

Carrying a Corpse

By P'u Sung-ling

A woodsman who had been to market was returning home with his pole across his shoulder,¹ when suddenly he felt it become very heavy at the end behind him, and looking round he saw attached to it the headless trunk of a man. In great alarm, he got his pole quit of the burden and struck about him right and left, whereupon the body disappeared. He then hurried on to the next village, and when he arrived there in the dusk of the evening, he found several men holding lights to the ground as if looking for something. On asking what was the matter, they told him that while sitting together a man's head had fallen from the sky into their midst; that they had noticed the hair and beard were all dragged, but in a moment the head had vanished. The woodsman then related what had happened to himself; and thus one whole man was accounted for, though no one could tell whence he came. Subsequently, another man was carrying a basket when some one saw a man's head in it, and called out to him; whereupon he dropped the basket in a fright, and the head rolled away and disappeared.

¹ The common method of portage in China is by a bamboo pole over the shoulder with well-balanced burdens hanging from each end. I have often seen children carried thus, sitting in wicker baskets; sometimes for long journeys.