

On learning that his friend was returning from the wa

Autor(en): **Chien, Wang**

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On Learning that His Friend Was Returning from the Wa

by Wang Chien (circa 840 A.D.)

In the old days those who went to fight
Had one year's leave in three.
But the soldiers in this war are never changed:
They must go on fighting until they die on the battlefield.
I thought of you, my weak and awkward friend,
Hopelessly trying to learn to march and drill.
It seemed about as likely that the sky should fall
As that a young man should ever come home again.
Since the news reached me that you were coming back,
I have mounted twice to the high hall of your home.
I found your brother fixing your horse's stall;
I found your mother sewing new clothes for you.
I am half afraid. Perhaps it is not true . . .
But I never tire of watching for you on the road.
Each day I go out to the City Gate
With a flask of wine in hand, lest you should come thirsty.
Oh, that I might shrink the surface of the world,
So that suddenly I could find you standing at my side!

— Translated by Steward, from a French intermediary.

Short Book-Review

Paul Buckland, Chorus of Witches (W.H. Allen, London, 16 sh.)

Well, here is yet another excellent homosexual novel from the Wolfenden Report Country. Congratulations, Mr. Buckland, on a highly sensitively written and equally highly intelligent book! There is no slipshod writing in your description of your chorus of witches, an amusing bunch of female impersonators. Jay Little will turn pale when he sees how differently such a ticklish theme can be handled. But witches apart this new book contains three very interesting characters as the leads. Alan, 37 years' old travel-agency man; Jock, 27 years' old Scottish knife-thrower; and Colin, 20 years' old handsome Narciss. Add to these three the figure of Alan's aunt by marriage, Julia — the kind of aunt one would love to have for oneself — and you have the principals in a story which is as beautifully drawn and sincerely felt as it is full of life and love and of tragedy and comedy. The conversation between Alan and his aunt in the last third of the book alone would make it worth your money to buy it. Thank you, Mr. Buckland once again for the valuable contribution to our theme, and especially for that lovely satisfying happy end with which your story closes.

R.B.