

Rise 219

Chapter 219: Passing Down the Name

The sunlight after the snow flowed like water, elegant and restrained.

Under the banyan tree at the center of Xiahe Village, while pouring tea and preparing ink, Zhu Ping'an and the others picked up their brushes, spread out the xuan paper, dipped their brushes in ink, and began writing, their strokes flowing like dragons and serpents.

When it comes to couplets that encourage learning, none surpass Pu Songling's famous pair. On his previous journey to take the child scholar exam, Zhu Ping'an had used this couplet to comfort a scholar who had failed. This couplet was so classic that it became an eternal phrase, inspiring countless people to strive forward. He believed that engraving this couplet on the monument would surely motivate future generations and contribute not only to Xiahe Village but also to the entire Ming dynasty.

"For those with ambition, success is inevitable; breaking the cauldrons and sinking the boats, the hundred and twenty Qin passes ultimately belonged to Chu.

For those who persevere, the heavens will not disappoint; enduring hardships and sleeping on firewood, the three thousand Yue warriors could swallow Wu."

After finishing this couplet, Zhu Ping'an pondered for a moment before writing another:

"If a man does not aspire to greatness, he wastes the eight feet of height he was born with."

This phrase would later have a significant impact on future generations, inspiring countless people. Its meaning was clear and motivational, urging people to strive in their lifetime and not live in mediocrity. Theoretically, this phrase would only be written by Feng Menglong decades later in *Stories to Awaken the World*, but since Zhu Ping'an had written it today, it should serve an even greater purpose.

After completing these two couplets, Zhu Ping'an put away his brush. The village head and elders held their brushes with an indifferent attitude, barely writing a few words. On the other hand, Scholar Zhang wrote as if divinely inspired and had already finished a couplet, putting away his brush without intending to write another. He sipped tea from the village elder's treasured collection, carefully savoring it.

Nearby, Uncle Zhu Shouren appeared quite dignified, with a gentle smile, an elegant posture, sharp eyebrows, and a flowing beard. Naturally, he also wore a green headscarf and had a confident gaze. He had already completed one couplet and was working on a second with great confidence and speed. About three minutes later, his second couplet was finished.

"Shameful, shameful..." Uncle Zhu Shouren said modestly after putting down his brush.

Seeing that all the couplets had been written, the village elders and the village head also put away their brushes, casually setting aside their barely written sheets while jokingly lamenting that one only regrets not studying more when knowledge is needed. They never intended to write much in the first place and were content playing supporting roles.

Now, only the couplets written by Zhu Ping'an (two), Scholar Zhang (one), and Uncle Zhu Shouren (two) remained on display.

Scholar Zhang's couplet read:

"With ambition higher than the sky, I will not rest until my aspirations are fulfilled;

Determined to succeed, anyone can become as great as Yao and Shun."

In terms of quality, Scholar Zhang's couplet was excellent, but compared to Zhu Ping'an's two couplets—especially the first one—it seemed slightly inferior.

Uncle Zhu Shouren's two couplets were also placed on the table alongside the others:

"Study diligently under the stars and moon;

Set sail and achieve academic success."

"The light ink plum blossoms bloom proudly in the cold; this year's auspicious snow foretells a bountiful harvest.

The aspiring students reach for the skies; next autumn will bring good news."

Well... how to put it? Uncle's couplets were smooth and readable, but that was about it. They also felt somewhat cliché and didn't leave much of an impression. However, Uncle Zhu Shouren was quite proud of them and felt a sense of accomplishment.

After placing his couplets on the table, he first glanced at Scholar Zhang's work and acknowledged that it was indeed better than his own. Originally full of confidence, his enthusiasm dampened slightly, though he still held his work in high regard, having carefully crafted it over several days.

Then, stroking his beard, he looked at Zhu Ping'an's couplets. But upon seeing the first one—"For those with ambition, success is inevitable; breaking the cauldrons and sinking the boats, the hundred and twenty Qin passes ultimately belonged to Chu. For those who persevere, the heavens will not disappoint; enduring hardships and sleeping on firewood, the three thousand Yue warriors could swallow Wu."—his breathing became erratic. His hand trembled, pulling out a tuft of his own beard, and his face turned as red as a boiled prawn.

After reading both of Zhu Ping'an's couplets, Uncle Zhu Shouren looked at his own work and suddenly wished he could turn back time and not have written anything at all.

The contrast was just too stark.

Scholar Zhang, after reading Zhu Ping'an's couplets, was full of admiration and praised them repeatedly:

"Though young, Brother Zhu's literary foundation is profound. His use of historical references is flexible and innovative, and the upper and lower lines of his couplets complement each other naturally, flowing smoothly like running water. The first couplet references Xiang Yu's determination in burning his boats to defeat the Qin army, encouraging later generations to have the same unwavering resolve. The second couplet refers to King Goujian of Yue enduring hardships to eventually defeat Wu, inspiring perseverance and self-improvement. With determination and perseverance, how can one not succeed? The entire couplet is magnificent and inspiring, truly remarkable."

"Brother Zhu's second couplet is brief but powerful—'If a man does not aspire to greatness, he wastes the eight feet of height he was born with.' Life is long, but if one lacks ambition and does not strive, how can they ever experience the glory of success? One must work hard in their lifetime and not live in mediocrity."

"Exquisite! Reading these lines fills me with enthusiasm!"

Scholar Zhang was full of admiration for Zhu Ping'an's work, but when he turned to Uncle Zhu Shouren's couplets, he refrained from commenting.

This silence only made Uncle Zhu Shouren, who was already feeling ashamed, even more embarrassed.

"Brother Zhang, you overpraise me. Your couplet—'With ambition higher than the sky, I will not rest until my aspirations are fulfilled; Determined to succeed, anyone can become as great as Yao and Shun'—is just as inspirational and will surely encourage the students of Xiahe Village to strive for excellence." Zhu Ping'an cupped his hands and added, "As for Uncle's couplets... hmm, they are excellent as well."

Excellent as well... Hearing this, Uncle Zhu Shouren's face turned even redder.

Zhu Ping'an and Scholar Zhang exchanged modest compliments until the village head intervened, suggesting that both of their couplets be engraved to inspire future generations. Of course, in the village head's mind, Zhu Ping'an's first couplet was the one that must be inscribed on the monument, while the rest could be placed elsewhere. Uncle Zhu Shouren's couplets, the village head and elders agreed, should be put away for future use when needed.

The village head's words pleased everyone, and the matter of the monument was settled.

"Encouraging students is important not only in spirit but also materially. I have been able to study until now thanks to the support of the village. Since we are promoting education, I will donate the 50 taels of silver that Scholar Zhang gifted me to the village for purchasing grain as 'study provisions,' ensuring that village students can study without worry. Each year, the village will allocate a certain amount of grain to support the students. I am still young and inexperienced, so I entrust this matter to the village head and elders."

Saying this, Zhu Ping'an handed the 50 taels to the village head.

"For the sake of the village, I hope you will take on this responsibility."

The village head initially declined, but Zhu Ping'an insisted, so he accepted.

The villagers were full of praise for Zhu Ping'an, and many even cheered.

"Brother Zhu's generosity and virtue make him a role model for us all!"

Scholar Zhang, already impressed by Zhu Ping'an's literary talent, was now even more admiring of his character.

Of course, not everyone felt the same. For example, Zhu Ping'an's mother, Chen, upon seeing him donate the 50 taels, pinched Zhu Father's arm so hard that it turned blue...

Meanwhile, Zhu Ping'an's name spread far and wide, from Shanghe Village to Kaoshan Town and beyond. Anyone who heard of him couldn't help but give a thumbs-up.