Wretched Flea

Lenore Elizabeth Mulets
WRETCHED FLEA'S MOTHER WHEN A LITTLE GIRL.
WRETCHED FLEA

Or, The Story of a Chinese Boy

By

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A. FLANAGAN COMPANY
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THE STORY OF

WRETCHED FLEA

Wretched Flea was a dear, round-faced Chinese baby boy. He had a little flat nose and two fine, narrow eyes. Even at his birth Flea had such long black hair that his proud mother said: "By and by, Flea will have a beautiful queue."

But if Wretched Flea was so fine a baby, why did his parents give him so mean a name? Wretched Flea! Think of that name for a beautiful baby boy!

Well, it happened in this way: Flea's parents were quite well-to-do people, and they had made great plans for Flea's future. They meant to give him
a fine education, so that by and by he might become a great man. Flea's parents lived in a large house, and there were many servants to wait upon Flea and amuse him. Indeed, Flea
was to have everything for which a child could ask.

But perhaps you do not yet see why Flea should be given so unpleasant a name?

In our country a fine boy like Flea would be given the very noblest name that could be found. But in China it is different. There are evil spirits in China—so the people say—and these evil spirits are always looking for something or somebody to injure.

The people think that these evil spirits love to put wicked spells upon baby boys, especially upon baby boys who have fine prospects for their future. When they find a baby boy whose parents love him and mean to make a great man of him, they delight in tormenting him. They push him out of his nurse's arms. They send sicknesses
to him—measles and small pox. They break his bones. Sometimes they will not allow his hair to grow;—and what is a Chinese boy without a queue?

Now it is to deceive these evil spirits that the parents give their babies such mean names. The parents say, "Let us call our boy by the very meanest name we can find. Then, when the evil spirits hear us speaking to him, they will say, 'What a mean name! He must be a mean child. Don't let us trouble him. His parents care nothing for him, else they would never have given him that mean name. Let us find a child whose parents love him enough to give him a beautiful name.'"

Wretched Flea once had a little sister. But girl babies are not much loved in a Chinese home. Indeed, when Flea's sister was born, all the neighbors came
in to console the mother and father. "Too bad! Too bad!" they said. "But don’t feel too sad; perhaps it will die by and by."

And by and by it did die. Then there was great rejoicing in Flea’s home, and the poor little baby was carried to a great tower outside the city. The little body was pushed in at one of the small windows of the tower.
and dropped into a great pit below. Even Flea would have been thrown into this tower had he died; for when a baby dies in China the parents are sure that it must have been possessed by an evil spirit. "Had it lived," they said, "it would have been a great trouble to us. Very likely its evil spirit would have disgraced us. Let us forget it as soon as we can."

As we have already read, Flea's parents were well-to-do people. They lived on a fine farm, and Flea's mother was quite a lady. She had a round face and a very broad, high forehead; for it is the fashion in Flea's country for women to pull out the front hair so that their foreheads may seem very broad and high.

The finger nails of Flea's mother were very long, and she wore little silver
shields over them to keep them from breaking. The long finger nails were proof that Flea’s mother did not work; for in China rich women consider work a disgrace. “Only servant women and slave women work!” Flea’s mother used to say, and she had great scorn for working women. Flea’s mother had little cramped feet, hardly longer than Flea’s own feet. These small feet were proof that Flea’s mother did not walk! “Only servant women and slave women walk!” Flea’s mother used often to say,
and she had great scorn for women who walked.

Flea's mother's mother was much afraid that her daughter would have feet so large that she could walk. So, when the child was yet a baby, she bound the feet round and round with strong bands. These bands were worn for years, and this is why Flea's mother's feet were now only three inches long.

She was very proud of her small feet, and she wore a new pair of gold-embroidered slippers every day. Sometimes, when she saw a servant woman's feet, she would say, "See those dreadful sandals!" And she was very grateful that she had no such sandals.

When Flea's mother hobbled across the room her people would say, "How
graceful! She moves like a waving willow tree. And her feet are like golden lilies.” Flea’s mother was proud when her people said these things; for she was then sure that she had learned to walk as a real lady should walk.

Flea’s mother wore a loose tunic of bright colored silk. The gown was trimmed with silk and gold braid, and her sleeves were nearly as large as the skirt of her gown.

She combed her hair very high over a frame or cushion, and wore a great many pins in it.

In her ears were heavy rings, and her fingers were covered with rings. She also wore a great many bracelets, for she was very fond of jewelry.

Flea’s mother could neither read nor write; for in China girls are not taught to read and write. When she was a
child, however, she was very carefully trained in those things which a Chinese girl should know. Thus, she was taught a great many things which came under the name of The Four Virtues. That is, she was taught to have correct manners, to be kind, to be very careful in speech, and to be skillful in weaving and embroidering.

Besides these she was taught The Three Obediences. That is, as a girl at home she must in all things obey her father; by and by, when she should have a home of her own, she should in all things obey her husband; and, if she becomes a mother, she must in all things obey her sons.

But let us go back now to the story of Wretched Flea.

When Wretched Flea was only a few hours old, one small bowl of wine,
one of sugar, one of cabbage, and one of rice was placed beside him.

"Let the bowls be very small," said Flea's mother. "If they are small, my boy will not be a glutton."

Then the nurse brought a piece of paper upon which was a picture of the sun. This paper she dipped into the wine, and then washed Flea's face with it. This was done so that Flea would be a very bright boy.

After this she put a few kernels of rice in his mouth, a bit of cabbage, and a little wine.

Flea was then wrapped in a blanket and put in a basket. This basket was hung from the beams of the house and was the very one Flea's father had slept in when he was a baby.

For three days friends of the family sent presents of pork and eggs to Flea's
mother. One half of each gift was accepted and the rest of it was sent back to the giver. It would have been very greedy in Flea's mother to have kept the whole gift.

When Wretched Flea was three days old, he was given his first bath. He kicked as well as he could with his tiny little feet and screamed as loud as he could with his tiny little lungs. But the nurse cared nothing for his kicking and crying. She scrubbed him well, and brought him by and by to the guest hall. There the priests and neighbors were already waiting. Then the priests said long prayers, Flea's father offered sacrifices to the Good Spirit who watches over children, and the people chanted and sang.

After this, Wretched Flea was brought out into the middle of the hall. Now
the great ceremony of the day was to be performed. That is, Flea was to have his two little wrists tied with red silk cords. The people stood very still while this was done, and the priests looked very solemn. Indeed, it was a time to be solemn; for if those red cords held firm, and if proper prayers were said as they were tied, Wretched Flea would not grow up a willful, unruly boy.

We are quite sure that Flea’s red silk cords did hold firm, and that the proper prayers were said, for Flea grew to be a fine boy. Only a few times did his father have to say, “Flea, were your wrists not tied when you were a baby?”
On the fourth day Flea and his mother were left quite alone. There were no more ceremonies and no more presents. Flea's mother ate only pork and eggs until the ninth day. Then she was allowed to eat some fish.

On the ninth day there were more ceremonies. The gods of the household were prayed to, and a bowl of soup was sent to all those who had sent gifts to Flea's mother.

When Flea was a month old, there was another great festival day in his home. All the relations and friends were invited. The great tables were spread for a great feast, and everybody brought presents. There was music, and the whole day was given up to festivity. On this occasion Flea's little round head was shaved.

Flea's mother's mother was in charge
this day. She made great preparations for it, and had many presents for her grandson. She presented Flea with five jars of bean catsup, a jar of sugared fruit, one jar of pastry, one jar of sugar, a primer, an inkstand, two pens, two cakes of ink, five hats, and twelve little tunics.
She also presented Flea with two little scarfs. With these his mother could tie Flea upon her shoulders.Besides these there were two little razors, two rolls of cotton, and two colored eggs.

The razors were used at once to shave Flea’s head. It was not shaven all over, for that would have been a bad omen. He was, instead, shaven in spots, and many little tufts of hair were left upon his head. These tufts meant that Flea’s future wife would bring with her as many trunks of fine clothes as Flea had tufts of hair.

The two eggs were rubbed over Flea’s little head, and by and by his head was washed off with the two little cotton rolls.

Then the two eggs were broken and were eaten by the friends. This meant
that all who ate of the eggs would forever be friends to Flea.

Flea's mother was very anxious that her baby should grow to be a fine man. So, when he was just a month old, she carried him to look down into a well. This, she said, would give him courage and wisdom.

She always fed Flea from a cup rather than from a bowl or plate. This was because a bowl, being large, would teach the child to be too large an eater. The cup, being small and deep, would teach him to take but little food.

Whenever Flea became ill, his mother gathered thorns from twelve kinds of plants. These she made into a tea. With this tea she washed the child, hoping to wash away the disease. She would then carry the water to an open space and throw it upon the ground.
As she went out from her house, the people would shut their doors to prevent the disease from entering their houses.

Once Flea fell from a high place to the ground. Spirit money was immediately burned upon the spot by Flea’s mother. This was in hopes that she could buy off the wicked spirit who was trying to throw Flea down.

She was afraid, too, that Flea might have left his wits in the earth when he fell. So the mother at once made a motion as if dipping from the ground to the child’s chest. In this way she put back whatever wits Flea might have lost when he fell.

For three months after this Flea lived a quiet life with his mother and nurse. When he cried, he was fed, or tossed, or rocked, as babies are in all
SOME OF FLEA'S LITTLE FRIENDS.
lands. And sometimes the nurse walked up and down the floor with him. At the end of four months, however, another festival day was celebrated.

Again the friends and relatives filled the home and joined in prayers of thanksgiving to the Good Spirit who watches over children. Flea's father bowed before the shrine and prayed for his baby. "O Good Spirit who watches over children," he prayed, "teach Flea to be good-natured. Make him to grow rapidly. Grant that he may be easy to take care of; that he may eat well and sleep well, and that he may forever keep well and strong."

When these prayers were over, a chair was brought out into the middle of the hall and the seat of it was covered over with paste. Flea's father then set the child upon the chair and
held him until the paste stuck fast. Flea was frightened and he screamed for his nurse to take him. But the nurse did not heed his crying. She only stood and whispered prayers to the Good Spirit as the child wriggled and tried to get away from the paste.

Then Flea's father made a speech. In this speech he explained that never again was Flea to be held in his nurse's arms or carried about by her. Henceforth he was to sit by himself in a chair, for in this way only could he learn to be a man.

There was no other festival until Flea was a year old. Then again the friends and relatives flocked to the house. Again the shrine of the Good Spirit was loaded with offerings. Again many prayers were said and there were music and dancing.
By and by a great sieve was brought, and into it were placed several articles. There were books and pens and pieces of money, little images and pieces of jewelry.

This sieve was placed on the floor in the middle of the hall, and Flea was brought from his mother's room. He was dressed in fine new clothes made of silk, and there was a beautiful chain around his neck. Into the sieve Flea was placed, and the people stood breathlessly waiting to see which toy he would seize upon.

Flea looked around him for a minute. Then he reached forth and seized upon a bright-covered book.

Then the people shouted, "He will be a scholar! He will be a scholar! He will be a great scholar!"

Then Flea's father said, "The child
hath seized upon a book. Therefore we know that he will be a scholar; for whatever a child seizing first, that shall he hold forever in his hand."

Then more prayers were said and more thank-offerings laid upon the shrine of the Good Spirit. After this the priest told a story to the people, and they listened as politely as if they had not heard it twenty times before on the birthdays of twenty other babies. Some stories, however, never grow old.

This is the story which the priest told:

"Long ago, during the Shun dynasty, there was a certain child who, when placed in the sieve, seized at once upon the government seal. Many other articles were in the sieve,—many of them just as bright-colored. The child, however, would look at nothing but the
seal. What, think you, did the child become when he grew to be a man? Listen. He became ruler of the Empire.”

“And now it is time,” the priest continued, “that Wretched Flea should begin to enter upon his religious worship. Let us, therefore, set him before the shrine.”

At this Flea’s father placed him upon a bench before an altar. There were candles on the altar, and many images of the gods. Before these the father tried to teach Flea to bend low and to raise his arms in prayer. Flea did not understand very well, and it is said that he screamed. But Flea’s father did not mind that. He knew that, by and by, Flea would learn to worship before the altar as a Chinese child should worship.
THE STORIES HIS MOTHER TOLD.

Once, in the summer time, Flea's mother took him to the temple grounds, where, with other children, he played among the rocks and trees. They made great pagodas of pebbles and sailed their junks, as their boats are called, down a brook which ran through the lower part of the grounds.

At the highest part of the hill a beautiful waterfall came down with a noise and ripple, to which Flea never grew tired of listening. So, when his mother spread a mat and tried to make him go to sleep in the afternoon, little Flea persisted in having it laid down by the side of the waterfall itself.

But even then he could not seem to go to sleep or even keep still; so his mother
began to tell him little stories which she had read in her story books when
she was a little girl. The first one was about

A BEWITCHED WATERFALL.

Long, long ago a nice young woodchopper lived all alone with his father and mother. His work was very hard, for he had to go far away among the lonely hills. Yet, in the midst of the shady trees of the forest, among the birds and animals, he learned to be very thoughtful and kind.

Although he worked very hard, he could not seem to earn very much money; and he used to grieve out there all alone because of this. He did not mind for himself, for he was very happy to be busy, and to be able to make friends with all the strange and lovely things which grow and live in the woods.
But his poor old father and mother could not enjoy these things; for they were old and crippled, and had to stay at home. His mother often talked of her loving and dutiful son, for she was always cheerful and remembered how hard he tried to supply her wants.

His father, however, was very different; for he had been a selfish boy when he was little and had grown up to be a selfish man, always complaining and making others unhappy. Perhaps it was because he had dyspepsia that he grumbled so much at the poor supper of rice and weak tea.

"Oh, if I only had a little sake!" he would say. "It would warm me up and make me feel better." But, worst of all, he would reproach his poor young son and hint that he, in his younger days, had always been able
to offer a cup of sake to his parents and their friends.

You can imagine how grieved the boy was when he went to the forest. There he was always thinking, "How can I earn more money? For I really must get some wine for my poor old father, who needs it now that he is old and weak."

One day, while he was at work gathering up the fagots and branches, a sound of running water came to his ears. It filled him with wonderment; for he
had often been there before, and when thirsty had walked a long distance to find water. So he tried to follow the sound, which grew louder and louder, until, as he came around a big rock, he saw a straight line of silvery white gliding down one side and breaking up into a little rainbow of mist at the foot.

How clear and cool and good the water seemed when he stooped down, a little distance away from its splashing, to get a drink from the quiet stream. He dipped his hand in it and tried to drink. You can imagine his surprise when he found that it was wine instead of water.

Now, in China, they believe that the wood fairies and gods can do very wonderful things. So, while it was all very strange, he believed that such things could happen. He quickly
filled the bottle gourd which was hanging at his girdle and ran with all speed to his home, glad that at last he could bring wine to his poor old father.

And the old man was delighted. A neighbor who happened to drop in was offered a cup of the wine and called it most excellent.

The news spread all through the village before night, and the next day people came from far and near to hear the story of the enchanted waterfall. Some of them even asked to smell of the gourd to see if it really contained wine or not.

The next morning the young woodchopper went to work earlier than usual, carrying with him a bigger gourd. When he came to the spot where he had made the wonderful discovery, he was amazed to find several of his rich-
est neighbors there, all carrying tea-pots, buckets, and vases of the largest kind. Each man had stolen away from home, thinking that he alone could find his way to the spot.

It really made the young woodchopper laugh to see the spiteful, angry faces of those who had first come, when they saw other people crowding about the fall, and more coming over the hill. Each looked ridiculous, and acted as if he felt uncomfortable when he saw his neighbors.

One of them, who was a jolly man, broke the sullen silence with a laugh: "Well, as we are all here, let us fill up our jars and go home. But first let us pledge one another to better manners."

So all the men stooped down and filled their gourds and vases. When they began to drink, though, every one
looked funnier than ever. Their eyes bulged out with surprise and they stood with their mouths open looking at one another. Then some began to laugh at each other, but most grew angry. "It is only water!" they shouted in a rage. "Nothing but cold water. We have been fooled by a lot of stories. Come here, you fine young fellow, we will dip you in your wine waterfall!"

Then the woodchopper took to his heels and ran away, and of course the old men who tried to run after him had to give it up. So they sat down by the side of the stream, panting and puffing with rage.

Then they all began to taste of the stream, some arguing that at some particular point the wine might yet be found. But they could not find anything except clear, cold water; so,
abashed and quarreling, the covetous company scrambled out of the wood and went to their homes.

When they had all gone away, the good young woodchopper crept from his hiding place, came to the side of the stream, and sat there in sadness and despair. Every unkind thing which he heard his old neighbors say of him made him weep afresh, and all his former joy was turned to bitterness.

He knew he had not deceived them, yet he could not understand the wonderful changes which had come to the water, which could be sometimes wine and sometimes only itself.

"Was it only a dream?" he asked, as he began to bestir himself to go home, "or have I offended the gods and fairies by any wrong-doing so that they have withdrawn the gift? But I will not be ungrateful. The water itself is a bless-
ing to me at my work. I shall not need to go so far again.” So he filled his gourd and, lifting his eyes to the treetops, thanked his gods in the way he had been taught to pray.

When he reached home he was filled with amazement; for the gourd contained the same fine wine it had held the day before!

And so it always was after that. The good and dutiful son was able to fill his gourd with wine from the waterfall, but everybody else was able to fill theirs with cold water only.

When the Chinese emperor heard of this story, he thought it very wonderful. He sent for the good young woodcutter. To further reward him for his kindness to his father, he changed the name of the year in his honor. This encouraged all children who heard the story to obey and help their parents.
FLEA GOES TO SCHOOL.

When Flea was six years old, he was sent to school. This was a great day in Flea's life, and great preparations were made for it. Flea's father was very anxious that he should begin school on a lucky day. But how do you suppose he knew what was to be a lucky day for little Flea?

There was a great fortune teller in the land, and Flea's father went to him. "Tell me," said the father, "a lucky day for my son Flea. The time draws near when he should go to school."

The fortune teller looked very wise. "Tell me the day of the child's birth," he said.

Then he looked in his great books, and after a long search he chose a day.
On this day, then, Flea's father took him to school. Flea looked very nice and clean on that morning, for his mother had taken great pains with him.

He wore a nice little cap of blue silk, and the cap had a fine red tassel hanging down behind. He wore shoes with soles so thick that they made him look quite tall, and the toes of these shoes were embroidered with red and yellow silk. He carried an odd little purse with some money in it, and in the big sleeves of his little frock he carried some of his favorite toys.

Flea entered the school room holding tight to his father's hand. Already he
had been taught what he was to do when he came into the school room. First of all he must stand before the schoolmaster and make a demure little bow. Then he must present the schoolmaster with a piece of money.

The schoolmaster was much pleased, and he took Flea by the hand and led him to a shrine. Above the shrine was a tablet, and on the tablet was the word

CONFUCIUS.

Now Confucius was once a Prime Minister over China. This was long, long ago—so long that Flea’s father could not tell how long. But he was a great officer, and he wrote books full of wisdom. Already Flea’s father had taught him to repeat some of the wise sayings of Confucius. Flea’s father
had some books filled with these wise sayings.

Confucius, so Flea had been taught, was the wisest man that ever lived. He came down from the heavens to dwell among the Chinese people. He did this because he saw that the Chinese were a great people. Therefore he wished to teach them, so that they might become the wisest people in all the world. Confucius was called the Teacher King. This was because he often left his beautiful palace and went up and down the country teaching the people.

Among the very first things to be learned by all well trained children was what Confucius had written about the five virtues—Yeu, Yi, Li, Cu, and Siv.

These words sound strange to us; but they mean kindness, goodness, right
manners, wisdom, and faith. Therefore, when the schoolmaster carried Flea to the shrine, Flea knew what he ought to do. First, he must bow very low before the shrine; then he must burn some incense and say a few prayers.

The schoolmaster was pleased to see that Flea had been so well taught at home. "We shall make a great man of Wretched Flea," he said.

Flea's father now went away, and the schoolmaster placed Flea upon the floor not far from his wooden desk. Near Flea was a little stone plate, and on this he was to learn to write. There was a nice new cake of India ink, too. And soon the schoolmaster brought Flea a camel's hair brush to dip in the ink when he was ready to write.

Poor little Flea! He had a hard task before him, for his alphabet has many more
signs in it than ours has. Here, on the wall, are some of the signs or letters that poor little Flea had to learn to write.

At first Flea was given a Chinese primer. It was a book of rhymes, and there were just three syllables in each line.
By and by Flea was given another reading book. This had harder lessons in it. This book contained a thousand different signs, and each line had four words in it.

These signs were very hard to learn; but Flea was in earnest, and the time came when he could write as well as his father could. Then Flea was promoted. He was put into a class with the boys who were learning the sayings of Confucius.

Sometimes there was but one book, and the schoolmaster kept it upon his desk. The children stood in a row before the teacher with their backs toward him.

And this is the way he taught them:
"What you would not like done to you, do not you to others," the teacher would say in a loud voice. Then the
children would repeat in a loud voice, "What you would not like done to you, do not you to others."

In this way, over and over, Flea's teacher read the words of Confucius to the children. Over and over the children repeated them till they could say them without help.

Then Flea and the children went to their desks and wrote the sayings upon their little stone plates. Then they began to study.

You should have seen Flea study! No, I mean you should have heard him study; for in this school the children studied aloud.

The teacher sat at his desk with a long bamboo rod, and if one child did not make as much noise as another, he would tap that child on the head. "Louder, louder, Flea," he sometimes
said. Then Flea screamed louder and the teacher was pleased.

Such a noise as the children made at their study! At first it made Flea’s head ache; but by and by he became used to it.

"Is Flea doing well at school?" Flea’s father once asked the schoolmaster.

"Very well," answered the schoolmaster; "he can study as loudly as any boy of his age."

Flea’s school opened about a month after the New Year, and continued for eleven months. The teacher, however, often went away to his native place whenever there was a festival there. He also went when the rice was harvested, or when there was a funeral, or a birth, or a wedding in his family. He was absent a few days at each festival, so
that Flea had many vacations. He and the other children always had another vacation whenever a play was performed in their village. They were excused whenever home duties called them from study.

Truancy, however, was punished by the rod. Each forenoon and afternoon each pupil, as he came in, took a tally from a cup upon the teacher’s desk. If any tally was left in the cup, the teacher sent some pupil to find the truant. Unless the parent came to explain his absence, the boy was whipped.

Flea had to go to school at early dawn to study his lessons. When the sun was well risen, the eldest boy in the class would knock at the teacher’s door and ask permission to recite. The teacher would come and hear the recitation, and then the pupil would go
home to his breakfast. When all the children had recited and had breakfasted, they would return to sweep the schoolroom and to wash the teacher’s dishes. About noon they would go home to dinner, and play until the middle of the afternoon. Then they would go back to their lessons and study until sunset. After their early supper, the older ones would go back to the schoolroom to study during the evening.

Flea’s teacher had a son who did his housework for him when he was not at his lessons with the other children. All the pupils assisted the teacher in his simple housekeeping, and their mothers did his washing and mending and sewing.

But Flea’s schoolmaster knew that little boys could not study Confucius
all day long. So sometimes he told stories to them. The boys were to learn to recite these stories to him. These stories were true stories, so the schoolmaster said, and they were hundreds and hundreds of years old. Each night at home Flea told the stories over to his mother. As he ended each story, his mother always said, "I hope you will grow to be just such a man as the man in the story;" or, "I hope the story will teach you a lesson, my son."

This is one of the stories that Flea learned and told to his mother:—

During the Chin dynasty there was a certain studious lad named Sun King. Sun King was in the habit of shutting himself up alone in his house, so that his attention need not be taken from his books.

He would tie his queue to a beam at
the top of the house, lest he should fall asleep at his studies. Then if he should fall asleep and his head dropped forward, he was sure to be brought up with a quick pull at his hair. Sometimes the fall drew from him a cry of pain.

"A very good story," said Flea's mother. "I hope you will be as studious when you become a man."

Then she told Flea a story which she had been told when she was a child. This was the story she told:

**THE STORY OF MENCIUS.**

Once there was a lad named Mencius. His father died when he was a little baby. Then there was no one but his mother to take care of him.

She was a wise mother, so she wanted her little son to be educated.
If he were not educated, she knew that he could never become a great man. She worked very hard at weaving so that she might earn money to feed Mencius and send him to school.

But Mencius was lazy and idle. He would not study. One day he threw away his books and said he would never go to school again.

"Very well," said his wise mother. "If you will not study, then I will not weave." So she cut the cloth she was weaving and threw it away.

Mencius did not understand, and he did not care. "I need not go to school any more!" he laughed. Then he went off to play with the other children.

But, by and by, he became hungry and ran home for his supper.

"I have no supper for you," said his mother. "If we do not work, we cannot
earn money for food.” This made Mencius very sober, and he went to bed supperless.

“Surely, I shall have a warm breakfast,” he thought.

When Mencius awoke the next morning, he found his mother already awake. But she had no breakfast for him. She was sitting idly at the door of their little house.

Mencius began to cry. “I am so hungry,” he sobbed.

“I am hungry, too,” said his mother; “but if we do not work, we cannot earn any food.”

Then Mencius went out to play again. But he was too hungry to play. All day long the lazy boy went without food, and at night he went again to bed without his supper.

The next morning he gathered up
his books and went back to school. "I will study," he said to his mother.

Then his mother said, "Then I will weave again."

When Mencius came home from school that night there was a nice warm supper waiting for him.

And never again was Mencius lazy at school. By and by he became a great scholar, and the Empire of China gave him great honors when he died.

Flea listened very closely to this story of Mencius. Often he would ask his mother to repeat it to him.

I think the story must have meant a great deal to Flea. For Flea became one of the most studious boys at school.

"I must learn every saying of Confucius," he used to say to his schoolmates. "For by and by I mean to have a degree."
Now a degree is a great honor in China. It is like graduating from college in our country.

Of course Flea could not study all of the time.

Much of the time he played games with the other children in his neighborhood.

Flea was a very sober little child. Indeed, all Chinese children are very sober. He never made much noise, but he had good times for all that.

He could spin tops, and he often played at shuttle cock. He had wonderful kites, too. They were made of
red and gold paper, and they were shaped like birds and dragons and fishes.

Flea liked to play the Mud Turtle game. This is the way he played it: Each child took off his shoes and gave them to the boy who had been chosen Turtle. The Turtle piled the shoes together and called them his eggs. Then he tried to cover them as a hen covers her eggs. Then each child tried to steal an egg. The Turtle kicked and struck at the thieves. If one was hit, he had to take the place of the Turtle. The first Turtle then had to buy back all the stolen eggs and pay a forfeit for every one.

Then the second Turtle took his place, and the children again tried to steal the eggs without being hit or kicked by the Turtle.
Flea had another game very like Blind-man's-buff. He called it Fishing-by-hand. The leader was blinded, and then he held out his hand with the palm down. Each child tried to touch the hand without being caught by the blinded fisherman. If the blinded fisherman caught one of the children, he would feel all over his face and try to guess who it was.

If he guessed, then that child had to be the fisherman.

Sometimes the blinded fisherman would say, "The tide is rising!" Then the children would clap their hands and make believe that the fish were splashing in a great deal of water.

Sometimes the blinded fisherman would say, "The tide is very low!" Then the children would dart towards the blinded fisherman, making just as
little noise as possible. The blinded fisherman could feel the touches upon his hands, but of course could not hear the fishes, because they had so little water to splash in.

Flea played a game of hide-and-seek, but he called it "The Butcher's Account." Each player chooses a color to make marks with. One uses charcoal for black; another chalk for white; another a fragment of soft tile for red.

The blinded child leans his head against a wall and closes his eyes. The other children go off and each one makes a mark somewhere within a space which has been agreed upon. When the children have had time enough, the blinded one calls to them and takes their pencils. Then he goes away to find the marks which they have made. If the blinded one fails to find one of
the marks, he has to pay a forfeit to the one whose mark he fails to find.

Flea had another game, very like the game of Button. Several children stand in a row. One child holds a fruit pip in his hands and passes along the line of players, pretending to put something into the hands of each. He says, as he goes from one to the other:

Something for all, a pip for one;
Four-o’clock seeds and pineapple bun;
Pewter, peas, and powder. Run!

At the word Run, the child who has received the pip speeds toward a goal. The other children try to catch him before he reaches it. The child that catches him is the next one to give away the pip.

Flea had still another game, called the Water Sprite. One child acts as sprite,
and stands in the middle of a hall, which they play is a river. The players take their places along the sides of the hall, as if they were standing on the banks of the stream. Then they all

ONE OF FLEA'S COMPANIONS GOES TO GET HIS SHOE MENDED.
march around the hall three times, singing:—

Years glide along, and the third one is here; Whom will the water sprite take this year?

After the children have crossed and recrossed the pretended stream three times, they return to their places on its banks. After that the sprite tries to catch any one who tries to cross it. The children run to and fro, and when one is caught between the banks, he takes the place of the sprite.

Flea had still another game, called the Lame Chicken. It is played by jumping on one foot between shoes that have been placed across a road, each about ten inches from the other. When the end of the line of shoes is reached,
the last shoe in the line is kicked away by the "lame" foot. Then the Lame Chicken does this over and over until every shoe has been picked up and kicked away. Only one foot may touch the ground. No shoe may be touched except the one at the end of the line. Moreover, the shoes which are kicked away must be picked up without putting the "lame" foot upon the ground. When the "chicken" breaks any of these rules, he must at once give place to another child. The winner in the game is the child who can kick away the greatest number of shoes.

There is another game called the Water Demon. It is played by five persons, and is very like Puss-in-the-Corner. There is still another game like the Cat's Cradle. It is played with a string, which is passed from one pair
of hands to another pair, just as we play it in our own country.

Flea played also at Water Wheel. This is played by a large number of children. They join hands and form a circle, all facing inward. Then two of the children raise two arms to form an arch, and all the other children pass under the arch. The children do not unclasp their hands, and so are now facing outward. Those who first passed under the arch now again quickly raise two hands, and the other children pass under. All the children follow until the circle again faces inward. While the children play, they imitate with their voices the sound of bubbling water and of a creaking wheel.

How do you like Flea's game of Hornets? The children cuddle around a chair or a tree for their nest. Two
grass cutters come along and pretend to cut the grass, talking all the while. They finally sit down to rest and, while resting, they discover the hornet's nest. They agree to burn it, and pretend to hold their pipes to set it on fire. The hornets then rush out and sting them, using their forefingers as stings. The men run and the hornets pursue, until the tired stingers return to their nest, or the grass cutters reach home.

Here is Flea's play of the Dog Buyers. One child calls himself an old man who lives among the mountains. This old man rears fine dogs. Several children hide with him behind a door, and call themselves his pets. Two or three other children call themselves villagers who have heard of the old man's dogs, and who desire to buy puppies. These children walk several times up and
down the playground, pretending to go on a long journey. They sing as they travel:

Up the hills and down the dales,
To buy little dogs we go;
Through the woods, across the vales,
To buy little dogs we go.

Then they knock at the old man's door. He says, "Who is there?" And they tell him their errand. He replies in a surly manner, "The puppies have not yet got their eyes open. They cannot leave my house till they are larger."

Then the would-be buyers go home and soon make the journey a second time, singing as before. Again they make their request at the old man's door. Again he tries to keep the puppies. But they insist now upon seeing
them. He opens the door and the dogs rush out, barking and snarling. The buyers then run, pursued by the dogs. At last some one of the buyers catches one of the dogs and drags it away with him. Then the other dogs run back to their master.

One of Flea's pet games is the Vegetable Garden. All of the children, except three, arrange themselves as vegetables in garden-beds. A green-grocer then comes with the gardener. He praises the size of the vegetables, and agrees to pay a certain price for the whole. The amount is accepted, and the gardener promises to pull and trim the vegetables the next morning. The gardener and the grocer then go away.

The gardener soon returns and pulls up the vegetables. Then he trims off their
leaves and lays them on the ground to dry. After he is gone, night comes on. Then comes a thief, who carries the vegetables off to a hiding place. He has a pole over his shoulder, and the vegetables cling to this and walk away with him.

The next morning the grocer goes to take his vegetables and finds the garden empty. He seeks the gardener, and both go in search of the thief. After much search they discover the vegetables stacked up in a corner. Then they hide and wait for the coming of the thief. When he appears, they seize and bind him. The gardener marches him off to the judge, and the grocer carries off the vegetables on a pole.

So you see Flea had plenty of games to amuse himself with, even if he was a little Chinese boy.
FLEA'S TEA FARM.

But Flea did not play games all of the time. Often he worked with his father on the tea farm.

Flea's farm was very small, and the farming implements were very clumsy. It took more men to run Flea's little farm than it takes to run a great western farm in our country. But Flea's father would not have had any better farming implements, even though you would give them to him.

"What was good enough for my father is good enough for me," he would have said.

This is because the Chinese are so devoted to the past. They think their country is the first and best that ever existed. They think its history is the grandest. They think its em-
perors and great men have been the greatest that ever were. Therefore, they think their own ancient ways of farming are the very best in all the world.

BUFFALO OX HITCHED TO CHINESE PLOW ON FLEA'S FARM.
They look upon all other people as poor heathen.

Flea's plows were very clumsy things. They had only one handle, and that made it very difficult to keep them in place.

The blade was a V-shaped iron. This was so narrow that it made a furrow only four inches wide.

It was slow work going up and down a field, breaking up so little earth each time. But Flea's people had for generation after generation used the same old plows.

Flea's threshing machines, too, were as clumsy as the plows. He set a little ladder into the earth, and held it in place by braces. The thresher then brought one handful of grain and struck it over and over against the ladder, until the grain was shaken out.
While this man threshed another man brought the grain. He plodded back and forth all day long, carrying the grain. He carried it in two small bundles fastened to the ends of a stick. This stick was swung over his shoulders.

Flea's farm was mostly a tea farm. And tea farming is very careful work.

The tea plant yields its first crop of leaves in its third year. But after this it yields three fine crops every year.

The tea leaves have to be gathered very carefully. They cannot be stripped off the branches. They have to be gathered one by one.

The very small leaves must not be gathered, for they are too young. The very large leaves must not be gathered, for they collect the dew which the tea plant needs. So it is only the middle-sized leaves that may be gathered.
These leaves are gathered into baskets. When a basket is full, two servants come and put a bamboo rod through the handles of the basket. In this way they carry it away upon their shoulders.

These leaves must now be spread out in the sun and dried very carefully. Not a bit of dew must be left in them, lest they should gather mould. This would spoil the flavor of the tea.

At night the leaves are covered over with cloths. During one night a great change comes to the leaves. As Flea looks them over in the morning, he finds that they have lost all their greenness. They have become black or brown; and their taste, too, has changed, and they begin to be very fragrant.

The leaves are now spread out again, and the men and women set to work
upon them. They roll and roll, and crumple and crumple them, until, by and by, they are ready again to be laid in the warm sun.
Then the leaves are placed on a great frame over the fire. Flea's servants watch them very carefully, for they must be stirred and sifted and shaken and turned until every leaf has been warmed through and through.

Then the leaves are passed over to the women and children. Their work is to sort the good leaves from the bad ones. To do this they pick them up one by one and look at each very carefully. After the leaves are sorted, they are put into bags and pressed. And how do you suppose they press them? The men grasp a beam overhead and spend hours and hours treading these bags. This is the way the Chinese press their tea.

Next comes the weighing of the leaves, and the tasting of them. They do this so that the leaves may be care-
fully graded. Then the different kinds of leaves are packed in different boxes. And so, at last, the tea is ready for shipping.

Of course, it took a great many servants to do the work on a farm like Flea's. Moreover, it took quite a little of Flea's time to tell these servants what to do, and to see that they did their work as they ought.

For many years, then, Flea studied, and worked on his farm. He had now become a grown up man. At last one of his teachers said to him, "Flea, it is time for you to go to Canton and try for a degree."

"If you think I am ready, I will gladly go," said Flea. For this was what Flea had hoped to do ever since he was a little boy.
THE VISIT TO CANTON.

Soon the day was set for Flea to start for Canton. On that morning Flea rose very early because he must say his farewells to the shrine of his ancestors.

Now this seems very strange to us. But worship of ancestors is a very important thing in China.

In Flea's home there stood a tall stone tablet. On this tablet was a great deal of Chinese writing. Flea knew the words on this tablet, because they were the names of his ancestors—grandfathers and grandmothers, great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers, and great-great-grandfathers and great-great-great-grandmothers.

Beside each name was the day and
hour that each ancestor was born, and also the day and hour that he died.

The Chinese believe that when an ancestor dies, a part of his soul goes into that tablet. If the family take good care of the tablet, the ancestor will forever watch over the family.

On a shelf beside the tablet was a row of little wooden images. There were just as many images as there were names on the tablet, for each little image represented an ancestor.

From babyhood, Flea was taught to be very polite and kind to these images. Every time an ancestor’s birthday came, Flea’s family had a great feast in honor of that ancestor.

A great table was spread with food, and incense was burned. Then the whole family went to the family temple, where the ancestors were buried. Here
many prayers were said, and offerings were laid upon the altar of the temple. Surely, then, Flea would not go away to Canton without saying good-bye to his ancestors. So, on that morning, he rose very early. He knelt before the tablet and read the names very carefully. Then he bowed his head to the ground before each image and asked it to bless him on his journey.

Now Canton is one of the largest cities in China, and Flea had never yet seen a large city. Therefore he was very proud and happy when he started forth to take his degree.

It was quite a long distance, and Flea made the journey in a boat. The reason he made his journey in a boat was this. It is the custom in China for every farmer to build a canal through his farm, instead of a road or a railroad.
Then he has a boat of his own, and he sends his produce away by canal. The farmer's canal joins a large canal which
reaches to the sea. In this way the Chinese farmer sends his produce from his farm to the city market.

The canal on Flea's farm was fifty feet wide; but the road was only three feet wide. This was because the travelling was usually done by water rather than by land.

Flea's produce boat was broad and flat, and was moved by sculls. Flea had another boat for his own use. This was a little narrow boat something like a canoe. Flea pushed this boat with his foot, and steered it by means of a large, broad paddle. It was not a very swift boat, but Flea only travelled from one farm to another with it.

But now Flea was going to make a long journey. He was going to Canton. So he took his place on the big scull-boat, and the produce was piled up
around him. Then the servants took their places, and the scull-boat moved slowly away.

Nothing very wonderful happened on the journey until the boat reached the harbor of Canton. But, as Flea came into the port of the city, a strange sight greeted him.

HOMES OF MANY CANTON PEOPLE.
At first Flea thought the city must be either crazy or asleep. For the houses seemed to be tipping in all directions. Certainly they were all nodding and rocking, and swaying back and forth. "Is this the way houses behave in great cities?" thought Flea.

Surely this was very strange. Then the pilot of the boat explained to Flea that many of the houses of Canton are built out upon the water.

"And why are they built on the water?" asked Flea.

"Because the city is so crowded," said the pilot.

Soon Flea's ship passed some Chinese boys who were fishing. Flea had often read about fishing, but he had never seen anyone fishing as these boys were.

These boys were fishing with a great net, which was fastened to a hoop. This
made a kind of basket. To this hoop was fastened a long pole. This pole was the handle for the basket.

Very slowly the boys sank the net in the water. Then they sat very still to watch. Soon one boy drew up the basket and there was one little fish in it.

By and by, Flea passed another raft of boys who were also fishing. But these boys were fishing in a different way. They had two large birds, which were catching the fish for them.

These birds were cormorants. They were clumsy, homely birds, but quite skillful. They were trained to catch fish and to bring them to the raft. Flea watched these cormorants for a long time.

When they reached the raft, the boys would take the fish from their bills. Then each cormorant would swim away
to dive for another fish. Sometimes a young cormorant was ill-natured, and would not bring the fish to his master. But he soon learned that he would be punished if he didn’t. His master had a strong string tied around the cormorant’s neck. If the cormorant did not come to the raft with the fish, the master pulled the string. There was a noose on the end of the string, and this noose was around the neck of the cormorant. As the boy pulled the string, the noose grew tighter and tighter. Then the bird hurried to the raft and gave the fish to his master.

Flea had read much about the wonderful city of Canton, and he had read that about sixty thousand of its people live on rafts in the water.

Reading about a city, and seeing it, however, are very different. And Flea
was as surprised at what he saw as if he had never read a word.

“I will go and see the walls of the city,” said Flea to himself. “I have read that the walls are hundreds of years old.” So Flea hired a palanquin and was carried along the walls for several miles.

The palanquin was borne by eight Chinese servants, and there was a nice roof to keep off the heat of the sun.

The city had sixteen very beautiful gates, and Flea saw every one of them.

On the next day Flea visited some of the great temples. Here he said many prayers. He also laid offerings before the shrines of the great Chinese gods, just as he had done at home before the shrines of his ancestors.
FLEA'S VISIT TO HIS FATHER'S FRIEND.

On the next day Flea went to visit a Chinese gentleman who was a friend of his father. This friend lived in a very beautiful house. But when Flea entered, the gentleman bowed his head to the floor and said, "Welcome, welcome to this dirty hut."

And Flea said, "I thank you for permitting me to cross the threshold of your grand mansion."

Then the host thought to himself, "This young man has good manners."

"What, pray, my noble young friend, is your age?" asked the gentleman.

And Flea answered, "I am but a miserable dog, but my age is twenty-one. And what, pray, is the age of your own honorable son?"
HOME OF FLEA'S FATHER'S FRIEND.

Then the host said, "Oh, the rat, he is twelve and can read a few words. A
good-for-nothing lad! Not worth your notice. But tell me, how is my great friend, your father?"

"We are but a mean family," Flea answered, "but my father is very well."

By this time the host was sure that Flea was well mannered. So he took him into the house and introduced him to his friends.

Flea remained with this gentleman until he left the city to return to his own home. One day the friend took Flea down to the great hall where he was to be examined for a degree.

First Flea went to a shrine and placed his offering before it. Then he prayed for a blessing in the test that lay before him. After this he was ready to enter the hall.

On entering the hall, an officer came to meet Flea and bowed low before
him. Indeed, Flea also bowed low. He touched the floor with his forehead, for that was Chinese fashion.

Then Flea was led to a side hall, and there his clothes were carefully searched. The officer even unbraided his queue, and looked into his shoes and into his mouth. This was because he was so afraid that Flea might have some leaf from the books of Confucius hidden away.

When the officer was sure that Flea had no pages of Confucius hidden away, he led him to the great Hall of Examinations. There they placed him in a

EXAMINATION HALL—CANTON
tiny cell all by himself and gave him pen and paper.

The little door of the cell was then closed and Flea was told to write a certain page from Confucius.

There were eleven thousand of these cells, so that each candidate might have one for himself alone.

Now Flea had studied Confucius earnestly ever since he was five years old. He could recite page upon page without one little error.

It is no wonder then that Flea passed this examination with great credit to himself.

How proud Flea was! He could hardly wait to get home to tell his parents what had happened.

You should have seen him when he left the house of his friend. He said his good-bye to him in an inner room.
Then he backed away, bowing his head to the floor at every step backwards. In the same way he bowed himself out through the next room, and the next, through the outer hall, and down the steps to the sidewalk. There he made a last bow, with his head upon the lowest step. Then he turned and went away.

"A well bred young man," said the friend, as Flea bowed himself out.

Flea’s father was very proud of his son when he returned home; for he had now earned the title of "Flowering Talent."

But there were two higher titles, and Flea meant to earn these by and by.
FLEA'S RETURN HOME.

On Flea's return, he found his household in a sad condition. Flea's mother was very ill. The servants were frightened, and his father was too busy in the family temple to notice Flea's return. Flea's father went to the temple every hour and offered up sacrifices and prayers to the gods to take away the disease.

There were several priests, too, whom Flea's father had hired to pray and offer up sacrifices.

Sometimes the priests prayed to the god of health; sometimes to the god of disease. Sometimes they prayed to the destroying god, begging it to go away.

Hour after hour the priests marched around and around the temple, chanting, and striking upon their bells.
But all this did not make Flea's poor mother well. One day she grew suddenly much worse.

"It is the wicked spirit," said the priests. "It has seized this good woman."

Then they set to work to try to buy off this wicked spirit.

They spread a long table in the room where the sick lady lay. On this they placed three cups of wine, a platter of fruit, a pair of candlesticks, and a silver censer.

Then they laid a heap of money on the table. This was a gift for the wicked spirit. Then the priests began marching up and down the room. One priest carried a bowl of water in his hand. With this water he sprinkled the table and also the sick woman herself.

Every time the priest passed the
table, he struck it with a stick and cried to the wicked spirit to go away.

Still the mother grew more ill. Then Flea himself dressed in a white robe and went to the family temple. He carried a torch and beat loudly upon a drum. Then he knelt before a shrine and told the story of the sick mother.

After this he took an arrow from the shrine and carried it to the sick room. This arrow he placed upon the table, and the priests began to pray to it in a loud voice.

One morning Flea's mother was so ill that he could hardly tell whether she was alive or dead.

Then a priest took one of her robes and went with it to the temple. He raised it on a long pole and held it high in the air. Then all the priests prayed earnestly, and begged the al-
most departed spirit to come back and enter into the robe.

The prayers of the priests must have been very powerful. At least, Flea thought so, for on the next day Flea’s mother was very much better.

In a few days she was quite well again. Then the priests and the whole family went to the temple and carried back the arrow. They offered up thank offerings to the gods, and burned more incense, and sang and chanted loudly.

DRAGON SUPPOSED TO WARD OFF EVIL.
FLEA'S WIFE.

When Flea's mother was well again, Flea told his father all about his visit to Canton.

Flea's father was very proud of his son. He wrote a very polite letter to the gentleman in Canton and thanked him for his kindness to Flea.

"And now," said Flea's father, "it is quite time that you should have a home of your own. Your mother and I have already chosen a wife for you."

"Very well," answered Flea, "I shall obey you."

"You have always been a good and obedient son," said Flea's father; "and your mother and I have tried to choose a good wife for you."

Now, there was a tea farm not far from Flea's home. On this tea
farm lived a family of three sons and three daughters. It was said that these daughters were very amiable. They could make beautiful embroidery, and they were educated in the Five Virtues.

Already Flea's father had sent a "go-between" to the father of these daughters, and had told him that he wished to choose one of these daughters for his son's wife.

The father was very anxious to be rid of the three daughters, so he sent a very polite message to Flea's father.

The "go-between" had taken a card to the father of the three daughters. On this card was Flea's name, and the day and hour of his birth.

The father took the card to a fortune-teller and asked him if Flea's hour of birth was one of good omen.

The fortune-teller studied it very
carefully for a long time, and compared it with the birthday and hour of each of the three daughters. After a long time, the fortune-teller decided that the second daughter would be the best wife for Flea.

Then the "go-between" came back to Flea's father and told him what the fortune-teller had said.

Flea's father then took the second daughter's birthday and hour to another fortune-teller, and asked him if this young woman would be a good wife for Flea.

This second fortune-teller compared the birthdays very carefully. Then he told Flea's father that he was quite sure that this second daughter and Flea would live very happily together.

But, alas! Something terrible happened on the very morning that the
fortune-teller came to see Flea's father. And what do you think it was? It was this: One of the images of Flea's ancestors fell off its shelf and broke its nose.

Flea's father found it on the floor when he arose in the morning.

This was a terrible thing. It was a bad omen, and Flea's whole family was frightened. They ran to the temple and prayed to the gods to prevent the disaster that must be coming.

By and by, the fortune-teller came to tell Flea's father what the stars had told him about Flea's wedding.

"No, no, no!" cried Flea's father. "This daughter shall not be my son's wife! No, no, no! The gods forbid!"

"What do you mean?" asked the astonished fortune-teller.

"The omen! The omen!" was all
Flea's frightened father could say. Then he pointed to the poor noseless ancestor, which still lay upon the floor.

"He fell from the shelf during the night," Flea's father whispered.

The fortune-teller stooped to pick up the fallen image.

"No, no, no!" cried Flea's father. "No one outside my own family must touch an image of my ancestor. By and by the priests will come. They will offer prayers, and then I will place the image back upon the shelf."

Then the fortune-teller went away. He knew full well that it was useless to talk about a wife for Flea now. For, if any accident happened in a house during the time the fortune-tellers were at work, it was considered a warning that the chosen wife was not the right one.

Several weeks passed by before Flea's
father dared to begin another search for a wife for Flea.

But, by and by, he again consulted the fortune-tellers. In due time a suitable wife was found. No accidents

MUSICIANS WHO PLAYED AT THE WEDDING.
happened this time, and the wedding ceremonies went on.

First, Flea’s father sent to the bride’s father a little red folded card with a gold bird upon either cover. Inside was the date of Flea’s birth, and his full name.

Into this card two needles were fastened, and from each needle hung a long, red silk cord.

There was another card sent with this one. It was just like the one that bore Flea’s name, only that there was nothing written upon the inside.

When the cards were brought to the bride’s father, he bowed very low and said some very polite things about Flea and his family.

“We are a miserable family,” he said, “and we are greatly honored with this compliment from the noble father of
the noble Flea.” Then he wrote the date of birth and the age of the bride upon the blank card, and sent it back to Flea’s father.

“What does the red cord mean?” asked Flea’s future wife when she saw the cord.

“It means,” said her father, solemnly, “that, when once you are married to this Flea, nothing can separate you. Listen, and I will tell you why.”

Then the bride’s father told her this story:—

STORY ABOUT NIKO’S BRIDE.

Once upon a time, in the Tang dynasty, there was a great man named Niko. When Niko was a guest in the city of Sung, he saw an old man reading by the light of the moon.

“Good father,” said he, “what book
have you? It must interest you very much, since you read even in the dim light of the moon."

"This book," answered the old man, "contains the record of all marriages in all places in all times. And in my pocket I have red cords with which to tie the feet of those who are to be married. When this cord has once been tied, whatever comes, these two cannot be separated.""}

"How wonderful!" said Niko.

"I see your own future wife," added the old man. "She is the child of an old woman who sells vegetables in a shop in the north. Already are your feet tied by my magic cord."

Niko scowled and turned away. "I will learn," said he, "if any such old woman is to be found."

So he went away into the north.
And, indeed, there sat an old woman, the seller of vegetables. By her side sat the ugliest little girl that Niko had ever seen.

"She shall never be my wife," said Niko to himself. So he told an old Chinaman to kill the child.

"It shall be done at once," answered the old man. Then Niko went away. By and by the old man came to him.

"I struck her a blow upon the head," said he, "and killed her in an instant."

"That is good," answered Niko.

Fourteen years passed by. Then Niko chose a wife for himself from the family of Mo, a prefect.

The girl was very beautiful, and Niko was pleased.

Some time after they were married, Niko said to her, "Tell me, why do you always wear that band across your brow?"
For a long time the bride would not tell. Then she said, "My father died when I was but a baby. My nurse was an old woman who sold vegetables in a shop in the north. One day a strange man appeared at the window and struck me a blow upon the head. Then he fled down the narrow street. They thought I was dead; but by and by I breathed again. The scar is there yet. That is why I wear the band across my brow."

"And so you see, my daughter," said the father of Flea's future wife, "that it is useless to try to escape what fate has prepared for you."

Flea's wife-that-was-to-be bowed her head meekly and said, "Yes, my father."

"And now we must fix upon the wedding day," said Flea's father. So the fortune-tellers were set to work.
again, and a day was fixed. When the bride was told that the day was fixed, she began to rock back and forth, and wail, and moan.

"Alas, alas," she cried, "I am about to die." She said this because it is the fashion in China for the bride to mourn when her wedding is announced. The more deeply she mourns, the more proud her friends are of her.

Flea's bride mourned beautifully. When Flea heard of it, he was so proud he could hardly wait to see her. "She must be a beautiful lady," he said, "and so well-bred."

"When I am dead," wailed Flea's bride, "my soul shall come back to this home of my childhood. Look for it in the rats, for I would rather be a rat than to dwell in the grave which is about to receive me."
“Beautiful!” said the bride’s friends. “She mourns like a truly well-bred woman.”

At last the wedding day came. A sedan chair was brought to the bride’s door, and she entered. Then the servants drew the curtains, and she was carried to Flea’s home.

She was a very beautiful bride. Her hair was stiff with paste, and was drawn back from her forehead. It was piled up in the back in a tower-shaped mass, and there were gay-colored pins sticking in all directions. She was dressed in a wonderful robe of red and gold, and she carried a wonderful fan.

She wept and wailed aloud as she entered the sedan chair, as any well-bred Chinese bride must do.

Then the servants lifted the chair upon their shoulders and the procession
FLEA'S BRIDE GOING TO HER HUSBAND'S HOME.
moved off. At the head of the procession marched a man carrying a large branch of a banyan tree. Behind this man marched two boys who carried lanterns on the tops of long poles. Others carried various articles, mottoes, and musical instruments.

Then came a boy with a long bamboo rod over his shoulders. After the sedan chair came several other men, carrying red boxes. In these red boxes was the trousseau of the bride.

As the procession moved away, fire crackers were exploded from time to time, and torches were burned.

When Flea's bride reached the door of her new home, Flea stood waiting for her.

But first a woman came forth to meet the bride. This woman threw some burning straw across the doorway, and then invited the bride to enter.
She was taken at once to her own room, and her boxes were set down beside her. There she sat, in silence, all day long. No one took any notice of her except to bring her food.

In the evening a great feast was held, and Flea's friends were allowed to look at the bride.

Flea himself came into the room and sat down beside his bride.

The bride did not know it was Flea, for he was dressed like an old man. This was considered a very funny joke, and all the guests laughed.

You would have laughed, too, to see Flea and his bride when the time came for them to sit beside each other. They scrambled and pushed and crowded each other like two children. This was because each was trying to sit on the skirts of the other. For the one who
succeeds in sitting on the skirts of the other will henceforth rule the other. The one that is sat upon must henceforth be obedient.

Of course Flea succeeded in sitting upon the skirts of the bride, and all the guests laughed.

Then some of the guests came and bowed low before the bride. Some of them said verses which the other guests seemed to think were very clever.

Here is what one guest said:—

"The bride is high-browed, fair, and sweet;
Like awls, her small and sharp-toed feet."

Another said:—

"Fresh twigs upon the vine,
New sprouts on the bamboo;
The groom brings home the bride
To rule his house."

Flea now arose and went with his bride to the temple. There they bowed before a little shrine and prayed. Then Flea led his bride to the ancestral tablet, and they again bowed and prayed.

Flea asked his ancestors to receive his new bride, and the bride promised the ancestors that she would always honor them.

Then Flea and his wife drank to the health of each other. They drank from two glasses, which were tied together with a red cord.

After this, the bride removed the heavy veil from her face. For the first time Flea saw the face of his wife.

No doubt she was very beautiful, for Flea seemed greatly pleased. He led
WRETCHED FLEA AND HIS BRIDE.
her at once to the feast table, where all kinds of rare fruits and cakes were spread. Flea began to eat, but the bride could only look on. Very likely she, too, was hungry; but it would have been very ill-bred for her to eat in the presence of the wedding guests.

On the next day there was more feasting, and more guests were invited. But even on this second day the bride must take no part. She must not smile. She must not even seem to see what is happening around her. The more she behaves like a deaf and dumb and blind woman, the more pleased Flea and the guests were.

“She is beautifully bred,” they said.

On the third day Flea’s wife rose early to begin her work. First, she washed some clothes for Flea. Next, she took a long ladle and stirred up
food for the pigs. As she did this, she sang:—

"Stir deep and long!
Stir deep and long!
Give thousand weight swine to your spouse."

Flea's mother watched the new wife as she did this. "She is going to make a good housekeeper," she said. And she was much pleased with her new daughter-in-law.

After this, Flea's wife set to work to make a garment for him to wear. She must finish this before the evening meal, else she would be sure to bring bad luck into her new home.

The ceremonies were now at an end. On the fourth day Flea's wife settled down to hard work. She had to rise before daylight to arrange her hair in
the fashion which belongs to married women. She had, of course, never arranged her hair this way before, so it took her a long time. She then dressed herself in plain kitchen clothes and went to work. She did not become the head of the house, as wives do here in our country. She was only a servant to Flea’s mother, and it was her place to do the hardest of the work.

Flea’s wife was a little homesick, but Flea’s mother was kind to her and time passed very happily. Moreover, the young wife knew that at the end of a month she would be allowed to go on a visit to her own mother.

She counted the days very eagerly, but unfortunately something happened and she was not permitted to go.

Five days before the month was out, Flea’s father died. This meant that the
family must go into mourning for three years. During all these three years the women of the household would not be allowed to visit even their nearest relations.

"Your father is going to die," said the priest to Flea.

"Let us take him at once from his bedstead," said Flea. "If we do not, the poor old man will have to carry the weight of it into the next world."

So the father was taken from his bed and carried into the main room of the house. Here he was dressed in his very handsomest tunic, and was laid upon the floor.

He was placed before the door, so that his spirit might easily find its way out into the free air.

Then a sheet of paper was laid over the face of the old man. This was done so
that he could not count the row of tiles in the roof. If he did, never would the family be able to build a larger house.

Then Flea and all the men-servants unbraided their queues, and hung their tunics from one shoulder.

After this, messengers were sent out to tell all the relatives that an ancestor was dying.

Flea himself went down to a stream which ran through the farm. He took a new saucepan with him, and in this he placed three pieces of spirit money. This he dipped into the water, at the same time offering prayers for the dying ancestor.

The saucepan filled with water, and with this water Flea hurried back to the house.

The father was now dead, and Flea sprinkled him with this holy water, which
he had bought with the spirit money. Then Flea put some rice in his father's mouth. As he did this he cried aloud, "You fed me when I was a helpless child; I now feed you."

After this, Flea and all his relations went to the temple to tell the guardian spirit that another ancestor had gone forth. They carried lanterns and tolled bells, and Flea bowed before the shrine as many times as the father was years old.

When Flea returned to the house, the mourners were ready. The mourners were the women of the household. They were crowded into one room, and at the door stood a little boy.

It was the boy's duty to tell the mourners whenever anybody entered the house. As soon as he gave the signal, the mourners burst into loud
wailing. They would howl and moan and cry like mad women. Some of them recited verses in a loud voice.

For a hundred days the funeral ceremony went on. Each night food was placed upon the shrine of the departed
ancestor, and Flea said many prayers. For a few days he wore his tunic wrong side out, and for a hundred days he did not shave his head.

After a long time Flea’s father was buried, and his image was set upon the shelf with that of the other ancestors.
FLEA AND THE VICEROY.

When the season of mourning was passed, Flea went back to Canton to take his second degree. He took his wife with him, and from that time on he lived in Canton. Flea's wife was very heavily veiled, and Flea took great pains that she should see no one and that no one should see her. It would have been very rude for her to have gone unveiled, or to have ridden in an open carriage.

When Flea reached Canton, his wife was placed in a closed sedan chair, and in this way was taken to her new home.

Flea soon went to the Hall of Examination, and again took a high honor. He was very proud of his new title, for he was now Promoted Man.

Three years passed by, and Flea
again went to the Hall of Examination. This time he was given the highest degree that any man in China can win—the degree of Advanced Scholar.

In this examination he wrote his pages so neatly and so perfectly that the viceroy of the city sent for him. "I need a studious young man like you," he said, "to help me in my duties."

Flea bowed himself to the floor before the viceroy. This was to show how grateful he was.

"A fine-mannered young man," thought the viceroy.

On the very next day Flea entered the service of the viceroy. This happened to be at the time of the Festival of the Water Bullock. On that day very little business was done, for the governor, the viceroy, and the chief citizens went in state toward the east-
ern gate of the city "to meet the spring," as they said.

They did meet a strange procession, which had at its head a great clay figure of a buffalo, which is not quite so large as the American kind, and likes to live in muddy places. This "water-ox" is always used to drag their plows through the rice grounds, which are flooded before they plant the grain. (See page 68.)

The figure of the buffalo was followed by floats on which were children. These were all dressed like historical people, and decorated with flowers. Then there were also drums, and a sort of banjo which makes a queer noise. These they think very fine.

Flea went straight to the governor's house, for the governor is called the Priest of Spring. When the procession halted, the governor took a whip and
struck the buffalo three times. At that very moment the people, with stones in their hands, seized the figure and broke it into little pieces. Then what a scramble! For the inside of the buffalo was filled with hundreds of smaller images made of clay. Everybody who wanted a good rice crop felt that he had to surely get one of these queer Easter presents.

Queerly enough, they used to perform this same thing long ago in Egypt, where the river Nile floods all the country round about. But they called the bull by another name. Perhaps this was the golden calf that Aaron the Hebrew made, when his people came up out of Egypt after the plagues, of which you have all read.

Even the Emperor himself at Pekin pays honor to the farmer by going
A CHINESE EMPEROR WHEN A BOY
through the form of holding the plow. With some of the princes and the principal ministers, he goes into a field used for this custom. This is just outside the "Temple of the Earth," where everything has been made ready by regular farmers.

He offers certain sacrifices made of grain, which has been saved from that borne by the same field the year before. Then he plows a few furrows, as do also the princes and ministers, in the order of their rank. They are very strict about these things in China. The five sorts of grain are then sown. When the Emperor has seen the field planted, he leaves it in the care of an officer, who will collect and store the crop for sacrifices.

Flea had been so useful and clever in his new place that he found favor, not
only with his own people, but with the English merchants who were coming to China in large numbers to trade for tea and silk. Flea was sometimes sent far into the country to see the state of the mulberry trees and watch the signs of the times. In China, you know, the silk is woven and dyed in the homes of the people instead of in big factories, as in this country.

As he went along the streets, Flea could hear the rattle of the clumsy looms, which the men and women work with their feet as well as with their hands. He could also see the bright webs, or lengths of cloth, newly dyed, hung in their gardens, as your mother hangs out clothes on wash-day.

At the time of the ninth moon, he happened to be in Pekin, when the Empress went to make her sacrifice at
the altar of the man who invented the weaving of silk. When that ceremony was over she, with her ladies, came out into a grove to gather mulberry leaves for her own lot of silkworms. And, with her own hands, she threw some of the cocoons into warm water and wound some of the light yellow silk off on a reel, and then read one of the sacred edicts, which said, "Attend to your farms and mulberry trees, that you may have sufficient food and clothing."

She looked very grand, Flea thought, with her yellow robes of state, upon which fierce dragons were wrought. He was as happy to think he had seen his Empress, as we are when we have seen the President.

At times China is a republic and then Flea has a President, too.
FLEA GOES TO A DINNER.

Wretched Flea felt very much honored when, through his master, he got an invitation to the ambassador's dinner. Now, when different nations send their messengers to one another, there is a great deal of curious custom and queer form to be observed. It is very hard for the people of one country to be polite in the customs of the other; and nobody likes to seem not to know what he ought to do, or to do things which are not polite, even by mistake.

Of course, Flea knew exactly what to do, as he had been so well brought up. While he was too polite to take notice of other people's mistakes, he thought that the manners of English and American people were very queer. He remembered, when he was a boy,
MARKET PLACE WHERE THINGS FOR THE FINE DINNER WERE BOUGHT
going out to a dinner with his father, where the English host actually set his father at the right hand when they were seated at the table, instead of in the Chinese place of honor, at the left. Besides, this ignorant man actually took off his hat when he bowed!

By this time Flea had learned that in every country the very opposite customs are meant to be polite, and so he hardly noticed the things which surprised him so much when he was little. But, of course, as he had learned such strict manners when he was a little child, and had taken heed of all that he had studied later, he was welcomed everywhere for his charming and graceful ways. So, really, he had earned the right to dine with the representatives of the Emperor.

So, one fine morning, Flea took his
white ticket, written with blue letters, and dressed himself in pure white, because he was still in mourning. Then he got into his chair, which you would not think a chair at all, but a sort of little carriage with windows which bearer-men carry upon their shoulders.

At the gate these bearers presented his ticket, which had all his names and titles written down upon a folded sheet of paper. A mandarin's chair was there at the same time. Flea knew the rank of its owner because it had four bearers. There were also two long files of servants before the chair. Two of these carried
gongs, which they struck at regular times. Two others had the duty of yelling, in order to announce the coming of the great man. A third pair carried jingling chains. But these last were the executioners, with high caps of iron wire, in which a grey feather was stuck.

These made quite a crowd at the gate, with the servants who carried bamboo for whipping criminals; the men who carried red umbrellas of dignity, and those who carried red signboards, on which the officers' titles and virtues were written in gold.

So it was some time before Flea entered the palace itself, or saw the wonderful yellow screen which stood, in this instance, for the high-born "Son of Heaven,"—the Chinese Emperor.

He made the right number of bows to the people above him in rank; and,
when he met men of his own rank, he raised his clasped hands towards his own head, saying, "Haou-tsing, tsing!" This was his way of saying, "Are you well? Hail, hail!"

In China, dinners are usually eaten from a broad couch called a kang. On the middle of this is planted a little table, perhaps a foot high, upon which to rest the arm or the tea cups.

On either side of this little table, on the couch, the two principal people at the dinner, the host and his guest, are seated. And at each end of the couch two long rows of arm chairs are placed for the other guests, who sit there in the order of their rank.

As no chairs can be used when the Emperor is present, or is represented by his screen, the whole party sat cross-legged on cushions. After the guests
had been seated, servants entered with porcelain cups, fitted with covers, in which were a few perfect tea leaves. Over these boiling water had been poured.

Low tables were now placed between each two guests, and a large tray was brought in containing the first course. This was a rich soup made of birds' nests (which you have often read about).

When the first course was cleared away, salted meats, with sauces and other relishes, sixteen in number, were brought in. Eight basins of birds' nests, and hashes of shark fins, deer sinews, and other things followed. The fourth course was made up of twelve bowls of stew and rich soup.

Flea enjoyed talking with his neighbor at the table very much. This neighbor happened to be an English
clerk in the service of the ambassador. Flea could talk a little English by this time, and he watched with great amusement his neighbor's effort to eat these nice things, although he was too polite to even smile.

The English clerk asked Flea to show him the trick of eating with the chopsticks. He had been holding the two square sticks as you do your pen or your spoon, but Flea showed him that these were not the best fingers to control these narrow bits of wood. All the vegetables and meats were cut into such tiny strips that they were easily held between the chopsticks, or would lie over the edges of the two used together, like hay reaching out over the sides of a hayrack. (See page 17.)

They had great fun together, and Flea could laugh as much as he wanted to
now, without giving offence. He helped the other man so much that the next time he went to a dinner no one knew that he had not been brought up in China.

The Englishman thought the dishes of China were very beautiful, and Flea explained to him what the pictures and the letters meant. You may often see such chinaware in this country; and it may interest you to know that the queer signs near the handle of a tea pot may be the wish that you may not lack refreshment all your life; or that the long line of black lanterns around the edge of a saucer, with the same letter of the alphabet on each one, may repeat twenty-four times the wish that you may have long life and prosperity.

Flea told him that there was a printed history of one furnace alone, where
chinarware was made, which filled four volumes; and he offered to lend him the books, if he would like to read them.

When the stranger asked why this ware was called porcelain, Flea told him that this name was given to this ware by the people of Europe because they thought it looked like the inside of the porcellana shell. This shell was so called because the outside, which is curved, looks like the back of a little hog.

The beautiful glaze, he told him, is made of rocks and ferns. When the Englishman looked puzzled, Flea assured him that this is true. The silica ore, Flea told him, is pounded up with the burnt ashes of ferns and is called varnish, or oil, by the Chinese workman, who is able to decorate with colors in the glaze,—something which cannot
easily be done by the workmen in any other country.

"Previous to baking," said Flea, "the dish itself is made of white clay, or 'biscuit,' very much as children make mud pies. Then it is shaped equally round by the hand, as it is turned on a little platform wheel, and one piece will pass through twenty hands. Before it is sold, it will have gone through twice that number of hands."

The Englishman had been eating a relish in a tiny bowl, and he enjoyed it very much. It was made of small circles of brownish meat with a deep-brown sauce, quite salt and pungent to the taste. Flea told him that the dish was a favorite one with him, although only a mandarin could afford to eat it very often. When asked what it was made of, he said, "Earth worms, which
grow on the sides of the mountains,”—and could not understand why the other guest did not eat any more.

There was another dish which the Englishman asked about. This, Flea told him, was a special kind of white rat, and that the dish on the other side was pigeons’ eggs cooked in gravy. But their talk was interrupted here by their becoming interested in one of the actors, who had all the while been giving a performance on a stage without curtains at the head of the room.

Music had been given throughout the entire dinner. One man played on the pipa, a balloon-shaped guitar made of woo-tung wood. Another played on the but-kamk, or full-moon guitar, made of swan-she wood. Other musicians played upon the sam-een, a three-stringed guitar, or upon the two-
MUSICIANS PLAYING FOR THE GUESTS.

stringed fiddle, called the ee-een, which exactly describes the sound it makes.

Then there was no end of nam-tings, or gongs; tong-koos, or concert drums; pin-koos, or low drums, and instruments resembling fifes and clarinets. You would
hardly like it, but Flea thought it was the finest music he had ever heard. He had always liked music, as, indeed, it was his duty to do; for Confucius, the great teacher, after hearing the music of Shun, did not know the taste of his food for three months. He had written: "Music has a powerful influence over the morals of people, and helps them to be happy and good."

By and by, the dessert began to appear, being preceded by hot saki, or rice wine, in little gilt cups. Then came a pyramid of bowls upon a tray. There were four arranged in a square, three others upon these, and the eighth on top. These were carried about without spilling a drop. Each guest politely declined to partake, holding his hands to his sides, and also patting himself on the stomach, thus showing that he had
had enough to eat in ways which we would not think polite.

When each one had refused, the whole was taken away. The table was then completely covered with articles in pastry and sugar, a salad of bamboo shoots being placed in the centre. Last of all, came bowls of plain rice, which were held up to the mouth, and, with the united chopsticks, literally pushed and shovelled in.

Finally, tea was brought in, and, in a second, the tables were strewed with very brilliant flowers. Pretty baskets filled with blossoms were mixed up with the plates of delicious candy and the tiny cakes. Prettiest of all were the litchi nuts, with their bright crimson skins and fine white pulp. You have sometimes tasted them yourself, when the laundryman has sent them as
a Christmas gift or a New Year's present to your father and mother. When they are dried, however, they are as hard as almond nuts, and as brown as raisins.

Though the dinner began at six o'clock in the evening, it was almost twelve before the great cup (scooped from the horn of a rhinoceros), was filled with wine and was passed to each guest. The people of every nation in Asia think this cup will sweat if poison is put into it; and so it is passed around as a sort of pledge-cup, as in old times in England.

Suddenly, with a great shout and a beating of drums, one of the tumblers on the stage leaped into the air, turned a backward somersault, and kept on turning and turning in the most wonderful way, until he looked like a
catherine wheel at a Fourth of July celebration. When this human fire-
work had finished turning round so fast that his head and feet could not be seen, and had salaamed to the audience, each guest made nine bows to the yellow screen of the Emperor and walked out backward, bowing at every step. So the banquet ended.
FLEA HAS A SON AND HEIR.

It was the night before New Year's, and everybody was watching and listening for the temple gong to strike. They had slow matches in their hands, and little charcoal fires near by, and were waiting to light firecrackers and other things of that sort.

Flea had been busy all the week with his work, and had taken care to settle all his accounts, and to leave nothing undone which belonged to the old year. All the public offices had been closed for some ten days. Even the mandarins had locked up their seals until the twentieth day of the first moon.

When the gong did strike, all the people, young and old, as a sign of their rejoicing, set off great packages of firecrackers, hung together from poles in
the streets. Flea went through the ceremonies appropriate to the day, and made ready his house for the solemn feast of the first day of the New Year.

All the members of the family and the servants bathed in warm water, in which were placed the leaves of the hoangpy fruit-tree. The house was swept and decorated. The shrine of the house gods and ancestors was honored with great porcelain dishes containing the large citron called "the hand of Buddha," and with the flowers of the yellow narcissus.

Flea folded large sheets of crimson paper. These were about eight inches long and four inches wide, with three picture letters written at the top near one side. These three meant, "boys in the family," "promotion in business," and "many days," and they looked like a child, a
mandarin, and an old person. There was also the picture of a stork, the emblem, like the lobster, of long life. Flea smiled as he folded the long edge half way over and then the bottom for a third of the distance, so that the three picture-words neatly fitted the oblong space of the folded card of good wishes. And he might well be happy, for, for the first time in his married life, his friends and relations would greet a son in his house.

Baby Flea was the darling in the family now, and he was old enough to have his queue started. Already it was beginning to show as a patch of jet black hair peeping through the little silk cap with the gathered hole in the top. Over his forehead they had fastened to the cap a little gold figure of the god of luck, that he might be pro-
tected by his parents until such time as he could protect himself by offerings to the gods.
The mother of little Flea had been very particular about this charm on his cap; but Flea himself wondered whether it was really beneficial. He had seen the children of the foreign people in Canton who never had a single charm about them, or any of the early rites performed for them, thrive and grow happy; so he began to wonder if the one God of other nations might not be more powerful than his row of idols in the nearby temple.

Of ancestor worship he was quite sure, for did not all nations worship the "Our Father," who was very, very ancient, loving, and all-powerful? But the little gods, the troublesome spirits, might they not be only the fears of women, due to the fond care which their thought made for their children?

But then, he recalled how the son of
the English friend he had met at the banquet,—a son who would have been lord of a vast estate if he had lived,—had incurred the wrath of some forgotten or dishonored ancestor, and had died suddenly while playing with the other boys out in the sun. And he was afraid to disobey any teachings of his own parents.

Flea had recently made up his mind that he would study all the English he could. He had learned that, skillful as the workmen of his own country are, and great as the secrets they hold, the foreigners are able to do the very same things in a shorter time.

He had seen an English boy learn the Chinese alphabet, which is made up of thousands of word-signs, in half the time which it had taken him to learn it. He could not imitate as well as the
Chinese boys, but he could think out things for himself without anyone to tell him. And, in all matters of games, the English boy could surpass, even without cheating; and Flea wondered how these things could be.

He meant to send little Flea to even better schools than he had been to himself. He knew the only wise way to prepare for tiny Flea's school days was for him to study well which sort of school was the best, and even to go to school again himself.

So, when his English friend called the next day to wish him joy of his son and heir (for no outsider called on the first day), Flea asked him if he would help him to understand English words and writing, as well as English schools.

"Of course," the friend said with a smile; "did you not help me to use the
chopsticks at that feast? I should have starved in that six hours, if you had not helped me.”

So the two friends, in the fifth month, went up the river to see the dragon boat races. These boats are narrow and long, not unlike the shells in which college men race. But the Chinese boats hold one hundred instead of eight men, each sitting behind the other. Each man carries a paddle, and the boat is made so that it will go just as well backwards as forwards. Two men, one at each end of the boat, give the orders. The idol from the ward or district from which the boat comes sits in the centre on a throne, and over him is raised the sacred umbrella.

There is a band of music by each boat, and the drummer beats the time for the stroke. The prize is a banner, to
be hung in the temple of the god by the winner. This particular race was a great success, and the god from Flea's own district won the prize. The two friends had cheered and shouted and thrown firecrackers till they were tired; so they sat down under a tree near the river side to talk.

Flea spoke of Mr. Perry's promise, and asked him to explain the first word-signs of the English. So Mr. Perry patiently made on paper a few letters of the English alphabet, and showed how this alphabet is much more easily learned than the Chinese, because the letters are simpler and are only twenty-six in number.

But Flea became much discouraged when he realized that, although the alphabet is easy, there are thousands of words to be remembered; also that
these words are made up of many letters, combined by no known rule that he could see, and that afterwards these "many-feeted" words had to be strung together in a way which was never quite the same.

Then, too, the tones of the voice were misleading. The same word may mean a dozen things in China, if you let your voice rise or fall, or give it even a slightly different tone. But in English a word is sometimes made up in one way and sometimes in another, yet has the very same sound. And sometimes the words are made up just alike and mean different things. What can a poor Chinaman do with such a strange language?

But, as they sat there, they forgot all about words and meanings, troubles, and all the curious differences which people of different nations feel. The
Englishman told Flea that often he had sat down with his lessons by the river Isis, near Oxford, in England, and never dreamed that he should be sitting, at sunset-time, by a river on the other side of the world. His voice trembled a little as he told that his mother was ill, and that, even if he could sail the next day, he might not reach her in time to see her alive.

Flea's brown eyes almost filled with tears as he looked with sympathy at his friend, though he did not touch his hand, as people here might have done. But he truly felt the sorrow of his friend, and expressed the hope that he might hear better news before the New Year's festival was over.

Suddenly the gray clouds which had hung over the sky parted and slowly moved away like the divided wings of
birds. The sun sent down a great beam of light through the vapor, throwing a deep purple and rose color upon the water of the river. The yellow straw and bamboo sails of the boats anchored on the further shore took on new colors, so that each looked like a big flower petal as it was curved by the last breeze of the day. The sky glowed like a great golden mirror.

But soon the rose color faded to a coppery tint, and grays and blues and cold, shining green could be seen in the sky. A mist crept up and softened all the bright hues. And then, as twilight came on, and a beautiful new moon threw its comforting, pure light over the darkening world below, Flea and his friend turned back toward the great city and the duties of a busy life.