

Unknown Devils

By P'ou Song-lin

Suen Pure-whiteness was privileged with the possibility of seeing distinctly all the creatures of the other world, who, for the greater part of humanity, remain always mysterious and invisible.

One night he slept in a mountain monastery; he had closed and barred the door; the full moon illuminated the window; everything was quiet. He had slept an hour, when he was awakened by the hissing of the wind; the gate of the monastery seemed to be thrown open; after a while the door of his room was shaken, the bar dropped down, and the heavy wood turned on its hinges.

Pure-whiteness thought at first that it would be better to close his eyes and to wait; but his curiosity was aroused, he looked intently; after a few seconds he could see a big devil, so big that he was obliged to stoop in order not to break his head against the ceiling, and who was coming slowly towards the bed. His face had the colour and general appearance of an old melon. His eyes were full of lightning and his mouth was bigger than a tub. His teeth were at least three inches long and his tongue kept moving incessantly, while he uttered a sound like "Ha-la."

Pure-whiteness was much afraid; but, seeing he had no way of escape, he took a short sword from under his pillow and, with all his might, thrust it into the devil's breast; it sounded as if he had struck a stone.

The devil hissed in a fearful way; he extended his claws to catch the man. Pure-whiteness jumped on the right side; the devil could only catch his dress and started; the man hastened to unfasten his dress; he dropped and remained there on all fours, motionless and mute. When the devil's steps ceased to be heard he screamed for help; the priests came with lamps; everything was in order, but in the bed Pure-Whiteness was yelling as in a nightmare.

On another day Pure-whiteness was in the country enjoying the pleasures of harvest. The golden rice was piled high and everybody was busy. Some armed men had been posted here and there, according to the custom; everybody knows that when the rice is ripened in a place, people of the neighbouring villages are always looking for an opportunity to make the harvest themselves or to take away what has been cut by the owners.

Pure-whiteness, tired by the heat, laid down behind a rice-stack; after a while he heard stealthy steps; raising his head, he saw a big devil more than ten feet high, with hair and beard of a fierce reddish colour, who was approaching. Pure-whiteness yelled for help: men with spears came to the rescue. The devil bellowed like the thunder and flew away. Pure-whiteness told them what he had seen; nobody would believe him, but they nevertheless started in pursuit; people working in the fields all round had not seen anything, so everybody came back.

The second day Pure-whiteness was among four or five men, when he saw the same devil, "He has come back!" cried he, flying away.

The other people ran away too. When they came back, everything was quiet. But they always kept by their side some spears, bows and arrows, and swords.

For two or three days, they had no trouble; the rice was being stored in the granaries, when Pure-whiteness, looking up, screamed:

"The devil has come back!"

Everybody ran to his arms. Pure-whiteness fell down; the devil picked him up, bit his head, threw him down, and went away.

When the man came back, Pure-whiteness bore the marks of teeth on his head; he did not know anybody. Taken home and nursed, he remained unconscious for a few days and died.