

STAR WORSHIPERS

BY HARUO SATO

[Mr. Sato achieved distinction among contemporary Japanese writers some years ago, with a poetic story of rural life, The Sick Rose. His work is usually marked by a delicate sensuous quality, a rather sophisticated emotion, and sometimes by an almost morbid modernity. The Star Worshipers is based on an older Chinese romance, and also recalls the story — famous in Chinese literature — of the lyric poet Li Peh, who became so intoxicated with the beauty of the moon's reflection in the water, that he threw himself into the stream to embrace it, and so perished.]

From *Kaizo* (Reconstruction)
(NATIVE JAPANESE PRESS)

MR. CHEN, who lived in Yingnei in Fukien, had three sons, one of whom had been promoted to be Inspector-General of Kwang Ting and Kwang Su (for the Chens were a wealthy and distinguished family), while the other two were still studying at home. The third son, who was named Chen San, was versed in astrology, though none of his family knew how he had learned this mysterious science.

One serene evening in the autumn, when the sky was sprinkled over with many, many stars, he recognized the one particular star with which his own destiny was intertwined. No other in all the broad firmament was so bright.

'O heavenly light and guardian star,' he prayed to it, 'grant me the favor of marrying the most beautiful woman in the world. Grant me a child who will be the greatest man in the world.'

His elder brother, who was in the garden at the time, weary with the composition of poems for the examination he was soon to take, overheard Chen San's prayer and scoffed at it.

'It is foolish,' he cried, 'to pray for the loveliest woman and the wisest child. As for me, I pray for fame and glory for myself.'

'Perhaps you are right, honorable brother,' replied Chen San. 'But I can

be a great man through my own efforts, whereas the most beautiful woman and most brilliant child are beyond my power to attain unaided. That is why I prayed as I did.'

'Why,' said the elder brother, 'so far you are right. Destiny may be more powerful than we imagine. But suppose you are born under an evil star? What then will be your fate? Yet, although I do not believe in astrology, it seems to me a prudent thing to offer prayer to a guardian star. Tell me, which is my star?'

They looked up at the sky together. It was an evening that Chen San was to remember long.

After several years the elder brother became Governor-General instead of Inspector-General, and Chen San went to the castle of Chao Chow, whence his brother was setting out for his new post. After they had taken leave of one another, Chen San rode out alone to view Chao Chow. He rode into the town dreaming of his brother's future and thinking that perchance it might be he who was to find the loveliest woman in the world. In all the years since Chen San had prayed to his star, he had never found her.

Suddenly, as he rode, he heard some

one playing on a stringed instrument. In front of him, separated from him by a magnificent gate, rose a high tower flanked by green woods; and leaning against a pillar of the tower stood a girl of dazzling beauty. It was she who had made the music. Her robe was black, and above it her profile was delicate as a white magnolia blossom. As he gazed upon her, he began to sing to her playing. Startled, she made as if to throw something at him, and fled. Scarcely had the fascinating vision vanished from his sight, when a *lychee* fell at the feet of Chen San's horse. With his heart palpitating, Chen San grasped the fruit in his bridle hand. A passer-by told him that the girl was Wu Niang, the fifth of the daughters of Huang, renowned for her beauty among all the residents of Chao Chow.

From gossip at the hotel the young man learned that among the ancestral treasures of the house of Huang was an ancient mirror. Calling a servant, he exchanged his own gala attire for the old clothes of the servant. In the morning a stranger stood at the door of the Huang family, saying that he was an expert polisher of mirrors, who had come from a distant land to brighten the historic treasure of the Huangs. All of one summer's day he polished the famous mirror, until, when evening drew near and he was about to put it again in its case, it fell to the ground and was shattered.

'Since I have no money to pay for it,' said the polisher to the head of the family, 'I will serve the house as a slave until I have repaid the damage.' Then, with a mysterious smile, he added, 'You will find me, honorable gentleman, a far more valuable possession than any mirror, however precious.'

The charming daughter of the Huangs glanced from behind the servants at the young stranger, and her eyes were dazzled. She observed the resemblance

between this new slave and the handsome knight whom she had seen on horseback.

The young mirror-polisher worked long in the house. Soon the beautiful girl, fascinated by him, sought every occasion to peer at him from behind the screen of her boudoir. So often did she see him, that she came at length to believe that the new slave and the young horseman who had passed beneath her window were one and the same.

'You will find me a far more valuable possession than any mirror, however precious.' The words seemed to her a revelation. At times she feared the mysterious slave. Only to I Shun, one of her servants and her best friend, did she confide these doubts and fears.

Now the young slave had seen the beauty of I Shun, whom he sometimes thought more beautiful than Wu Niang herself. He felt secretly ashamed of his fickleness when he found himself transported by the grace and elegance of I Shun. Again he prayed to his star:—

'O star, have mercy on me and grant me the good fortune to marry the most beautiful woman in the world. Give to her the most distinguished son in the world.' Every night he repeated this prayer, each time with more ardor than before.

When Chen San was among the other slaves, his high character and the elegance of his manners revealed his noble birth. The eyes of the intelligent yet tender I Shun were not blind; they followed him with compassion.

I Shun discovered that, although he had confessed to her his love for Wu Niang, she was herself in love with him. Never had he said to her, 'I love you,' yet she bethought her of a promise she had made to Wu Niang, that they two should marry the same man. She began to hope that this young man would prove to be the son of some nobleman of high position, or at least one rich

enough to be able to afford a second wife.

'In a garment of pearl-white silk, mounted on a horse caparisoned with blue,' as the fifth daughter had described him when she was alone with I Shun, the vision of the young man haunted her. 'Oh, that I might become his second wife when Wu Niang becomes his first!' she sighed.

At last I Shun was charged with a grave mission. The young slave asked her to bear his confession of love to Wu Niang: 'Led by my guiding star, last June I passed your house. I am the third son of Chen of Yingnei in Fukien. My eldest brother is Governor-General of Kwang Tung and Kwang Su. My only desire is to know how deeply a man can love his wife and in return be loved by her.'

In a voice like a fading melody, the charming Wu Niang replied to the bearer of this avowal: 'I will see him.'

When she had ushered the man she loved into a chamber which was not her own, I Shun cast herself on her bed in tears. When the girls met next morning, they had not courage to raise their eyes. I Shun grew thin, as one who has ended a period of mourning. A day seemed as long to her as a year. She was gazing at the flowers in the garden, her eyelashes moist with tears, when someone, holding her softly by the shoulders, whispered in her ear: 'It is spring. Why are you sad? I hold to our promise of last year. You shall be Chen San's second wife.' It was Wu Niang.

One day she said to I Shun again: 'We must elope. We shall steal from the house to-morrow morning before daybreak. We are to disguise ourselves as men. Chen San has procured two gentle horses for us.'

Three travelers on horseback, too handsome for boys, attracted the glances of the people whom they pass-

ed. At Cheng Chow a band of lawless soldiers dragged them off to prison.

'You shall repent this!' cried Chen San, when they pushed him into the dungeon. The solemn tone of his voice, the beauty of his companions, the quality of their horses, and the money they carried with them, were enough to prevent further outrage by the soldiery.

'He is a robber who has stolen the gold and the two girls and the three horses. Since he will not divulge his crimes, we are determined to put him to the torture,' the jailer explained to a high official who chanced to be visiting the prison, and who had seen them in a dark corner. With a nod, the official turned to go.

'Honorable brother!' cried Chen San. 'Wait! Stay but a moment, my esteemed brother!'

'Don't treat them cruelly,' remarked the kind official, looking back. 'They seem almost crazy.'

'Brother, no! It is I! My dear brother!'

Shouting like a madman, the prisoner caught the attention of the magistrate. The accent of the town of Yingnei was unmistakable.

'I will see the prisoners once more,' said the dignitary — none other than the eldest brother of Chen San.

When the story of the love-affair was told him, the older brother took pity on the younger, and promised to call upon the father of Wu Niang.

'Half of my prayer, O my star, has been realized,' Chen San prayed. 'Have pity on me and grant me full happiness.'

For a longer time than usual he prayed, with more ardor than usual, his mind full of gratitude for the divine assistance of his guardian star. His wives, who recognized their own stars in two which twinkled near his tute-

lary star, joined in the prayer: 'Grant me to be loved by my husband forever!'

A year later, as Wu Niang sat in her chamber alone, thinking of the happy days which she had spent with her husband, whose love had now come to be I Shun's alone, she looked up after her custom, to the three stars which guided the destinies of Chen San, I Shun, and herself. One of them began to grow dim.

That night Chen San left the chamber of I Shun, to knock at the boudoir of Wu Niang. As he opened the curtain which hung above her bed, he found it empty. On the pillow lay a gold hair-pin, and a letter, which he opened with trembling hands.

He dashed from the room into the darkness of the garden. Unable to see in the blackness about him, he returned to seek a light. Close by the well where Wu Niang had told him she would die, he found one little red shoe. As he lifted the light and let it fall upon the black surface of the water, he saw another shoe. Surely it was hers. He peered again into the well. The light of a star was reflected — his star.

'Wu Niang!' he cried in despair. The black water tempted him and he threw himself into the well. A shrill cry from the barn near-by was drowned by the splash in the water. Chen San had gazed at his star for the last time.

By the well a candle flickered. Wu Niang, who had hidden to test her husband's love, tottered out of the hiding-place like a lost soul. Returning to her chamber, she sought a pen with which to write her last letter, while the candle by the side of the well, burned in its silver candlestick.

Two dead bodies were drawn out of the well — two bodies and a pair of red shoes. The dead wife and husband were laid in the same grave, and by the tomb

was planted the tree which the Chinese call 'Mutual Love.'

I Shun found it harder to live alone than it would have been to die with her husband; but she determined to live and rear the child that was to be born to her.

'You are the most beautiful woman in the eye of heaven,' her husband had told her the night before he died. 'You are my true wife. That is why you are the mother of my child. It will be a boy and will grow to be a great man.'

The child was a boy, and as he grew to manhood the sorrow of I Shun faded away like old music which, though heard by the ear, evokes no sorrow in the heart. The tombstone of Chen San and Wu Niang was covered with moss, shaded by the ever growing tree of 'Mutual Love.' Each year, in autumn, I Shun and her son went to the tomb to offer incense and flowers, and at these times the fruits of the tree rained down on child and mother, red as the shoes of Wu Niang.

The little boy became the greatest man in China. He defeated many rebels and he made good laws. He served the last Ming Emperor and the first of the Ching dynasty faithfully and well; but in the midst of his greatness he was lonely and in his heart there gnawed a tragic melancholy like poisoned wine. Late at night he would cast aside his pen and reflect with heartrending sorrow on his career.

'I do not know,' he was wont to think, 'I do not know whether I am the distinguished man for whom my father prayed. Yet such sorrow and loneliness as mine only a great man could feel, for only a great man could pay such a price. Only my mother believed in me. If she were living, she might understand me. But when she urged me to achieve greatness, she did not tell me that this sad loneliness was to be mine.'

AN EPISODE OF THE GERMAN REVOLUTION

BY HANS PAASCH

[Hans Paasch, a German pacifist of some wealth and distinction, was shot on his estate near Berlin, by a party of soldiers who came to search his dwelling, on May 22, 1920. The following is from a letter, written shortly before his death, to an English friend.]

From *Die Rote Fahne*, May 23
(BERLIN OFFICIAL COMMUNIST DAILY)

It is time to puncture the myth that the Empress was brutally ejected from her Potsdam palace in November, 1918, by the revolutionists. The incident which has been distorted into this 'touching tale' was as follows.

About the middle of November, I had the interview with the ex-Empress upon which her reputation as a royal martyr rests. I was endeavoring to ensure the preservation of certain documents, which the representatives of the old government, and unfortunately some of our Conservative Socialist comrades, desired to see destroyed. This errand took me to Potsdam Villa, where the ex-Empress and her son Eitel Friedrich were then living. The latter asked me if I wished to speak with his mother. As I had no motive for disturbing the lady, I said no. Nevertheless, the Prince left the room, and appeared a few minutes later with his mother. She wore a street gown of brown silk and a hat with brown feathers. I was told that Mr. Hintze, who had been an under-secretary of the navy until shortly before the revolution, was waiting for her, and that Mr. Fehrenbach had also just been announced.

To my surprise, the Empress at once assumed a challenging manner and inquired in an angry voice: 'What do you want of me? I knew at once that I was going to be insulted.'

I replied, 'You don't seem to understand under what circumstances I have

come here. I am a representative of the people, who are anxious to escape from their misery and can hardly be reproached if they do inconvenience you a little in so doing.'

When I addressed her as 'you,' — *Sie*, — the lady bridled up indignantly, and in her wrath fairly stuttered the following words, which I repeat verbatim: 'I am — I was — the Empress.'

It was an interesting moment in history. I certainly could not employ the term 'Your Majesty' without belying what the nation had just achieved, and I could not bring myself to say 'gracious lady (*Gnädige Frau*).'

The manner of address which I chanced to use was of course not designed in the slightest to insult her. But in view of the suffering which the world had been obliged to endure on account of the arrogance and heedless impulses of the Hohenzollerns, I did not attach much importance to whether my manner of addressing her pleased her or not.

Since she seemed to me to be tired, I asked her if she would not sit down, and indicated the only chair near us. When she refused, I got the impression that my well-meant suggestion would destroy a studied pose. I feel quite certain that there is a picture somewhere in which Queen Louise of Prussia is represented as standing on some similar occasion.

The Empress stared at me fixedly when I told her who I was, and men-