Killing a Serpent

By P'u Sung-ling

At Ku-chi island in the eastern sea, there were camellias of all colours which bloomed throughout the year. No one, however, lived there, and very few people ever visited the spot. One day, a young man of Têng-chou, named Chang, who was fond of hunting and adventure, hearing of the beauties of the place, put together some wine and food, and rowed himself across in a small open boat. The flowers were just then even finer than usual, and their perfume was diffused for a mile or so around; while many of the trees he saw were several armfuls in circumference. So he roamed about and gave himself up to enjoyment of the scene; and by-andby he opened a flask of wine, regretting very much that he had no companion to share it with him, when all of a sudden a most beautiful young girl, with extremely bright eyes, and dressed in red, stepped down from one of the camellias before him. "Dear me!" said she, on seeing Mr. Chang; "I expected to be alone here, and was not aware that the place was already occupied." Chang was somewhat alarmed at this apparition, and asked the young lady whence she came; to which she replied that her name was Chiao-ch'ang, and that she had accompanied thither a Mr. Hai, who had gone off for a stroll and had left her to await his return. Thereupon Chang begged her to join him in a cup of wine, which she very willingly did, and they were just beginning to enjoy themselves when a sound of rushing wind was heard, and the trees and plants bent beneath it. "Here's Mr. Hai!" cried the young lady; and jumping quickly up, disappeared in a moment. The horrified Chang now beheld a huge serpent coming out of the bushes near by, and immediately ran behind a large tree for shelter, hoping the reptile would not see him. But the serpent advanced and enveloped both Chang and the tree in its great folds, binding Chang's arms down to his sides so as to prevent him from moving them; and then raising its head, darted out its tongue and bit the poor man's nose, causing the blood to flow freely out. This blood it was quietly sucking up, when Chang, who though that his last hour had come, remembered that he had in his pocket some fox poison; and managing to insert a couple of fingers, he drew out the packet, broke the paper, and let the powder lie in the palm of his hand. He next leaned his hand over the serpent's coils in such a way that the blood from his nose dripped into his hand, and when it was nearly full the serpent actually did begin to drink it. And in a few moments the grip was relaxed; the serpent struck the ground heavily with its tail, and dashed away up against another tree, which was broken in half, and then stretched itself out and died. Clung was a long time unable to rise, but at length he got up and carried the serpent off with him. He was very ill for more than a month afterwards, and even suspected the young lady of being a serpent, too, in disguise.