## XXXI. The Stripling

W. Somerset Maugham

He walked along the causeway with an easy confident stride. He was seventeen, tall and slim, with a smooth and yellow skin that had never known a razor. His eyes, but slightly aslant, were large and open and his full red lips were tremulous with a smile. The happy audacity of youth was in his bearing. His little round cap was set jauntily on his head, his black gown was girt about his loins, and his trousers, as a rule gartered at the ankle, were turned up to the knees. He went barefoot but for thin straw sandals, and his feet were small and shapely. He had walked since early morning along the paved causeway that wound its sinuous path up the hills and down into the valleys with their innumerable padi fields, past burial grounds with their serried dead, through busy villages where maybe his eyes rested approvingly for a moment on some pretty girl in her blue smock and her short blue trousers, sitting in an open doorway (but I think his glance claimed admiration rather than gave it), and now he was nearing the end of his journey and the city whither he was bound seeking his fortune. It stood in the  midst of a fertile plain, surrounded by a crenellated wall, and when he saw it he stepped forward with resolution. He threw back his head boldly. He was proud of his strength. All his worldly goods were wrapped up in a parcel of blue cotton which he carried over his shoulder.

Now Dick Whittington, setting out to win fame and fortune, had a cat for his companion, but the Chinese carried with him a round cage with red bars, which he held with a peculiar grace between finger and thumb, and in the cage was a beautiful green parrot.