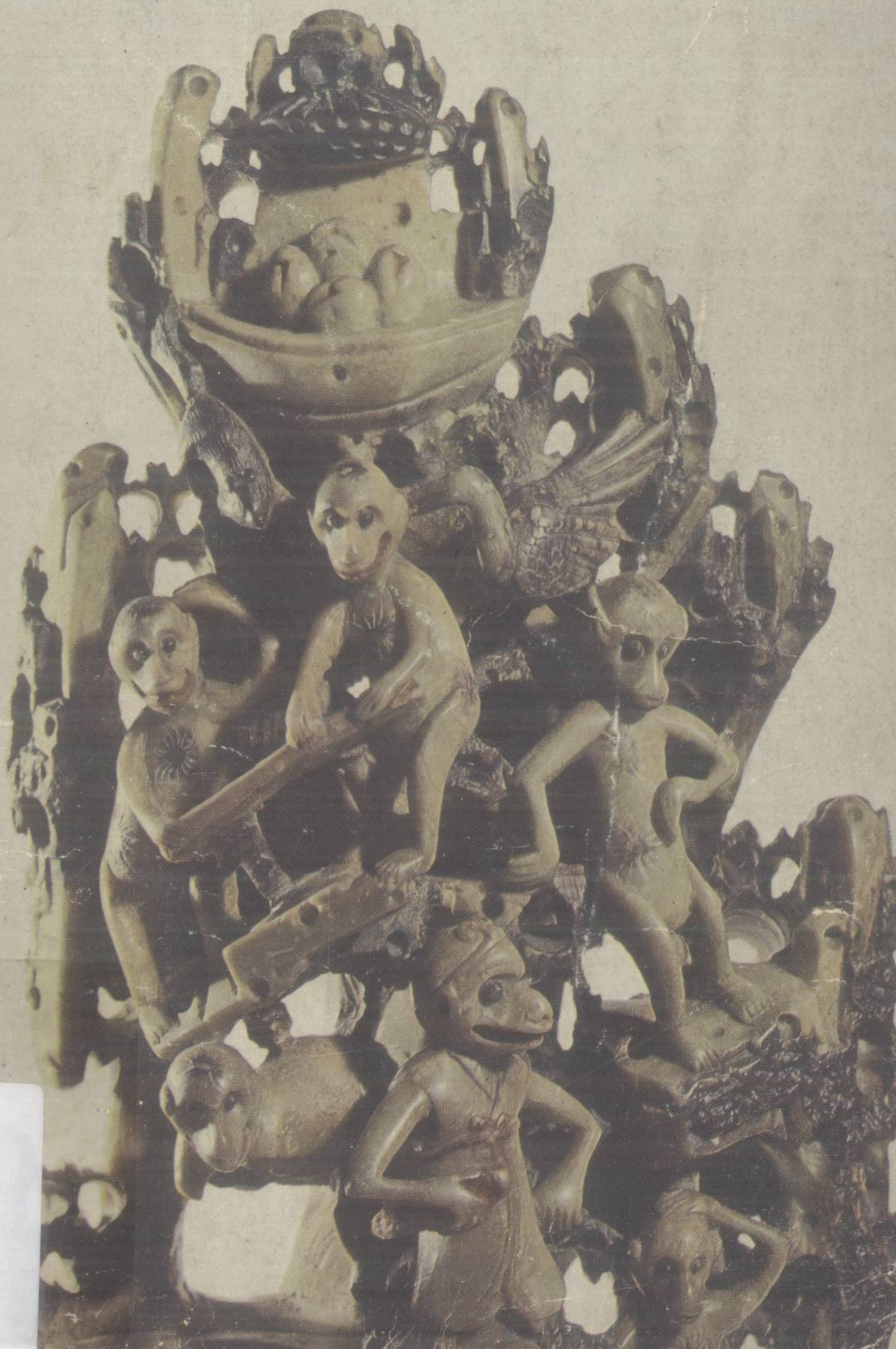
Penguin Classics

WU CH'ÊNG-ÊN
MONKEY



THE PENGUIN CLASSICS

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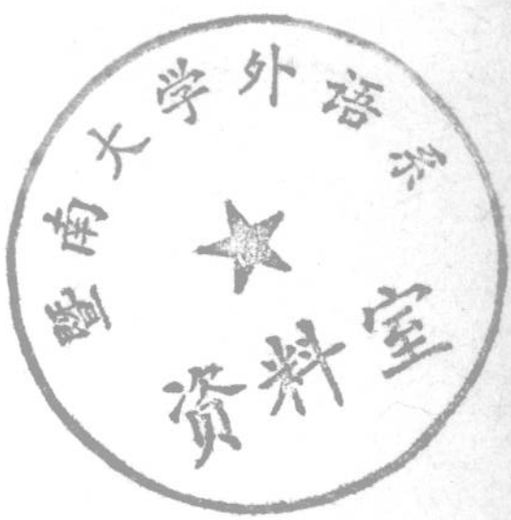
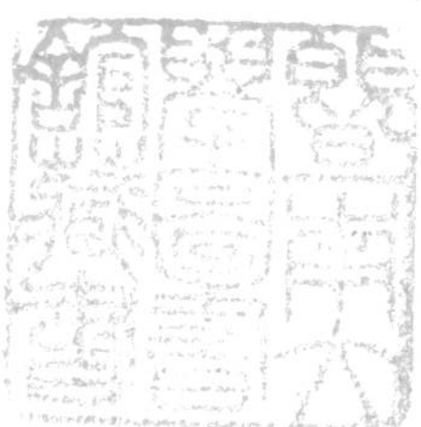
Editor: Betty Radice

Very little is known about WU CH'ÊNG-ÊN (c. 1505–80) although he is said to have held the post of District Magistrate for a time. He had a reputation as a good poet but only a few rather commonplace verses of his survive in an anthology of Ming poetry and in a local gazetteer.

ARTHUR WALEY C.B.E., F.B.S., was a distinguished authority on Chinese language and literature. He was born in 1889 and graduated from the Universities of Cambridge and Aberdeen. He was honoured many times during his life for his outstanding translations from the Chinese and in 1953 he was awarded the Queen's medal for poetry which is only given at infrequent intervals. Dr Waley died in 1966. His many publications include *170 Chinese Poems, Japanese Poetry, The Tale of Genji* (6 vols), *The Way and its Power, The Real Tripitaka* and *Yuam Mei.*





WU CH'ÊNG-ÊN

MONKEY

TRANSLATED BY ARTHUR WALEY

PENGUIN BOOKS

Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England
Penguin Books, 625 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10022, U.S.A.
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia
Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 41 Steelcase Road West, Markham, Ontario, Canada
Penguin Books (N.Z.) Ltd, 182–190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

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This translation first published by Allen & Unwin 1942
Published in Penguin Books 1961
Reprinted 1973, 1974, 1977

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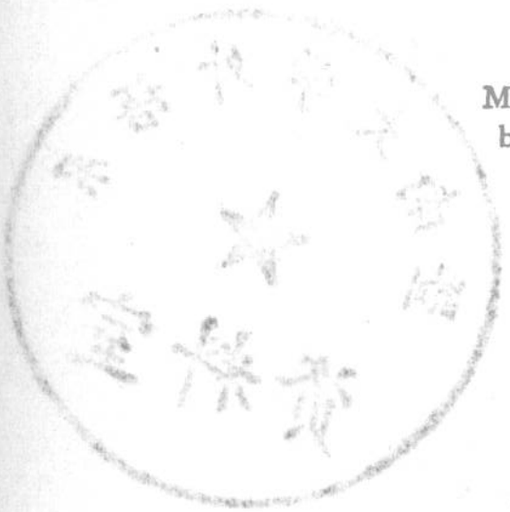

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by C. Nicholls & Company Ltd
Set in Monotype Garamond

TO

BERYL AND HAROLD

INTRODUCTION

THIS story was written by Wu Ch'êng-ên, of Huai-an in Kiangsu. His exact dates are not known, but he seems to have lived between A.D. 1505 and 1580. He had some reputation as a poet, and a few of his rather commonplace verses survive in an anthology of Ming poetry and in a local gazetteer.

Tripitaka, whose pilgrimage to India is the subject of the story, is a real person, better known to history as Hsüan Tsang. He lived in the seventh century A.D., and there are full contemporary accounts of his journey. Already by the tenth century, and probably earlier, Tripitaka's pilgrimage had become the subject of a whole cycle of fantastic legends. From the thirteenth century onwards these legends have been constantly represented on the Chinese stage. Wu Ch'êng-ên had therefore a great deal to build on when he wrote his long fairy tale. The original book is indeed of immense length, and is usually read in abridged forms. The method adopted in these abridgements is to leave the original number of separate episodes, but drastically reduce them in length, particularly by cutting out dialogue. I have for the most part adopted the opposite principle, omitting many episodes, but translating those that are retained almost in full, leaving out, however, most of the incidental passages in verse, which go very badly into English.

Monkey is unique in its combination of beauty with absurdity, of profundity with nonsense. Folk-lore, allegory, religion, history, anti-bureaucratic satire, and pure poetry – such are the singularly diverse elements out of which the book is compounded. The bureaucrats of the story are saints in Heaven, and it might be supposed that the satire was directed against religion rather than against bureaucracy. But the idea that the hierarchy in Heaven is a replica of government on earth is an accepted one in China. Here as so often the Chinese let the cat out of the bag, where other countries leave us guessing. It has often enough been put forward as a theory

that a people's gods are the replica of its earthly rulers. In most cases the derivation is obscure. But in Chinese popular belief there is no ambiguity. Heaven is simply the whole bureaucratic system transferred bodily to the empyrean.

As regards the allegory, it is clear that Tripitaka stands for the ordinary man, blundering anxiously through the difficulties of life, while Monkey stands for the restless instability of genius. Pigsy, again, obviously symbolizes the physical appetites, brute strength, and a kind of cumbrous patience. Sandy is more mysterious. The commentators say that he represents *ch'êng*, which is usually translated 'sincerity', but means something more like 'whole-heartedness'. He was not an afterthought, for he appears in some of the earliest versions of the legend, but it must be admitted that, though in some inexplicable way essential to the story, he remains throughout singularly ill-defined and colourless.

Extracts from the book were given in Giles's *History of Chinese Literature* and in Timothy Richard's *A Mission to Heaven*, at a time when only the abridgements were known. An accessible, though very inaccurate account of it is given by Helen Hayes, in *A Buddhist Pilgrim's Progress* (Wisdom of the East Series). There is a very loose paraphrase in Japanese by various hands, with a preface dated 1806 by the famous novelist Bakin. It has illustrations, some of them by Hokusai, and one of the translators was Hokusai's pupil Gakutei, who admits that when he undertook the work he had no knowledge of Chinese colloquial. I lost my copy of this Japanese version years ago and am grateful to Mr Saiji Hasegawa, formerly head of the London branch of the Domei Press Agency, who generously presented me with his copy. The text I have used for translation was published by the Oriental Press, Shanghai, in 1921. It has a long and scholarly introduction by Dr Hu Shih, now Chinese ambassador in Washington.

CHAPTER I

THERE was a rock that since the creation of the world had been worked upon by the pure essences of Heaven and the fine savours of Earth, the vigour of sunshine and the grace of moonlight, till at last it became magically pregnant and one day split open, giving birth to a stone egg, about as big as a playing ball. Fructified by the wind it developed into a stone monkey, complete with every organ and limb. At once this monkey learned to climb and run; but its first act was to make a bow towards each of the four quarters. As it did so, a steely light darted from this monkey's eyes and flashed as far as the Palace of the Pole Star. This shaft of light astonished the Jade Emperor as he sat in the Cloud Palace of the Golden Gates, in the Treasure Hall of the Holy Mists, surrounded by his fairy Ministers. Seeing this strange light flashing, he ordered Thousand-league Eye and Down-the-wind Ears to open the gate of the Southern Heaven and look out. At his bidding these two captains went out to the gate and looked so sharply and listened so well that presently they were able to report, 'This steely light comes from the borders of the small country of Ao-lai, that lies to the east of the Holy Continent, from the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit. On this mountain is a magic rock, which gave birth to an egg. This egg changed into a stone monkey, and when he made his bow to the four quarters a steely light flashed from his eyes with a beam that reached the Palace of the Pole Star. But now he is taking a drink, and the light is growing dim.'

The Jade Emperor condescended to take an indulgent view.

'These creatures in the world below,' he said, 'were compounded of the essence of heaven and earth, and nothing that goes on there should surprise us.'

That monkey walked, ran, leapt, and bounded over the hills, feeding on grasses and shrubs, drinking from streams and springs, gathering the mountain flowers, looking for fruits. Wolf, panther, and tiger were his companions, the deer

and civet were his friends, gibbons and baboons his kindred. At night he lodged under cliffs of rock, by day he wandered among the peaks and caves. One very hot morning, after playing in the shade of some pine-trees, he and the other monkeys went to bathe in a mountain stream. See how those waters bounce and tumble like rolling melons!

There is an old saying, 'Birds have their bird language, beasts have their beast talk.' The monkeys said, 'We none of us know where this stream comes from. As we have nothing to do this morning, wouldn't it be fun to follow it up to its source?' With a whoop of joy, dragging their sons and carrying their daughters, calling out to younger brother and to elder brother, the whole troupe rushed along the streamside and scrambled up the steep places, till they reached the source of the stream. They found themselves standing before the curtain of a great waterfall.

All the monkeys clapped their hands and cried aloud, 'Lovely water, lovely water! To think that it starts far off in some cavern below the base of the mountain, and flows all the way to the Great Sea! If any of us were bold enough to pierce that curtain, get to where the water comes from and return unharmed, we would make him our king!' Three times the call went out, when suddenly one of them leapt from among the throng and answered the challenge in a loud voice. It was the Stone Monkey.

'I will go,' he cried, 'I will go!'

Look at him! He screws up his eyes and crouches; then at one bound he jumps straight through the waterfall. When he opened his eyes and looked about him, he found that where he had landed there was no water. A great bridge stretched in front of him, shining and glinting. When he looked closely at it, he saw that it was made all of burnished iron. The water under it flowed through a hole in the rock, filling in all the space under the arch. Monkey climbed up on to the bridge and, spying as he went, saw something that looked just like a house. There were stone seats and stone couches, and tables with stone bowls and cups. He skipped back to the hump of the bridge and saw that on the cliff there was an inscription in large square writing which said, 'This cave of the Water

Curtain in the blessed land of the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit leads to Heaven.' Monkey was beside himself with delight. He rushed back and again crouched, shut his eyes and jumped through the curtain of water.

'A great stroke of luck,' he cried. 'A great stroke of luck!'

'What is it like on the other side?' asked the monkeys, crowding round him.

'Is the water very deep?'

'There is no water,' said the Stone Monkey. 'There is an iron bridge, and at the side of it a heaven-sent place to live in.'

'What made you think it would do to live in?' asked the monkeys.

'The water,' said the Stone Monkey, 'flows out of a hole in the rock, filling in the space under the bridge. At the side of the bridge are flowers and trees, and there is a chamber of stone. Inside are stone tables, stone cups, stone dishes, stone couches, stone seats. We could really be very comfortable there. There is plenty of room for hundreds and thousands of us, young and old. Let us all go and live there; we shall be splendidly sheltered in every weather.'

'You go first and show us how!' cried the monkeys, in great delight.

Once more he closed his eyes and was through at one bound.

'Come along, all of you!' he cried.

The bolder of them jumped at once; the more timid stretched out their heads and then drew them back, scratched their ears, rubbed their cheeks, and then with a great shout the whole mob leapt forward. Soon they were all seizing dishes and snatching cups, scrambling to the hearth or fighting for the beds, dragging things along or shifting them about, behaving indeed as monkeys with their mischievous nature might be expected to do, never quiet for an instant, till at last they were thoroughly worn out.

The Stone Monkey took his seat at the head of them and said, 'Gentlemen! "With one whose word cannot be trusted there is nothing to be done!"* You promised that any of us who managed to get through the waterfall and back again,

* *Analects* of Confucius, II, 22.

should be your king. I have not only come and gone and come again, but also found you a comfortable place to sleep, put you in the enviable position of being householders. Why do you not bow down to me as your king?'

Thus reminded, the monkeys all pressed together the palms of their hands and prostrated themselves, drawn up in a line according to age and standing, and bowing humbly they cried, 'Great king, a thousand years!' After this the Stone Monkey discarded his old name and became king, with the title 'Handsome Monkey King'. He appointed various monkeys, gibbons and baboons to be his ministers and officers. By day they wandered about the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit; at night they slept in the Cave of the Water Curtain. They lived in perfect sympathy and accord, not mingling with bird or beast, in perfect independence and entire happiness.

The Monkey King had enjoyed this artless existence for several hundred years when one day, at a feast in which all the monkeys took part, the king suddenly felt very sad and burst into tears. His subjects at once ranged themselves in front of him and bowed down, saying, 'Why is your Majesty so sad?'

'At present,' said the king, 'I have no cause for unhappiness. But I have a misgiving about the future, which troubles me sorely.'

'Your Majesty is very hard to please,' said the monkeys, laughing. 'Every day we have happy meetings on fairy mountains, in blessed spots, in ancient caves, on holy islands. We are not subject to the Unicorn or Phoenix, nor to the restraints of any human king. Such freedom is an immeasurable blessing. What can it be that causes you this sad misgiving?'

'It is true,' said the Monkey King, 'that today I am not answerable to the law of any human king, nor need I fear the menace of any beast or bird. But the time will come when I shall grow old and weak. Yama, King of Death, is secretly waiting to destroy me. Is there no way by which, instead of being born again on earth, I might live forever among the people of the sky?'

When the monkeys heard this they covered their faces with their hands and wept, each thinking of his own mortality. But

look! From among the ranks there springs out one monkey commoner, who cries in a loud voice 'If that is what troubles your Majesty, it shows that religion has taken hold upon your heart. There are indeed, among all creatures, three kinds that are not subject to Yama, King of Death.'

'And do you know which they are?' asked the Monkey King.

'Buddhas, Immortals, and Sages,' he said. 'These three are exempt from the Turning of the Wheel, from birth and destruction. They are eternal as Heaven and Earth, as the hills and streams.'

'Where are they to be found?' asked the Monkey King.

'Here on the common earth,' said the monkey, 'in ancient caves among enchanted hills.'

The king was delighted with this news. 'Tomorrow,' he said, 'I shall say good-bye to you, go down the mountain, wander like a cloud to the corners of the sea, far away to the end of the world, till I have found these three kinds of Immortal. From them I will learn how to be young forever and escape the doom of death.' This determination it was that led him to leap clear of the toils of Reincarnation and turned him at last into the Great Monkey Sage, equal of Heaven. The monkeys clapped their hands and cried aloud, 'Splendid! Splendid! Tomorrow we will scour the hills for fruits and berries and hold a great farewell banquet in honour of our king.'

Next day they duly went to gather peaches and rare fruits, mountain herbs, yellow-sperm, tubers, orchids, strange plants and flowers of every sort, and set out the stone tables and benches, laid out fairy meats and drinks. They put the Monkey King at the head of the table, and ranged themselves according to their age and rank. The pledge-cup passed from hand to hand; they made their offerings to him of flowers and fruit. All day long they drank, and next day their king rose early and said, 'Little ones, cut some pine-wood for me and make me a raft; then find a tall bamboo for pole, and put together a few fruits and such like. I am going to start.' He got on to the raft all alone and pushed off with all his might, speeding away and away, straight out to sea, till favoured by a

following wind he arrived at the borders of the Southern World. Fate indeed had favoured him; for days on end, ever since he set foot on the raft, a strong south-east wind blew and carried him at last to the north-western bank, which is indeed the frontier of the Southern World. He tested the water with his pole and found that it was shallow; so he left the raft and climbed ashore. On the beach were people fishing, shooting wild geese, scooping oysters, draining salt. He ran up to them and for fun began to perform queer antics which frightened them so much that they dropped their baskets and nets and ran for their lives. One of them, who stood his ground, Monkey caught hold of, and ripping off his clothes, found out how to wear them himself, and so dressed up went prancing through towns and cities, in market and bazaar, imitating the people's manners and talk. All the while his heart was set only on finding the Immortals and learning from them the secret of eternal youth. But he found the men of the world all engrossed in the quest of profit or fame; there was not one who had any care for the end that was in store for him. So Monkey went looking for the way of Immortality, but found no chance of meeting it. For eight or nine years he went from city to city and town to town till suddenly he came to the Western Ocean. He was sure that beyond this ocean there would certainly be Immortals, and he made for himself a raft like the one he had before. He floated on over the Western Ocean till he came to the Western Continent, where he went ashore, and when he had looked about for some time, he suddenly saw a very high and beautiful mountain, thickly wooded at the base. He had no fear of wolves, tigers, or panthers, and made his way up to the very top. He was looking about him when he suddenly heard a man's voice coming from deep amid the woods. He hurried towards the spot and listened intently. It was someone singing, and these were the words that he caught:

I hatch no plot, I scheme no scheme;
Fame and shame are one to me,
A simple life prolongs my days.
Those I meet upon my way
Are Immortals, one and all,

Who from their quiet seats expound
The Scriptures of the Yellow Court.

When Monkey heard these words he was very pleased. 'There must then be Immortals somewhere hereabouts,' he said. He sprang deep into the forest and looking carefully saw that the singer was a woodman, who was cutting brushwood.

'Reverend Immortal,' said Monkey, coming forward, 'your disciple raises his hands.'

The woodman was so astonished that he dropped his axe. 'You have made a mistake,' he said, turning and answering the salutation, 'I am only a shabby, hungry woodcutter. What makes you address me as an "Immortal"?'

'If you are not an Immortal,' said Monkey, 'why did you talk of yourself as though you were one?'

'What did I say,' asked the woodcutter, 'that sounded as though I were an Immortal?'

'When I came to the edge of the wood,' said Monkey, 'I heard you singing "Those I meet upon my way are Immortals, one and all, who from their quiet seats expound the Scriptures of the Yellow Court." Those scriptures are secret, Taoist texts. What can you be but an Immortal?'

'I won't deceive you,' said the woodcutter. 'That song was indeed taught to me by an Immortal, who lives not very far from my hut. He saw that I have to work hard for my living and have a lot of troubles; so he told me when I was worried by anything to say to myself the words of that song. This, he said, would comfort me and get me out of my difficulties. Just now I was upset about something and so I was singing that song. I had no idea that you were listening.'

'If the Immortal lives close by,' said Monkey, 'how is it that you have not become his disciple? Wouldn't it have been as well to learn from him how never to grow old?'

'I have a hard life of it,' said the woodcutter. 'When I was eight or nine I lost my father. I had no brothers and sisters, and it fell upon me alone to support my widowed mother. There was nothing for it but to work hard early and late. Now my mother is old and I dare not leave her. The garden is neglected, we have not enough either to eat or wear. The most

I can do is to cut two bundles of firewood, carry them to market and with the penny or two that I get buy a few handfuls of rice which I cook myself and serve to my aged mother. I have no time to go and learn magic.'

'From what you tell me,' said Monkey, 'I can see that you are a good and devoted son, and your piety will certainly be rewarded. All I ask of you is that you will show me where the Immortal lives; for I should very much like to visit him.'

'It is quite close,' said the woodcutter. 'This mountain is called the Holy Terrace Mountain, and on it is a cave called the Cave of the Slanting Moon and Three Stars. In that cave lives an Immortal called the Patriarch Subodhi. In his time he has had innumerable disciples, and at this moment there are some thirty or forty of them studying with him. You have only to follow that small path southwards for eight or nine leagues,* and you will come to his home.'

'Honoured brother,' said Monkey, drawing the woodcutter towards him, 'come with me, and if I profit by the visit I will not forget that you guided me.'

'It takes a lot to make some people understand,' said the woodcutter. 'I've just been telling you why I can't go. If I went with you, what would become of my work? Who would give my old mother her food? I must go on cutting my wood, and you must find your way alone.'

When Monkey heard this, he saw nothing for it but to say good-bye. He left the wood, found the path, went uphill for some seven or eight leagues and sure enough found a cave-dwelling. But the door was locked. All was quiet, and there was no sign of anyone being about. Suddenly he turned his head and saw on top of the cliff a stone slab about thirty feet high and eight feet wide. On it was an inscription in large letters saying, 'Cave of the Slanting Moon and Three Stars on the Mountain of the Holy Terrace'. 'People here,' said Monkey, 'are certainly very truthful. There really is such a mountain, and such a cave!' He looked about for a while, but did not venture to knock at the door. Instead he jumped up into a pine-tree and began eating the pine-seed and playing among the branches. After a time he heard someone call; the door

* A league was 360 steps.