

# The Rewards of Industry

By Richard Garnett

In China, under the Tang dynasty, early in the seventh century of the Christian era, lived a learned and virtuous, but poor mandarin who had three sons, Fu-su, Tu-sin, and Wang-li. Fu-su and Tu-sin were young men of active minds, always labouring to find out something new and useful. Wang-li was clever too, but only in games of skill, in which he attained great proficiency.

Fu-su and Tu-sin continually talked to each other of the wonderful inventions they would make when they arrived at man's estate, and of the wealth and renown they promised themselves thereby. Their conversation seldom reached the ears of Wang-li, for he rarely lifted his eyes from the chessboard on which he solved his problems. But their father was more attentive, and one day he said:

"I fear, my sons, that among your multifarious pursuits and studies you must have omitted to include that of the laws of your country, or you would have learned that fortune is not to be acquired by the means which you have proposed to yourselves."

"How so, father?" asked they.

"It hath been justly deemed by our ancestors," said the old man, "that the reverence due to the great men who are worshipped in our temples, by reason of our indebtedness to them for the arts of life, could not but become impaired if their posterity were suffered to eclipse their fame by new discoveries, or presumptuously amend what might appear imperfect in their productions. It is therefore, by an edict of the Emperor Suen, forbidden to invent anything; and by a statute of the Emperor Wu-chi it is further provided that nothing hitherto invented shall be improved. My predecessor in the small office I hold was deprived of it for saying that in his judgment money ought to be made round instead of square, and I have myself run risk of my life for seeking to combine a small file with a pair of tweezers."

"If this is the case," said the young men, "our fatherland is not the place for us." And they embraced their father, and departed. Of their brother Wang-li they took no farewell, inasmuch as he was absorbed in a chess problem. Before separating, they agreed to meet on the same spot after thirty years, with the treasure which they doubted not to have acquired by the exercise of their inventive faculties in foreign lands. They further covenanted that if either had missed his reward the other should share his possessions with him.

Fu-su repaired to the artists who cut out characters in blocks of hard wood, to the end that books may be printed from the same. When he had fathomed their mystery he betook himself to a brass-founder, and learned how to cast in metal. He then sought a learned man who had travelled much, and made himself acquainted with the Greek, Persian, and Arabic languages. Then he cast a number of Greek characters in type, and putting them into a bag and providing himself with some wooden letter-tablets of his own carving, he departed to seek his fortune. After innumerable hardships and perils he arrived in the land of Persia, and inquired for the great king.

"The great king is dead," they told him, "and his head is entirely separated from his body. There is now no king in Persia, great or small."

"Where shall I find another great king?" demanded he.

"In the city of Alexandria," replied they, "where the Commander of the Faithful is busy introducing the religion of the Prophet."

Fu-su passed to Alexandria, carrying his types and tablets.

As he entered the gates he remarked an enormous cloud of smoke, which seemed to darken the whole city. Before he could inquire the reason, the guard arrested him as a stranger, and conducted him to the presence of the Caliph Omar.

“Know, O Caliph,” said Fu-su, “that my countrymen are at once the wisest of mankind and the stupidest. They have invented an art for the preservation of letters and the diffusion of knowledge, which the sages of Greece and India never knew, but they have not learned to take, and they refuse to be taught how to take, the one little step further necessary to render it generally profitable to mankind.”

And producing his tablets and types, he explained to the Caliph the entire mystery of the art of printing.

“Thou seemest to be ignorant,” said Omar, “that we have but yesterday condemned and excommunicated all books, and banished the same from the face of the earth, seeing that they contain either that which is contrary to the Koran, in which case they are impious, or that which is agreeable to the Koran, in which case they are superfluous. Thou art further unaware, as it would seem, that the smoke which shrouds the city proceeds from the library of the unbelievers, consumed by our orders. It will be meet to burn thee along with it.”

“O Commander of the Faithful,” said an officer, “of a surety the last scroll of the accursed ceased to flame even as this infidel entered the city.”

“If it be so,” said Omar, “we will not burn him, seeing that we have taken away from him the occasion to sin. Yet shall he swallow these little brass amulets of his, at the rate of one a day, and then be banished from the country.”

The sentence was executed, and Fu-su was happy that the Court physician condescended to accept his little property in exchange for emetics.

He begged his way slowly and painfully back to China, and arrived at the covenanted spot at the expiration of the thirtieth year. His father’s modest dwelling had disappeared, and in its place stood a magnificent mansion, around which stretched a park with pavilions, canals, willow-trees, golden pheasants, and little bridges.

“Tu-sin has surely made his fortune,” thought he, “and he will not refuse to share it with me agreeably to our covenant.”

As he thus reflected he heard a voice at his elbow, and turning round perceived that one in a more wretched plight than himself was asking alms of him. It was Tu-sin.

The brothers embraced with many tears, and after Tu-sin had learned Fu-su’s history, he proceeded to recount his own.

“I repaired,” said he, “to those who know the secret of the grains termed fire-dust, which Suen has not been able to prevent us from inventing, but of which Wu-chi has taken care that we shall make no use, save only for fireworks. Having learned their mystery I deposited a certain portion of this fire-dust in hollow tubes which I had constructed of iron and brass, and upon it I further laid leaden balls of a size corresponding to the hollow of the tubes. I then found that by applying a light to the fire-dust at one end of the tube I could send the ball out at the other with such force that it penetrated the cuirasses of three warriors at once. I filled a barrel with the dust, and concealing it and the tubes under carpets which I laid upon the backs of oxen, I set out to the city of Constantinople. I will not at present relate my adventures on the journey. Suffice it that I arrived at last half dead from fatigue and hardship, and destitute of everything except my merchandise. By bribing an officer with my carpets I was admitted to have speech with the Emperor. I found him busily studying a problem in chess.

“I told him that I had discovered a secret which would make him the master of the world, and in particular would help him to drive away the Saracens who threatened his empire with destruction.

“ ‘Thou must perceive,’ he said, ‘that I cannot possibly attend to thee until I have solved this problem. Yet, lest any should say that the Emperor neglects his duties, absorbed in idle amusement, I will refer thy invention to the chief armourers of my capital.’ And he gave me a letter to the armourers, and returned to his problem. And as I quitted the palace bearing the missive, I came upon a great procession. Horsemen and running footmen, musicians, heralds, and banner-bearers surrounded a Chinaman who sat in the attitude of Fo under a golden umbrella upon a richly caparisoned elephant, his pigtail plaited with yellow roses. And the musicians blew and clashed, and the standard-bearers waved their ensigns, and the heralds proclaimed, ‘Thus shall it be done to the man whom the Emperor delights to honour.’ And unless I was very greatly mistaken, the face of the Chinaman was the face of our brother Wang-li.

“At another time I would have striven to find what this might mean, but my impatience was great, as also my need and hunger. I sought the chief armourers, and with great trouble brought them all together to give me audience. I produced my tube and fire-dust, and sent my balls with ease through the best armour they could set before me.

“ ‘Who will want breast-plates now?’ cried the chief breast-plate maker.

“ ‘Or helmets?’ exclaimed one who made armour for the head.

“ ‘I would not have taken fifty bezants for that shield, and what good is it now?’ said the head of the shield trade.

“ ‘My swords will be of less account,’ said a sword-smith.

“ ‘My arrows of none,’ lamented an arrow-maker.

“ ‘Tis villainy,’ cried one.

“ ‘Tis magic,’ shouted another.

“ ‘Tis illusion, as I’m an honest tradesman,’ roared a third, and put his integrity to the proof by thrusting a hot iron bar into my barrel. All present rose up in company with the roof of the building, and all perished, except myself, who escaped with the loss of my hair and skin. A fire broke out on the spot, and consumed one-third of the city of Constantinople.

“I was lying on a prison-bed some time afterwards, partly recovered of my hurts, dolefully listening to a dispute between two of my guards as to whether I ought to be burned or buried alive, when the Imperial order for my disposal came down. The gaolers received it with humility, and read ‘Kick him out of the city.’ Marvelling at the mildness of the punishment, they nevertheless executed it with so much zeal that I flew into the middle of Bosphorus, where I was picked up by a fishing vessel, and landed on the Asiatic coast, whence I have begged my way home. I now propose that we appeal to the pity of the owner of this splendid mansion, who may compassionate us on hearing that we were reared in the cottage which has been pulled down to make room for his palace.”

They entered the gates, walked timidly up to the house, and prepared to fall at the feet of the master, but did not, for ere they could do so they recognised their brother Wang-li.

It took Wang-li some time to recognise them, but when at length he knew them he hastened to provide for their every want. When they had well eaten and drunk, and had been clad in robes of honour, they imparted their histories, and asked for his.

“My brothers,” said Wang-li, “the noble game of chess, which was happily invented long before the time of the Emperor Suen, was followed by me solely for its pleasure, and I dreamed not of acquiring wealth by its pursuit until I casually heard one day that it was entirely unknown

to the people of the West. Even then I thought not of gaining money, but conceived so deep a compassion for those forlorn barbarians that I felt I could know no rest until I should have enlightened them. I accordingly proceeded to the city of Constantinople and was received as a messenger from Heaven. To such effect did I labour that ere long the Emperor and his officers of state thought of nothing else but playing chess all day and night, and the empire fell into confusion, and the Saracens mightily prevailed. In consideration of these services the Emperor was pleased to bestow those distinguished honours upon me which thou didst witness at his palace gate, dear brother.

“After, however, the fire which was occasioned through thy instrumentality, though in no respect by thy fault, the people murmured, and taxed the Emperor with seeking to destroy his capital in league with a foreign sorcerer, meaning thee. Ere long the chief officers conspired and entered the Emperor’s apartment, purposing to dethrone him, but he declared that he would in nowise abdicate until he had finished the game of chess he was then playing with me. They looked on, grew interested, began to dispute with one another respecting the moves, and while they wrangled loyal officers entered and made them all captive. This greatly augmented my credit with the Emperor, which was even increased when shortly afterwards I played with the Saracen admiral blockading the Hellespont, and won of him forty corn-ships, which turned the dearth of the city into plenty.

“The Emperor bade me choose any favour I would, but I said his liberality had left me nothing to ask for except the life of a poor countryman of mine who I had heard was in prison for burning the city. The Emperor bade me write his sentence with my own hand. Had I known that it was thou, Tu-sin, believe me I had shown more consideration for thy person. At length I departed for my native land, loaded with wealth, and travelling most comfortably by relays of swift dromedaries. I returned hither, bought our father’s cottage, and on its site erected this palace, where I dwell meditating on the problems of chess-players and the precepts of the sages, and persuaded that a little thing which the world is willing to receive is better than a great thing which it hath not yet learned to value aright. For the world is a big child, and chooses amusement before instruction.”

“Call you chess an amusement?” asked his brothers.