Stories of Nanking.

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I.

"COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE."

SOME twenty-one hundred years ago there occupied the great Dragon Throne of the Land of Sinim one of those remarkable characters that occasionally appear in the world and seem to turn the course of history. This was Tsin Shi Hwang, the founder of the Tsin Dynasty. From being a petty feudal king he extended his conquests and united all China under his rule. He appointed governors for the provinces. He inaugurated a census and a poll tax. He drove back the savage Huns into Mongolia and, connecting the several walls made by the petty rulers on the north, he constructed the Great Wall of China which has been one of the wonders of the world ever since. He announced himself as the first and only Emperor of China and, that coming ages might know of no ruler before him, he burned all the records existing at the time, and buried alive over five-hundred of the scholars of the Empire, that no facile pencil might ever
mention the former times. The works of Confucius and Mencius went up in smoke as the bamboo tablets cracked in the devouring flames. Only in the memory of some humble, obscure scholar, (as a sacred repository) was hidden the teachings of those mighty Sages. These cruel and ambitious acts have caused his memory to be an offence to most Chinese ever since, and discredit in their estimation every valuable work of his reign.

After comparative peace had settled down over the land and the governors had undertaken their several tasks, he commenced a magnificent progress through his Empire. Early one morning the gates of Hienyang (戸) were thrown open, and, with fluttering banners, gaily decked horsemen, and countless heavily-laden carts, the Emperor started forth on a long journey southward to see the rich valley of the Great River and the broad reaches of his Empire bounded by the Four Seas.

A thousand # around the oriole sings from gentle willows green,
While from every hill and lake,
From country side and city gate,
Flutters a banded sheen.

Such a magnificent procession had never been seen, and it still remains as one of the great events in Chinese history. City after city received in great pomp and ceremony the so-called first-born Son of Heaven. He departed leaving behind a deep impression of his power, his glory, and his mingled character of severity and beneficence.

After many days of interrupted progress the great host of horsemen and foot soldiers, carrying bows and spears and banners, which formed the advance guard of the Imperial Procession, made gay with their many colours the green hills on the north bank of the Great River, opposite where now stands the city of Nanking. Here they halted and made ready the camp until arrangements could be made to ferry such an army of people, horses, carts and treasure, across this great body of water.

The gorgeous canopy of silk and satin with all its luxurious fittings for the Emperor's use was placed on the most commanding site, while tents and booths covered the surrounding hills and plain like a far extending city. Then arrived the Emperor and his retinue of Ministers, followed by the rear guard of tried and victorious warriors, who had made it possible for this august monarch to bring under one rule for the first time the several kingdoms of this great land.
When Tsin Shih Hwang had seated himself in the royal pavilion, he looked out to the south and got his first view of the Great River. It was an object of admiration for the most kingly mind. As he gazed upon its mighty flood, so wide and deep, rolling so silently, so majestically to the sea, a feeling came into his mind that he was before one of the great things of earth. For a moment his own arrogant and presumptuous ideas seemed to dwindle. A strange uncomfortable feeling of the possibility of a greatness beyond his own came over him. This Great River was an independent, defiant, mighty power that he could neither curb nor command. The flashes from its surface were like the glances of an evil eye. The sweeping curves of its eddies were like the curling of scornful lips, and he knew that here was a power that he could not conquer.

The Emperor shook off these distracting thoughts. He said to his Ministers, “Behold a part of my greatness! It is fitting that under all heaven I should have the greatest river!” And so the day faded away and in the darkening night the swirling waters, the hills beyond, and the rich fields of the opposite shore, blended into the troubled dreams of the uneasy head of the Monarch Tsin. At last the weary night wore by. The morning breezes were just stirring the gay banners of the encampment when the Emperor rose and, parting the silken curtains of his tent, looked out. The sun had not yet risen, but its coming glory gilded the eastern sky. His eyes fell upon the river, followed across to the opposite bank, then to the range of hills beyond, and settled upon the summit of Bell Mountain (錦山). As he gazed, a slight curling cloud of vapour rose into the sky. Higher, and spreading as it rose, the pearly cloud mounted into the air, its base resting in a slender pillar upon the mountain top. Its fleecy banks rolled, infolding and unfolding, until in their opalescent depths Tsin Shih Hwang beheld the form of an Emperor.
The hand that held the curtain back shook in fear and foreboding. The Ruler of all within the Four Seas knew that he looked on the breath of a Dragon, and that the Giver of Emperors held in his keeping a Son of Heaven of another House than that of Tsin. Just then the first beams of the rising sun touched the mountain top. The pearly cloud for an instant flashed with rosy hues of gold, and then, rolling and infolding, it disappeared like a passing shadow. The Emperor threw himself on his couch in a paroxysm of rage and fear. Then there was meaning in the uneasy thoughts of yesterday. His power was not so sure and his throne not so secure as he fondly dreamed. Coming trouble was casting its dark shadow before him! Was it so, or was Heaven warning him of dangers to be overcome? The latter thought he grasped with an imperious will. He would have it so, and with a royal hand he would rule the decrees of fate. Calling his Prime Minister before him he gave orders that all haste be made in preparing to cross the river. His commands were promptly obeyed and before many days had passed, the Imperial progress rested where now stands the city of Nanking. Surveying the ground, he readily traced the form of a Crouching Dragon in the contour of the neighbouring hills.

He knew that underneath them reposed its powerful form. Bell Mountain covered the summit of its arching back. The right foot rested under Pechiko (北極閣). The left under the hills outside of where is now the Chaoyangmen (朝陽門). Its long neck reached along and ended in an awful head under the hill now called Vihiwat-tai (兩花台). But Tsin Shih Hwang was a man to grapple with his evil star. He knew the laws of fengshui (風水), and at the expense of all his treasure, if need be, he would regulate it for his own advantage. The same ideas prevailed then as now, that taking treasure from the ground enrages the Dragon and, on the contrary, returning treasure to the earth restores peace to the Dragon and good fortune to the people. Tsin Shih Hwang brought together a most royal collection of gold, silver, and precious stones, and with great pomp and circumstance he repaired to the mountain side, and there, with burning incense and humble worshipping of the great Dragon underneath, he buried the precious treasure.

He then established a garrison with a high Mandarin in charge, that no irreverent hand in the future might defeat his Imperial will. To this garrison he
gave the name of Kinglingsze (金陵寺), the first two characters of which are retained until to-day as the name of this city (Nanking). Tsin Shih Hwang was not the man to make an uncertain struggle with the fates and so, summoning the people from all the country round, he founded Molingsien (秣陵县), now called Molingkwan (秣陵關) and commanded them to dig the Tsinghwa River (秦淮), commencing at Maoshan (茅山), in Chuyunghsien, (句容縣), and approaching in its circuitous course, until finally it gathers volume and boldly cuts off the Dragon's head under Yührwatai (雨花台), and is lost in the Great River. These labourers at last founded a city over the severed neck, and called it Kienkang (建康), or Established Joy.

And thus Tsin Shih Hwang kept down the kingly vapour and repressed for ages the Son of Heaven who was cherished in the Dragon Home.

For many years at morning and evening when the sun threw its slanting rays across the mountain it glowed in gorgeous splendour with iridescent lights from the buried treasure, and so the people called it Purple Gold Mountain (紫金山); and even to-day, although for twenty-one centuries the Dragon has been assimilating the royal offering of Tsin Shih Hwang, looking at it on a rich autumn afternoon, the beautiful ethereal purple and hues of yellow gold are thrown back to your eye, and you know that peace abides in the city of the buried treasure.

II.

"LO! THE CONQUERING HERO COMES!"

Six-hundred years ago there stood in the little village of Chungli (鎮江), some forty odd li distant from the east gate of Fungyangfu (鎮江府), the Hwang Choh Sze (皇覺寺), or Sleeping Emperor's Monastery. It was so-called from the fact that during the Tang Dynasty (唐朝) one of the Emperor's of that Dynasty while on a journey here fell asleep, and in his dream a spirit appeared to him and told him that on that spot he should build a Taoist Monastery. In accordance with his dream he built the halls and courts in kingly style and there for centuries the sacred stork carried away into the unfathomable mystical Tao the aged and long-bearded followers of "The Old Boy." Of it the priest could sing:—
In deep shades where are heard the songs of many birds,
   Where on either bank the weeping willow sways in waves of living green,
And the peach flowers red like tapestry;
   There the River Hao fills my soul with yearning.
There the bamboo spreads its shade before my window,
   When the morn burnishes her swords of light;
And there from o'er the hill
   The moon throws down its slender beams across my book.

At the time of which I write there occurred a much more prosaic affair in the City of Nanking (南京) then known as Kingling. A poor man found himself burned out of house and home. Hearing that north of the river there was plenty and to spare he took his wife and two sons and journeyed as far as the Hwang Choh Sze, begging his way and hoping that he might come across some good fortune.

Before the inmates of Hwang Choh Sze were really aware of it he and his wife, who was now near to full term with child, were making their residence in one of the small rooms inside the main entrance. The state of affairs was revealed to the Abbot in a dream. The Presiding Deity appeared to him and told him that the woman inside their door would give birth to an Emperor. He awoke in alarm and soon had the intruders located in a dwelling outside. He told the wonderful prognostication, and after the child was born and came to an understanding age, he also drank in the story with great avidity and developed a strong confidence in his destiny. The name of this family was Chu (朱) and the child was called Yuen Chang (元璋). After the child was named it cried continuously and most pitifully until, on the third day, a passing sage told its mother that he could stop its
crying by changing its name, and he gave him the name Hung Wu (洪武). It is said that this was efficacious and Mr. and Mrs. Chu had peace at nights.

The boy grew up apace and developed a very vigorous disposition. Poor and of the most plebeian birth his younger years were full of bitter experiences and associations that made him self-reliant and worldly wise. We hear very little of the nobler qualities in his character, but a good deal of his ability for cunning, and of that character not the most commendable in a Son of Heaven. He passed his earlier years in watching cows and sheep, in working about the temple, and in an occasional pashi (把戲) or small show. During his boyhood the Buddhist priests became dominant at the Hwang Choh Sze, and made his days bitter with the tasks imposed upon him. He had to carry water, gather fuel, prepare rice, and beat the bell, until he hated the sight of a hoshang, or Buddhist priest. His persecution of this class in his later years may be, perhaps, in no small degree due to these early experiences. As he grew older he was able better to manage his own affairs, and it was then he tried to turn an honest cash—if such an expression may be allowed—by giving sleight of hand performances about the neighbourhood. Whether it was the fruit of his fertile mind, or the result of an impress from heaven—I will not presume to say, I leave it to his admirers to decide—it was found that when he fell asleep at noon he reclined across his staff, and this with his extended arms and diverging legs formed the character Heaven (天). During the latter part of his nap he turned over in his sleep, bending his body and, unconsciously throwing his half-closed arms to his head, he lay there forming in living shape the character for son (子). This was one of the many prophetic incidents that marked his early career.

It seems, however, that the show business was not sufficiently remunerative for his growing ambition and he commenced a trade in fuel, selling reeds as they are sold to-day through Nanking and other cities on the river. He had too robust a physique to spend his time in begging and, besides, he had too high aims to be nothing more. In this business he went back and forth between Fungyangfu (鳳陽府) and the market place where now stands the city of Chuchoufu (滁州). While engaged at this he undertook a speculation in wumwei (烏梅), or black plums, which had a reputation
for curing diarrhoea. With this he came on farther south to this city (Nanking) then known as Kinling (金陵) and plied a thriving trade. Cholera was prevailing and making sad havoc with the people, and it is said that his plums were a sure cure.

Thus he shifted about finding his adventurous life most profitable and congenial. One of his favourite devices to raise the wind when hard pressed for funds, was to approach some well-to-do man on the street who did not know him, and politely addressing him say, “Oh! that money you owe me for plums I would be glad to have to-day.” The astonished man, of course, would protest that he owed him nothing. At this the young Mr. Chu would fly in a rage and, holding on to his victim, appeal to the crowd and tell them how the man was trying to defraud him, a poor humble carrier of fuel, out of his last cash. Then the usual peacemakers would come forward to separate them, and would persuade the innocent victim to compromise the matter by giving him a part of his claim and so have peace. This the man would do to get out of his plight, while others in the crowd held on to the poor defrauded coolie who jumped and swung his arms in uncontrollable rage and grief because of the great injustice he was suffering at the hands of his wealthy customer.

This was during the later years of the Yuen Dynasty (元) and the country was nearly in a state of anarchy. The land was full of thieves, beggars and irresponsible persons, and among this element our hero might perhaps be considered a man of no ordinary ability, and of some honour and morality. Charity ought to cause us to put the standard by which we measure him on one of the lower planes of right. In the meantime the affairs of the Empire waxed worse. The last Emperor of the Yuen Dynasty, but thirteen years of age, gave himself up to wanton pleasure, and gave to his immediate followers all the desirable places in the government. The people were in revolt and two Ministers of State were in Nanking. One by the name of Li, a member of the Board of Revenue, and one named Liu, a member of the Board of
Ceremonies, sought for one worthy to occupy the Dragon Throne. One after another claimed to be the true Son of Heaven, but when taken to the Imperial Temple and placed on the Throne, they all became blind and deaf and dumb, until they descended from the awful seat. No one was able to sit there and retain his faculties. In the meantime our Mr. Chu had made many friends among the adventurers, both by his skill as a leader and his cunning ways. Many of his old companions were soldiers, and his roving life among the lower classes gave him a wide circle of friends. Soon the rumour came to be generally repeated that the coming Emperor was in Nanking and that he would be found wearing a purple robe and a green hat. It matters not perhaps, that our hero's friends were industrious in circulating this rumour, nor is it ours to determine its source.

The two Ministers searched the city through, but without avail. Finally some soldiers at the gate, who had said that no such personage passed in or out, related that they had heard some one say that there was a man living on Tszkinshan (紫金山) who was dressed in purple and wore a green hat. With a company of soldiers the Ministers repaired to the mountain and there found our Mr. Chu the only dweller on the famous Dragon's back. His skin was purple from the burning rays of the sun, and his head was covered with a large lotus leaf. He greeted them and asked them if they had come for the Son of Heaven. One of the Ministers was about turning back in disgust, but the soldiers pointed out that this man was covered with a purple robe and wore a green hat, a fact which they could not deny, and, as the other Minister was inclined to be credulous, they decided to seat him on the Dragon Throne to see if he could rule from its august height. When they did so, he became neither blind nor deaf nor dumb, but when a question of state was presented to him for his solution, he displayed Imperial wisdom, and they knew that the great Dragon Throne held its right occupant.
The vision of Tsin Shi Hwang had at last materialized and an Emperor had come forth from Tszkinshan.

Chu Hung-wu at once displayed great activity in restoring peace and quiet, destroying all of the Yuen Dynasty who might claim the Throne, and then he set up his Capital at Nanking. Among those who rallied around Hung Wu was Liu Peh-wan (劉伯溫). To him is attributed most of the skill and daring that made the Throne secure for Hung Wu. He led his armies and, when they returned to Nanking, his glory was no small part of the great campaign. In the establishment of the new government the old friends of the days of poverty, many of whom had served in battle for Hung Wu, came about him for office. Although their previous history was safer in obscurity, he could not refuse them nor did he wish to do so. However, fearing their combined influence, he scattered them throughout the thirteen provinces as high officials. Liu Peh-wan asked that he might remain in Nanking and assist the Emperor; Hung Wu gave him the nominal position of Guardian of the Water Gates. Half of all the receipts of the Kianglingfu (江陵府), were his, and he was at liberty to appropriate anything in the city he saw and wanted. Where the Confucian Temple now stands was Hung Wu's garden known as the Tung Hwa Yuen (東花園) and the residence of the Prime Minister. A part of this compound were the rooms in the city wall now occupied by the Chao Hwa Tsz (乞丐) who are, in a way, successors to his messengers (差人) and who retain many
of the privileges accorded them. Liu Peh-wân is held in high estimation by the people to-day. Many think that from that time until the present there has never been his equal, and that Hung Wu's success was because of the wisdom of this great man. After a few years he retired from public life entirely and devoted himself to study first in the monastery that stood where the Ming Tomb now is, and afterwards on Tsingliangshan (青凉山), a beautiful hill in the west part of Nanking. From here he disappeared and no one to this day knows where his grave is; but every one in Nanking knows that if a person at night wanders alone over Tsingliangshan he is liable to meet this same Liu Peh-wân who will ask “Does the morning come?” referring to the re-establishment of the Ming Dynasty after the long night of the Tsing.

The founder of the Mings sleeps his long sleep protected by the great Dragon's coiling form. The city of his greatness, still grand and Imperial in her ruin, may yet again with her massive walls enclose the Dragon Throne.

O rare old city, born of kings!
The glory of the past sits on thee like a crown.
What if thy present be but days of gloom!
A Dragon sleeps beneath thee, and a Yao or Shun
Shall in the future ages coming down
Make thee again The Great Nanking.