

Three cowherds and the teacher.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong

They tell a story that, once upon a time, there were three Miao lads who went minding the cattle by a main road. The three lads were playing on a rock, and while they were there a teacher, who was going to Beijing for examination to become a mandarin, came to the place where they were and rested there. Having rested sufficiently the teacher departed, but left behind the bag in which he was carrying his silver. He had gone part way on the road when he recalled that he had left his bag of silver, so he returned. When he got back there, he saw that there was only one small lad still there. He said to him, "While you were here did you see that I had left a bag behind?" The Miao lad said, "We found it, and we three opened it and had a look. We saw that there were three pieces of silver, so we took them and shared them, one piece each. The other two have taken their pieces away, but my piece is still here. Let the teacher take his own". The teacher said, "This was to pay for my food and drink on the journey to Beijing, but since you are so good hearted, I will give half to you". The Miao lad said, "The teacher has a long way to go, I do not want it. Let the teacher take it". The teacher said, "Well then, I have here a ring. I will now break it into two parts, I will give you one part. When I have gone, if the day comes when you have any matter to be transacted, come and find me". When he had finished speaking they parted.

The Miao lad returned home and told the folk at home what he had done. The folk at home said, "You fool! When you have food to eat you cannot preserve it. If you are going to act like this you shall no longer live with us!" So the Miao lad's mother and father drove him away, to go where he could. The Miao lad went and did servile work for people, every day moving further from home, and every day moving nearer to Beijing.

On one occasion the Miao lad was living with a very wealthy family. This wealthy family wanted the daughter of the mandarin whose silver the Miao lad had earlier found, for their son. However, the son was not at all engaging and the mandarin wanted someone very engaging indeed. So the wealthy family took their servant along for the mandarin to see, saying this was their son for whom they wanted the mandarin's daughter. The mandarin saw that the Miao lad was very engaging and so gave the family a favourable reply. They waited for the time to fetch the bride and then brought their son. The mandarin saw that it was not the person who had come before, so he said, "This is not the person who came before to see the bride. You must bring me the person who came to see the bride". When they saw how angry the mandarin was, they told him every detail of what they had done. The mandarin therefore made them go and fetch the Miao servant and questioned him about every thing. The mandarin said to the Miao lad, "Why did you come to deceive me?" The Miao lad said, "I am only these people's servant, so I have to do what they tell me". The mandarin said, "Well, where do you come from?" The Miao lad said, "In the past I did have parents. On one occasion I was herding cattle by a main road with two lads from our village, and as we were playing there, a teacher came and rested, and left behind his bag of silver, which we shared out one piece each. The other two, having got the silver, took it to their parents, but I, when I got it, stayed waiting for the teacher. When the teacher returned I gave him back his silver. So the teacher said, 'since you are so good hearted, now I will break my ring into two parts. I will give you one part and I will keep one part. If one

day you seek me out I will be able to help you”’. When the Miao lad had finished speaking he brought out the ring. So the mandarin, remembering what had happened long ago, gave his daughter to the Miao lad.