

M492
The Yi slave woman.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that once upon a time there was a Miao family. The father had died. Only two small boys and their mother were left. One day the mother took them out to wash in the river. At that time there were many brigands and soldiers about, but those three, mother and sons, took no account of them. The brigands came to them, and, taking the mother, carried her off as a slave, leaving the brothers there. The two brothers were still not grown, and there was nothing they could do. Their mother having been taken away by the brigands, all they could do was to return home, though at home there was nobody. The two had no one they could turn to; they simply begged each day's food from friends. In this way they passed their days. After a long time, as the two were growing bigger, day by day they learned to do all kinds of farm work. Now the two brothers persevered in all they did, so that every day they ate and drank better than the day before, and every year they grew more wealthy than the year before.

On one occasion the two brothers went together to market, and they saw that the Yi had brought a slave woman for sale. They went to the lower side of the market and saw them there, and they went to the top of the market and also met them there, but this day the pair returned without buying anything. When the next occasion for market came, the two brothers went, each riding a horse. When they arrived at the market, again they met the Yi bringing the slave woman for sale. The two brothers said to each other, "We have a lot of children but no one to look after them. Come, let us buy this Yi slave woman to look after the children". Having finished speaking the two went and talked price with the Yi, bought the slave woman and took her along.

As they were going, the pair rode their horses while the slave woman followed behind. They reached a stream where there was water and rested for their midday meal. As they were having their meal the two brothers brought out good food to eat, but the slave woman took out some buckwheat cake to eat. When they had finished their meal, the slave woman thought of how, long ago, she had brought her two sons here to wash, and how she had been taken away by the brigands, and had left her two sons here. She was broken hearted, and lamenting and crying she said,

"In time gone by I was in this place,
I brought my Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghe here to wash.
But the brigands carried me off,
And my Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghe, where have they gone?"

The two brothers came and said to her, "What is your family background?" The slave woman told them in detail, and presently the two realised that the slave woman whom the Yi had sold them was indeed their mother. So they gave her a horse to ride and took her home. They cared for her, and provided for her well as long as she lived.