

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

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CHICAGO

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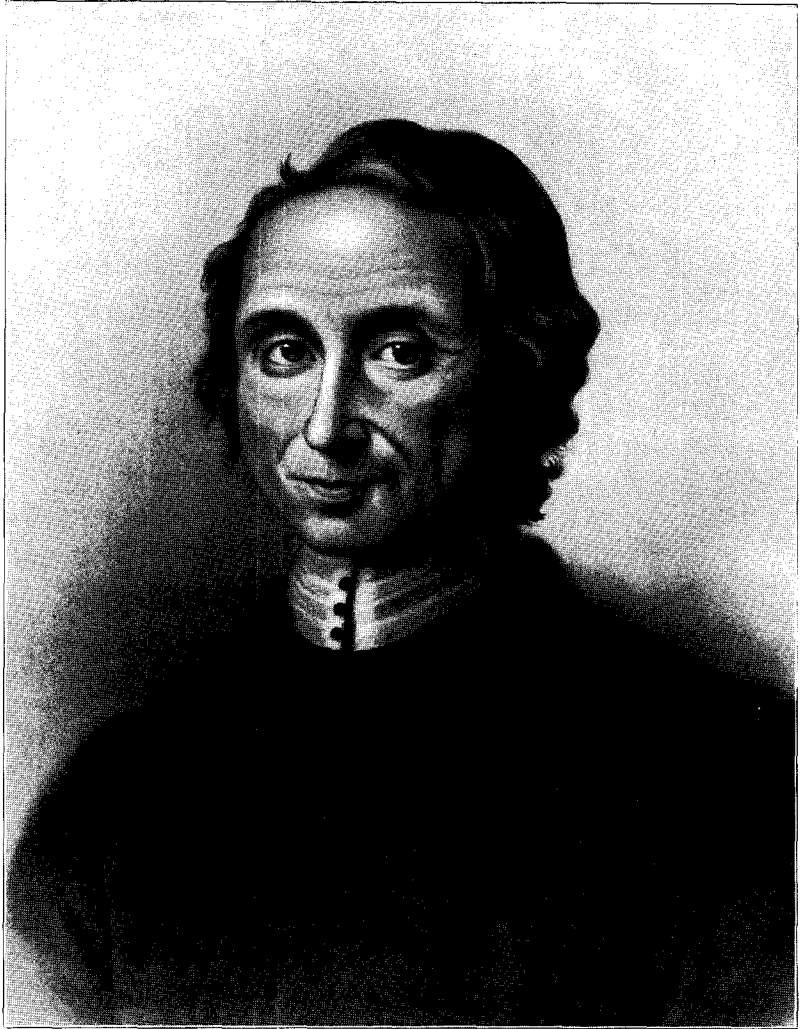
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CHINESE FICTION.

BY GEORGE T. CANDLIN.

ONE of the most salient characteristics of modern life is its tendency to a cosmopolitan comprehensiveness. In the distribution and exchange, whether of the material goods of commerce, or of the richer and rarer treasures of the mind, we seem determined to carry the circulation round the whole habitable globe, and down through every layer of society to its lowest strata. From lucifer matches and cheap oleographs up to the highest products of art, of science, and of literature, there is an ever-increasing approach to universality, so that we do not know in what remote region of the earth we may pick up a translation of Shakespeare's plays, or which newly enlightened band of savages may be disporting themselves with Edison's phonograph. Our readiness to lend hardly surpasses our willingness to borrow, and the cold mountains of Norway furnish our theatres with the dramas of Ibsen, while Buffalo Bill is imported from the Wild West to provide new circus attractions for the British public.

So deeply has the modern mind been imbued with the cosmopolitan spirit, especially in the highest province of mental activity, that while national schools of art and science are formed, their attainments immediately become the common property of all, a glad communism in which there is rivalry but not detraction, patriotism expresses itself as the desire to have our own achievements stand well in the general record, and a knowledge of the distinctive features of each is thought necessary to a liberal education.

The wide field of fiction has been subject at least as much as any other department to this widening influence. While our own best novels have been translated into various languages no effort

has been spared, by translations and critical disquisitions, to make us acquainted with the genius of fiction as it has expressed itself in other races, and the chief masterpieces of imaginative literature are appearing with great rapidity in English dress. From of old we have been readers of the Decameron, Don Quixote, of the Arabian Nights, and of Gil Blas; but the last two decades have seen a new impulse to this desire for universality in the almost wholesale importation of novels from Russian, French, and German sources. It is quite impossible to go over the names of the works, or even of the authors pertaining to other nationalities, with which our literature has been enriched.

It is a step further afield to attempt to explore the novel literature of the Celestial Empire, but considering what a great, ancient, and singular people the Chinese are, and that they constitute more than a fourth of the whole human race, we cannot claim to be truly cosmopolitan while we leave them out. Moreover the "Flowery Kingdom" holds no mean rank amongst nationalities distinguished for literature, and very much has been done by Western savants to bring home to us the great value of its ethical, historical, and poetical writings. Yet so long as it possesses an extensive repertory of fiction, some of which is of a very high order indeed, but which is almost a complete blank, even in the best informed and widely sympathetic Western minds, our knowledge of this interesting people and of their bibliothecal treasures cannot be said to be exhaustive. It surely cannot be worthy of us as students of universal literature, to be quite ignorant of the work which so unique a people as the Chinese have done, and the success they have achieved in this department. Even if, as appears to be the case in certain quarters, we have concluded on some *a priori* ground that they have nothing worth talking about in this class of writing, would it not be well to know somewhat definitely and precisely why it is to be rejected?

If such motives as these are still considered insufficient to stimulate us to an examination of Chinese fiction there remains an appeal to what perhaps has been in the history of our race the strongest of all incentives to exertion and research,—the religious motive. To many it may appear an extravagant indulgence in paradox to associate very closely such different subjects as those of religion and fiction. Yet it is not difficult to show that in many cases their relations are most intimate. To confine ourselves particularly to "things Chinese," we may say that the connexion is very evident. If we would know, indeed, how religious doctrines

have been explained and expounded we need no help from sources extraneous to the religious classics, but if we would understand how religious beliefs have lived in the popular mind, and the supernatural conceptions with which they have through long ages been wound up, popular fiction is the strong mirror into which we must look. This, of course, is especially true if we wish to interpret not only the nucleus of truth which lies at the heart of Chinese religions, but also the massive nimbus of superstition by which it has been accompanied.

Religion and fiction alike owe their strength to the power of imagination, the mystic faculty which has peopled heaven and earth with intelligences other than man, and has followed man himself beyond the confines of our mortal life. So that whether we speak of Confucianism—that most rationalistic of all the world's great religions, so rationalistic as to almost forfeit its claim to be considered a religion at all—or of Buddhism or Taoism, in which imagination has been allowed far less restricted play, not to mention other forms of faith which consist almost entirely of imaginary conceptions, if we extend the meaning of the word "religion" so as to embrace all its attendant superstitions, the field of fictitious literature is the only one from which we can form an adequate conception of the way in which it has affected the national mind.

Goethe, somewhere, speaks of the poets as having brought down the gods to men. But the poet does not write in verse. Whether in verse or prose, let him satisfy the demand of the national imagination and he may create a deity. Kuan Yün Ch'ang is the Mars of China. He is also the hero of the national prose epic, *The History of the Three Kingdoms*. It is hardly assuming too much to say he is the god of the nation because he is the hero of the national story. We may well doubt whether any temple would have been built to his honor or any incense burnt at his shrine had fiction let him alone. If Lo Kuan Chung had not immortalised him he might long ago have been forgotten.

The Feng Shen Yen Yi has at least perpetuated, if it did not originate, the persistent belief in a great hierarchy of supernatural and mostly malignant beings. That peculiar mass of folk-lore known as the fox-myths probably circulated orally or in far less consummately elegant and less compact literary forms before the Liao Tsai was written, but who can say that these myths would not have died long ago if that brilliant star of superstitious literature had not made them unforgettable? The Shih Yu, a book as-

cribed to a Taoist priest, is the Pilgrim's Progress of Buddhism, a rich repertory of religious myths.

These instances sufficiently indicate the close connexion between popular religion and popular fiction. But what it is important for our readers to understand is that the mere study of a religion in its purified form affords no sufficient key to its influence on the national mind either for good or for evil. We cannot understand the concrete value of any religion until we take it as a whole "with all its imperfections on its head." Superstitions themselves thus become an important object of study. How could we understand the religion of the Greeks if we left out Greek mythology—if we knew nothing of Jupiter, of Venus, of Mercury, of Bacchus, the Gorgons, the Fates, or the nobly suffering rebel Prometheus? There is in like manner, closely associated with Chinese religious belief, a whole world of mythical lore. If we are quite ignorant of this we cannot understand the national mind or its mysterious workings. Now such literature as we propose to examine is the one channel open to us for the study of these complex supernatural and superstitious beliefs. If our object is to know simply what is true in Chinese religions we may safely neglect it, but then we cannot understand the Chinaman as he actually is. If we would understand how his religion has moulded his mind, through what obstructions and distortions the purer rays of truth have worked, we shall find in the historical and mythical novels of China the chief material of our study.

But this is not all, nor the chief part, of what is to be said. It is at least as interesting and much more instructive to observe the light which fiction throws upon the deep moral principles and spiritual intuitions which religions share in common, however diversified in external appearance and however varied their concrete value as agencies for the regulation of life, and which in reality give them their hold upon the reason and conscience of mankind. Fiction testifies not less to the common truths than to the diversified errors embodied in religious systems, and even to what we may call truth held in falsehood, as it shows us what are essentially the same spiritual instincts wearing such strange guises, that, though intrinsically identical, they appear strange and even antagonistic to each other, like members of the same family who, being dressed most diversely, have come to regard dress so exclusively as to forget their common ties of blood and feature and to treat each other as strangers and even enemies. No religion is wholly true and no religion wholly false. The falsest has more truth than it is

aware of, and the truest more falsehood than it will acknowledge. Even of the pure Gospel as preached by apostolic lips it had to be said "we have this treasure in earthen vessels." There is place here for the application of Emerson's apothegm, "the highest cannot be spoken of in words." Chinese devotees, whether Buddhist or Taoist, often refer to the beautiful legend of a *wu tsü ching* (a wordless classic), the idea being that of teaching so pure and spiritual that words must inevitably warp its truth and stain its purity. There is a common meeting ground of the creeds, whether Christian or heathen, which the fiery polemics of every camp alike ignore, and because they ignore it their word-contests are too often fruitless and indecisive, depending hardly at all on the intrinsic merits of the cause, almost entirely upon the intellectual strength of the champion, powerless to win over opponents, strong only to confirm each side in its own darling opinions. Why wonder that we do not reach pure truth and harmonise belief? Our discussions are too militant, too full of the fighting instinct which the battle-skirted march of the race through all past ages has imbued us with. Is it a question of civil or criminal justice? We have a fight about it, and plaintiff and defendant *contend* in an arena called a law-court. Is it a question of the wise government of a country? We have a fight about it, and Whig and Tory, Republican and Democrat *contend* in an arena called a parliament. Is it a question of religious teaching? We have a fight about it, and the champions of rival creeds *contend* in an arena of polemical discussion where confusion is greatest and feeling bitterest of all.

But it is always strife, not comprehension, victory, not edification, which is aimed at. All progress made hitherto has been chiefly that the ring is better kept and the rules a little fairer than they used to be. Only men of rare openness, fearless candor, and calm, patient love, see adequately the common ground which it is the interest of the champions to ignore, yet which has given to their creed its credibility and is the secret source of its strength. Even they are rather inwardly conscious of it than capable of giving it adequate expression. They cannot state it in any way that will in the least satisfy either the combatants or their several crowds of admirers. But what thoughtful student has not at some time had sight of the truth that the religions are all aiming dubiously and with but misty glimpses at a mark none of them adequately attain, that the heart of the matter, could they but think so, is one. All lead toward the mystery which none of them solve. All are conscious, however objectionable the manner in which they

express it, of the Divine Power that rules our lives, of hopes beyond the grave, of a life higher than the sordid struggle for wealth or place, all pronounce the sacred word duty and have risen to the exalting conception of righteousness. They differ? Yes! as much as you please; we will not minimise their discrepancies, by virtue of which, says the infidel, they are mutually destructive. His conclusion is wrong simply because in these high things they *agree* and their many differences are a proof of the essential truth of what they agree in. So fierce has been the strife between them they would have differed in everything if they could have done, as indeed in most cases they have *persuaded themselves* they do.

Now nowhere is this truth more clearly illustrated than in those delineations of life and character which presented naturally, which unconsciously let slip, as it were, in their dramatic course, the unauthorised and unformulated religious convictions and impulses of mankind. Fiction shows us, and hardly any more so than that of China, that every creed has nourished men of earnest and true piety, reverencing heaven, loving men, living pure lives and doing noble deeds. At the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Buddhists and Brahmans alike spoke of God in much the same way as the Christian divines who were present. This was probably puzzling to many not only because those systems are only thought of by great numbers as mere idolatries, but because with more reason the most accomplished scholars have reduced the first to Atheism and the second to Pantheism. Perhaps we are right in saying that *theoretically* they are such, yet practice triumphs over theory, and the speakers were not conscious hypocrites. They were instinctively aware that what we reverence as God is in substance what they reverence. Fiction, saturated by the ideas of these schools, exhibits the same peculiarities.

Or to deal with religious conceptions of a more dubious character, Christianity has been peculiarly stamped by the spirit of chivalry, to which, perhaps, is due the elevation of woman of which it claims the merit. In Roman Catholicism this tendency has reached exaggerated expression in the worship of the Virgin. We see how natural this is when we consider that Buddhism has its Kuan Yin and Taoism its T'ien Hou Mang, both female impersonations of divinity, and in the pages of many a novelist we find these goddesses appealed to from precisely the same motives and for much the same objects as Mary would be in English novels depicting life and manners amongst Roman Catholics. We may be sure that while in each case the form which this natural feeling

has taken is erroneous and *super*-stitious, there is some truth behind craving in vain for right expression.

Again, nothing is more noticeable on a comparison of religions than that, while all have their sacred books, a formal doctrine of inspiration is peculiar to the Bible and the Koran. Yet no fact is worthy of more attention than that which fiction abundantly illustrates that in practice all treat their classics precisely as if they were inspired, reverencing them beyond all limits, so that paper and ink and the very errors in typography become sacred, quoting them as of final authority in controversy and regarding them as the summary of all truth. If you ask a Confucianist, "Are the Four Books inspired?" he will first be bewildered by the question, having never thought of them in that light. Your meaning having been more fully explained to him, he will probably say, "No." But in the result he will treat them with the same pious reverence and surrender with which you treat your Bible, if not even with more. For him they are practically inspired. It is a beautiful and true instinct of our humanity which cannot be eradicated by logic to hold in pious love the text-book of our religious teaching whatever it may be and the light literature which is the very opposite of the sacred books was the fullest testimony to the constancy of the sentiment.

Instances might be multiplied, but we have adduced enough to show how much light fictitious literature can throw upon the religious beliefs of those among whom it has sprung up; the weight of its testimony supporting the conclusion that just as our common humanity has shown strange diversity in different ages, with differing climes, under differing physical and social conditions; in laws, in customs, in dress, in external manners and ceremonies; yet is wondrously one at heart; so the strange and often wild and grotesque expression of those verities of the soul which we name religion hinders not that the spring and secret of their power has been alike, that it has been, though with varying dimness or clearness of insight, as the generations have kept their watch through the night of history, a true hope and vision of eternal things.

The tone in which the novel literature of China has been spoken of by Western scholars has for different reasons been almost invariably a tone of disparagement. Men who have taken pains to read but a strictly limited quantity, have not hesitated to pronounce it crude, puerile, and grossly impure. Like Browning's poems, it has been taken in quite homeopathic doses administered

at long intervals, yet has been pronounced nauseous as the drugs of the allopath. Those wonderful beings, a sort of Arhats or Mahatmas in literature, whose sacred function it is to reveal to common mortals the profound esoteric mysteries of Eastern bibliography, we mean the sinologues, intent as they are on the ancient and the heavy, would no doubt feel insulted if asked to take interest in anything so trifling as a mere novel. This whole field they pass by with the sublime unconsciousness of superior beings to whom such paltry matters are "trifles light as air." Rarely indeed has a voice been heard in approval. The one solitary testimony of any warmth which we have been able to find after much hunting is this of Remusat, which we take from the *Middle Kingdom*. In the midst of much respecting the defects and shortcomings of Chinese novels, he compares them (as a body, we suppose) to Richardson, and says: "The authors render their characters interesting and natural by reiterated strokes of the pencil which finally produce a high degree of illusion. The interest in their pages arose precisely in proportion to the stage of my progress; and in approaching to the termination I found myself about to part with some agreeable people, just as I had duly learned to relish their society." We give this with misgiving. It reads to us very like the "faint praise that damns." In fact China yet lacks that Western mind which has enough sympathy with this very large department of her literature to become in any degree its interpreter to the novel-loving Occident. Even Mr. Giles, the translator of the *Liao-Tsia*, the author of *Gems of Chinese Literature*, with his open sense and warm appreciation of all things Celestial, even Mr. Giles (we really beg his pardon if we take his name in vain) that Goliath champion of Chinese literature against the world, that Philistine blasphemer of the Western Israel, clerical and lay, has held in such light esteem this field of fiction, as in a book, professedly illustrating the *belles lettres* of China, to write of the Yuan the Mongol dynasty, which produced its great masterpieces, the *San Kuo Tzu*, the *Shui Hu*, the *Shih Hsiang*, the *P'i Pa Chi*, and the *Hsi Yu*, that "the imaginative power became visibly weaker, to decline later on to a still lower level of rule-and-line mediocrity." Yet we hope to show our readers that the Chinese have an enormous quantity (it is so hopelessly scattered and buried that we can hardly call it a collection) of prose imaginative writing, the great bulk of it by no means despicable, and some portions of it of a very high order of merit, which does not yield in interest or in literary finish, though perhaps it does in imaginative force, to the

best Western fiction; and which furnishes a mirror of Chinese life, household customs, ideals of character and superstitious folklore to be found nowhere else.

The feature to which we will first call attention is the extent of the field to be gone over by an investigator of Chinese fiction.

This is a matter on which it is too possible to be under a great delusion. China is a country in which there is nothing ready to your hand. Her literary productions are in a hopeless state of confusion, and no one knows what treasures of imagination may be buried under mountains of comparative rubbish. You cannot look at the end of a book and see advertisements of hundreds of others of its class. You cannot send for publishers' lists and pick them out at your ease. You cannot take up a history of literature and find them chronologically arranged. China has had great critics, but none who have dealt comprehensively with her literature. The *Taine* of the "Flowery Kingdom" has not yet appeared. An inquiry into the works of fiction she possesses is beset by difficulties which can only be likened to the fabulous search of "Hsuen Tsang" for the Buddhist canons. You must go on faith that they exist, that they are precious, and that they may be had by undaunted seeking: but it is a long way to fetch them, you have the vaguest possible idea where to look, and there are untold difficulties to be surmounted in the quest.

Your first impression is that you are in for a nice, neat, compact little thing, though you have a very ugly feeling of being in most disreputable company. The attitude of the ordinary Confucian teacher toward the fictitious writings of his ancestors is a charming study in masculine prudery. It is really a high-class article in the way of sentiment. It is such a lovely mixture of intellectual superiority, moral reprobation, fastidious delicacy, and hypocritical purity, as nearly withers you up. You are thoroughly ashamed of having supposed it possible that he ever was so weak as to betray the faintest interest in such low, trivial things. He is nearly as much scandalised as though you should make bold to ask him does he love his wife. Nothing can equal it except the avidity with which he will read novels on the sly. If you muster courage to go through this first stage and to be persevering in your inquiries, you will find that this highly proper individual knows more about novels than is consistent with his virtuous professions. He can if he likes give you a very fair outline of the *History of the Three Kingdoms*, and the names of its noted characters, though they amount to some seven hundred. He can detail no small num-

ber of the yarns in the *History of the Contending States*, give you the plot of the *Western Rooms*, incidents from the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, tales from the *Diversions of a Studio*, and the myths of the fabulous *Western Expedition*, and he at least knows the name of the *Tale of the Guitar*. You draw these things from him reluctantly, he evidently believing that it is much to his discredit to know anything about them. But there he comes to a sudden stop. You ask if these comprise the whole or the main works of fiction. "By no means," and he perhaps vaguely remembers the names of five or six others, some of which you must on no account read. You try another teacher, and another, and still another with the same result. But just as you are about to conclude that these are all that are worth notice, and that you have a manageable quantity to deal with, a sentence in the preface of a book or a stray observation sets you on a new track, you find that there are more and yet more books that no one you have met with has ever read, that no literary guide ever mentions, the names of which most people are ignorant of; and by dint of following a hint here and pursuing a clue there, you realise that you are in a trackless wilderness of unknown extent and of unexplored growth. There is no one publishing centre in China that corresponds to London: its Paternoster Row is distributed loosely through the Empire, but a very forest of timber must be tumbling about in lumber-rooms in the shape of wood blocks on which novels are stereotyped. So that we must dismiss from our minds the idea that Chinese fiction is a very limited quantity. There is any amount if you can get at it, but, bless us, it is like rummaging in an old second-hand book shop. The owner turns you in, bidding you pick out what you like, you select this and that from the dusty, piled-up heaps, but finally leave in disgust, unable to cope with the confusion, yet covetously longing to know all that's there. The quantity in existence may be inferred from a single fact. Chinese fiction, like Roman Catholic theology, has an *Index Expurgatorius*. In Wylie's *Notes on Chinese Literature* the list of prohibited novels published by this censorate contains the names of one hundred and thirty-seven different works. If such be the mere parings, the *excrementitia* of their novel literature, what must be the bulk of the whole body? A great deal of it is worthless enough, imitations are numerous, every really clever and popular novel has been plagiarised to satiety, but how much there is that has real merit it is impossible to say. A certain number of these books are known as "works of genius." We have got as far as ten of these in our researches, which we think is



KUAN YÜN CH'ANG, THE MARS OF CHINA. See p. 515.
(From an illustrated edition of *San Kuo Yen Yi*.)

all, but are by no means certain. We give a list of fourteen of the most famous of Chinese novels, the names of which for convenience we have put into English, as follows :

1. History of the Three Kingdoms.
2. Annals of the Water-marshes.
3. The Western Excursion.
4. The Tale of the Western Room.
5. The Tale of the Guitar.
6. The Dream of the Red Chamber.
7. Diversions of a Studio.
8. The Contending States of the Eastern Chou.
9. Seeking a Match.
10. The Pear of Precious Beauty.
11. The Jade Sceptre.
12. Story of P'ing San and Leng Yen.
13. Exorcising the Devils.
14. History of the Apotheosis of Spirits.

These are all novels fairly well known, written with considerable force of imagination and literary skill. We shall not be able to deal at large with them all, but propose, for want of a better judge, to act as literary taster to our readers and try to give them an idea of the principal ones, what they are about, their various excellencies of style, and what are the chief characteristics of Chinese fiction, these being taken as the samples and criteria of judgment?

As an instance of the sentiment of Chinese poetry, we select a poem entitled "The Maiden and the Flowers," which is taken from the novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber*:

THE MAIDEN AND THE FLOWERS.¹

Flowers fading, flying, fly and fill the sky,
 Colors melt and fragrance fails,—who pities when they die?
 Flossy festoons dance around the sweet spring arbor sides,
 To th' embroidered screen soft down-heads fasten clingingly.

From her room a maiden issues pitying much the waning spring,
 Full of sorrow past expression for the beauty taking wing;
 Through the brodered screen she passes with her flower hoe in hand,
 Stepping lightly 'mongst the blossoms, lest she trample anything.

Willow Floss and elm-tree scales unconscious fragrance pour,
 Unregarded peach and plum-bloom hover light the wind before;
 Peach and plum may bloom anew as next year's spring comes round,
 But next year, alas! she knows not who will stand within the door.

¹A translation of a poem from the Chinese novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber*.



CHANG-FEI. THE YOUNGER OF THE THREE COVENANT BROTHERS. A BRAVE BUT RECKLESS WARRIOR AND WASSAILER. See p 530.
(From the *San Kuo Yen Yi*.)

Fragrant nests are all completed ; 'tis the third moon's date.
 'Neath the bridge the twittering swallows now have ceased to mate.
 Though next year new flowers may bloom for plundering birds to peck,
 Maiden gone and bridge deserted, nests may hang disconsolate.

Of the year the days are numbered just three hundred and three score ;
 Full they are of fierce annoyance cutting winds and keen frost hoar.
 Glowing charms and fresh young beauty cannot last for long,
 Swift as morn they ripple past us to be found no more.

Blowing flowers by all are seen, but falling disappear ;
 Sorely grieved the maiden buries what she held most dear ;
 Hoe in hand before the steps she scatters secret drops,
 Drops that mark the naked boughs with trace of many a tear.

Cuckoo notes have silent grown and twilight comes apace,
 Hoe in hand through double doors her steps she must retrace.
 Bright the lamp gleams on the wall where now she turns to sleep,
 Chill her couch and cold the rain-drops beating on her window-case.

Sad she muses : What deep feeling strikes with double smart
 Half of pity half resentment through my aching heart ?
 Pity spring should come so sudden, with resentment for its flight,
 Come so silent without warning and so soundlessly depart.

Yester' eve without the porch I heard a piteous strain,
 'Twas the souls of birds and flowers departing as in pain ;
 Souls of birds and souls of flowers cannot be detained ;
 Birds are hushed and flowers in blushes all too swiftly wane.

Would that from my ribbed sides a pair of wings might spring
 That to heaven's height with the flowers I my flight might wing.
 Yet on heaven's height
 Where to find their gathering ?

No ! 'twere better the fair form embroidered shroud should wrap,
 Gaiety be mounded o'er with fresh earth for a lap ;
 That which cleanly entered life as cleanly depart,
 Not abandoned to the gutter or defiled with foul mishap.

Poor dead flowers ! I buried you to-day within earth's breast,
 Not divining when my body must be laid to rest ;
 I, who buried flowers for pity, men would laugh to scorn :
 Soon the mourner, as the flowers, to the grave must be addressed.

Thus the Spring must waste away, thus the flowers are gone ;
 Nature's hues and human beauty perish one by one ;
 One brief morning's dream of Spring and beauty hastens to old age ;
 Falling flowers and dying mortals pass alike to the unknown.

One interesting fact about Chinese fiction should not be omitted. It came to us almost as a shock of surprise that all this branch of literature is comparatively modern. There are many dif-



HSÜEN-TÊ. THE ELDER OF THE THREE COVENANT BROTHERS, AFTERWARDS RULER OF ONE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS INTO WHICH CHINA WAS DIVIDED, A. D., 221-685. See p. 532. (From the *San Kuo Yen Yi*.)

ficulties connected with dates and authorship, but it seems certain that most if not all the books we have enumerated have been written within the last three dynasties. Of course the events related in the semi-historic novels belong to the distant past, the mighty actors and the stirring scenes of the "Chou" and the "Han" and the pious pilgrimages of the "Tang" dynasties. But we have not been able to trace the authorship of any novel to an earlier age than the times of the Mongols. There seems no doubt that the great masterpiece, the *San Kuo Tzu*, was produced at this time. This was China's golden age of fiction, but the production extended on through the "Ming" and into the present dynasty, to which the *Hung Lou Meng* and the *Liao Tsai* belong. The vast mass of fiction is later than *K'ang Hsi* and is being added to at the present time. This is a refreshing change. In reading Chinese books, ethics, poetry, history, it is so difficult to escape the belief that everything is a millennium old.

Let us commence our review with the work just referred to, the *San Kuo Tzu* or History of the Three Kingdoms, a novel of novels, which if it were the only work of fiction that the Chinese had ever produced, it would be impossible to deny their claim to be an imaginative people. It is of fine proportions, one hundred and twenty long chapters, the reputed author Lo Kuan Chung, a great genius gone down to oblivion with nothing left us but a name and this product of his pen. The story is semi-historical, that is about as historical as the Waverley novels, with which it may be compared, and the events cover nearly a century of time. As Shakespeare borrowed his historical facts from Hollingshead, so this author is indebted to an earlier but very dull work by Ch'en Hsou. Williams, in the *Middle Kingdom*, confuses the two. The work has been embellished with very racy notes from the pen of Mao Sheng San, a brilliant *littérateur*, and to these again are added most extensive introductions to each several chapter by Chin Sheng T'an, as much a prince among literary critics as Chu Shi was a "prince of commentators." These two great writers and scholars have agreed to set the stamp of their approval on the work. Their names take the place of the author's on the title page. Thus in reading text or notes or introductory passages you are amongst the best models of Chinese style. If asked what book in Chinese furnished the best example of the power of the Chinese language we should say the *San Kuo Tzu*. For simplicity, force, and fertility of imagination, it is unsurpassed in any language. The author has done his work with inimitable skill. While his diction is charged

貂蝉



T'IAO CH'AN. A BEAUTIFUL SLAVE-GIRL EMPLOYED BY WANG YÜN TO COMPASS THE DEATH OF LUNG-CHO, WHICH SHE DID BY AN INTRIGUE IN WHICH SHE PLAYED CLEVERLY A DOUBLE PART BETWEEN HIM AND LÜ-PU. See p. 532. (From the *San Kuo Yen Yi*.)

with the richest metaphor it is chosen so simply that in spite of his use of "Wenli" particles the Chinese characterise it as a book in the Mandarin dialect. He has interspersed it with numerous rhymes of no very high order, more stilted and less poetic than the prose, but serving admirably the double purpose of mnemonics to assist the memory and morals to apply the lessons. He is a writer brilliant and perspicuous as Macaulay, simple as John Bunyan.

Let us try to interest our readers in him by offering, with apologies for its clumsiness, a prose translation of the little poem with which he introduces himself :

" The ceaseless stream of time, how its waters roll ever eastward.

The gifted and the brave are engulfed in its curling wave ;

And right and wrong, and success and defeat, are gone with a turn of the head.

While as of old the green hills remain,

In a trice the sun reddens to even.

" We old men, white-headed, at leisure ; we spend our days as fishers and fuel gatherers on our little isle in the stream.

We regard only the Autumn moon and the breezes of Spring.

With a pot of common wine we gleefully meet together,

And the past and the present, with all their concerns, are but food for a pleasant tale."

The story opens with the fall of the Han dynasty. At the accession of the Emperor Ling disorders break out at court, and gloomy omens presage distress. The scene passes to the neighborhood of P'ing Yuen in Shantung, where three mysterious brothers, possessors of magic powers, appear at the head of rebel hordes who gather in strength myriadfold. The monarch is feeble, his empire is ruled by eunuchs, but speeding through the kingdom are requisitions for volunteers to arm and oppose the "Yellow Cap" rebels. The spirit of loyalty is awakened, and now the heroes of the story, the three immortal brothers, appear on the scene. Liu Pei is of royal lineage but poor and unknown. He is twenty-eight years of age as he stands sighing before the placard summoning loyal subjects to battle, and Ch'ang Fei's abrupt greeting falls on his ears : "If a big fellow like you will not help his country, why do you sigh so deeply?" They adjourn to an inn, and while at their wine Kuan Yuin Ch'ang enters wheeling a barrow. He joins their conference and they declare their purpose to risk their all in upholding the house of Han. Liu Pei is a dealer in shoes and plaiter of mats, Kuan Yuin Ch'ang a refugee, Ch'ang Fei a seller of wine and a butcher of pigs. The famous Covenant of the Peach Or-

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LÜ-PU, A BRAVE WARRIOR AND RIDER OF RED-HARE, THE FAMOUS HORSE.
THE MURDERER OF TUNG-CHO, WHOSE FAVORITE HE HAD BEEN.
See p. 532. (From the *San Kuo Yen Yi*.)

chard is conceived in the happiest spirit of romance and forms one of the most striking of the many episodes with which the book abounds.

Let us take a short passage, once more with apologies for the translation ; and here first our readers shall have a picture of a Chinese hero :

" He stood nine feet in height and his beard was two feet long. His face was like a heavy date, and his lips as rouge. With eyes like the red phoenix and brows where silk-worms might nestle : stern and lofty was his countenance, and his bearing awful and menacing."

This is the original of the countless images scattered all over China. You see one every time you enter a Kuan Ti temple, for this man is the Mars of China.

But now for the covenant. The peaches, he is careful to tell us, are in full bloom.

"Next day in the peach orchard they prepared a black ox and a white horse for sacrifice, with all other things needful, and the three men burnt incense, and after repeated obeisances pronounced their oath, which read : ' Liu Pei, Kuan Yu, and Ch'ang Fei, though of different families, yet as we have joined in brotherhood with heart and strength to succor distress and support the weak, to show loyalty to the Kingdom and to secure peace to the common people, care not to have been born at the same time, we would only that we might die together. May Imperial Heaven and our Royal Mother Earth search truly our hearts, and him who proves traitor to the vow or forgets this grace may Heaven and men combine to slay."

The oath ended, they did obeisance to Hsuen Te as elder brother, to Kuan Yu as next in rank, and to Ch'ang Fei as youngest.

Then when they had finished their sacrifice to heaven, they slew another ox, brought on the wine, and gathered the braves of their district, more than three hundred in number, to the peach orchard, where they drank to intoxication.

Next morning they are up betimes and off to the front of battle. With true epic instinct and with a fire and force of spirit, to which all material is plastic, the author proceeds to unroll the panorama of events. Tung Cho's usurpation and the wiles of the maiden Tiao Ch'an, Lu Pu's masculine beauty and invincible skill in battle, Ts'ao Ts'ao, matchless in guile, kingly in statecraft, and his path in warfare untraceable, Sun Chien strong and inexpugnable, the piteous state of the fugitive child-prince : on through treachery and bloodshed and ambushade, the ceaseless shock of spears and ring of bucklers, with the twang of strong bow-strings and the hiss of poison-tipped arrows. Slowly and dubiously the three brothers with their small band rise to power, till the unfathomable Chu Ko



SUN CIEN. A NOBLEMAN WHO BECAME RULER OF THE THIRD KINGDOM.
See p. 532. (From the *San Kuo Yen Yi*.)

Liang is wooed from his retreat to become the Moltke of a rude wild age, and, espousing their side, unites magical resources with military strategy to make their cause victorious. He can call the rain and whistle the wind and shape wonderful automata that serve as battle steeds. He can read the secrets of men's breasts and fathom even Ts'ao Ts'ao's plans. All over the land the turmoil sweeps, the tide of battle rolling now east, now west, and now south, as Chu Ko goes to subdue the Man Tzu. A scene of wild confusion, change, and strife; battle everywhere; in palace and camp, in valley defiles, among mountain fastnesses, on land, on water, among the countless boats of Wu. And through it all the one golden thread of loyalty, the "argument" which gives unity to the story, is never lost sight of, and through it all the mighty three, true as steel in triumph and reverse, hold on their steadfast way. At last the storm sinks through sheer exhaustion and ends, not in complete victory, for Kuan Yuin Ch'ang has been trepanned in battle and put to death by Sun Chien, and Chu Ko Liang's victorious career has been checked by Ssu Ma Yi. But Hsuen Te is king of Shu, and a settled compromise is reached in the formation of the Three Kingdoms.

This writer is great. He loves his characters, they are living and distinct, each has his individuality and separate portraiture, Ts'ao Ts'ao, subtle, treacherous; Kuan Yuin Ch'ang, brave, generous; Ch'ang Fei, rash, coarse, but true; Hsuen Te, thoughtful, kingly; they are men; loving, hating, striving, boastful, magnanimous, often doing generous deeds, always their hearts throbbing with strong human passion. Then how he has contrived to image all the life and all the manners of the age, so that the China of bygone days glows on his pages, so that as his witty commentator says of the *San Kuo Tzu* that it is "*Wu shuo pu yu*"—"Nothing that it has not got." How fond he is of incidents and genealogies, with what loving tenderness or reiterated mention he dwells on this and on that. Hsia Hou Tun swallowing his own eye, Yu Chi's priestcraft, Hua To's magic in surgery, K'ung M'ing's harp, Yun Ch'ang's sword, Lu Pu's spear, and the famous horse Red Hare, that would "go a thousand li in a day and cross water and mount hills as though on even ground."

The *San Kuo Tzu* may be characterised in one comparison. It is the Iliad of China. This was first pointed out by Sir John Davis. Many of the qualities of old Homer are in it, consummate dramatic art (which alone redeems the Greek epic from insufferable dulness), supreme love of battle, extravagant admiration of



CHU-KO-LIANG, THE MOLTRE OF HIS AGE, A FAMOUS GENERAL OF THE HAN DYNASTY. See p. 532. (From the *San Ruo Yen Yi*.)

bravery and feats of arms, wide and universal sympathy which puts him in touch with all his characters, fondness for detail, and copiousness, which leads him to pour into it the most miscellaneous facts, lists, names; skill in blending the supernatural with the ordinary course of events (for the *San Kuo Tzu* has its machinery as much as the Iliad), consuming patriotism that makes everything interesting which affects his country. It scarcely yields to the Iliad in fire and spirit and descriptive power. Like the Iliad, it makes its heroes utter bragging speeches on the battle-field and do single-handed deeds of "derring-do." Like the Iliad, it mingles strategy with force and makes the sage the companion of the hero. Like the Iliad, it is the darling of a nation's heart because it has best imaged forth what they most love and admire. For it is immensely popular in China. Your 'rikisha coolie, if you are lucky in him, can probably tell you more of this book than I can. It is drawn upon copiously for the rude plays which the people passionately love, its incidents are repeated in endless recitals in the tea-shops, its heroes are glorified in the national imagination, one was a king, another is still a god, and the burning passion of a nation's life has poured itself into this tale of a glorious past. Strangely enough, not its author, but its lively annotator, like Homer, was blind. We will part with it with one other specimen, Kuan Kung's first great victory.

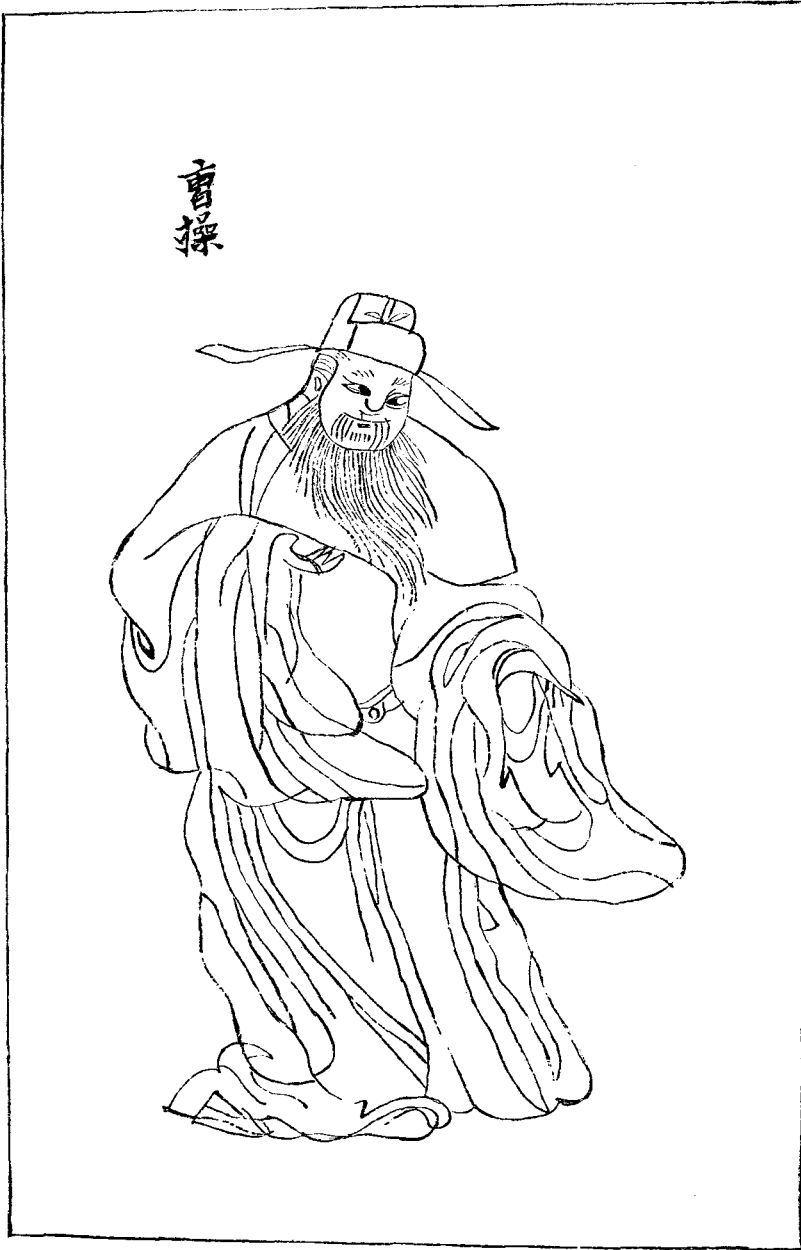
The champion, Hua Shiung, is vaunting in front of the army, and the princes are deliberating in the tent whom they shall send against him. He has just slain two bold heroes opposed to him and their hearts sink with misgiving.

The general, Shao, said "Alas my chief generals, Yen Liang and Wen Chou, have not yet come. If only we had a man here we need not fear Hua Shiung.."

Before he had finished speaking from below the step which led into the tent a loud voice called out, "I will go, will cut off Hua Shiung's head and present it before your tent."

They all looked at him and saw a man who stood nine feet in height, with a beard two feet long. "His face was like a heavy date and his lips as rouge. With eyes like the red phoenix and brows where silkworms might nestle. Stern and lofty was his countenance, and his bearing awful and menacing."

Mark this. Precisely the same description as you have had before. Pope has a long passage in the introduction to his Homer in which he defends his constant practice of repeating his epithets. Here we have just the same trick. It is a remnant of oral epics. If



TS'AO-TS'AO, THE VILLAIN OF THE *San Kuo Yen Yi*. HIS SON BECAME
RULER OF THE SECOND OF THE THREE KINGDOMS. See p. 534.
(From the *San Kuo Yen Yi*.)

the matter is something which takes hold of the imagination the people like to hear it repeated, as children love to hear the story over again. There is just one addition:

"His voice was like a great bell," and as he stood before the tent Shao asked:

"Who is this?"

Kung Sun Tsan said, "This is Liu Shuen Te's brother, Kuan Yu."

Shao asked, "What rank does he hold?"

Tsan replied, "He follows Hsuen Te as a mounted bowman."

Then Yuen Shu cried angrily from the tent, "Do you wish to flout our princes with the want of a general? How is it that a common bowman dares to talk nonsense in this presence?"

But Ts'ao Ts'ao hurriedly stopped him saying: "He must be a brave man to speak so boldly, and methinks you would do well to try him. If he does not succeed it will be time enough to rebuke him."

"But," Yuen Shao objected, "if we send a mere bowman to fight Hua Shiung will laugh at us."

Ts'ao Ts'ao replied, "This man's appearance and bearing are uncommon. How should Hua Shiung know that he is only a bowman?"

"If I do not conquer let me be beheaded myself," said Kuan Yu.

Upon this Ts'ao Ts'ao heated a cup of wine to give him as he mounted his horse. "Pour out the wine," said Kuan Yu, "I go before I drink and be back directly."

He left the tent, took his sword, flew on to his horse, and the princes heard without the gate the thundering sound of drums and the clamorous shouts rising, as though the heaven was moved, as though the earth had fallen in; it was like the shaking of lofty peaks and the downfall of mountains. They all trembled with alarm, but before they could inquire what was the matter, the tinkling bells jingled as the horse came back into the ranks, and Yun Ch'ang appeared with the head of Hua Shiung and threw it on the ground.

And his wine was still warm.

He had done it in the time which it took the cup of wine, poured out before he started, to be cool enough to drink.

This is genius, the sparing touch of a master's hand. Do not misunderstand the comparison we made to the Iliad. We cannot

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HUA-T'ò. THE FAMOUS SURGEON. See p. 534. (From the *San Kuo Yen Yi*.)

pretend to the knowledge of the subject and the critical capacity which would enable us to compare Lo Kuan Chung's book with Homer's and adjudge their respective merits, nor could our readers so divest themselves of preconceived ideas as to take the Iliad in one hand and this in the other and give an unbiased judgment. Here is none of the fineness and delicacy of the old Greek spirit, and it is in prose, not verse. Yet it must be remembered that this prose, like all the best writings of the Chinese, notably the "four books," is most rhythmic, and maugre its prose style it is virtually an epic. Where it should stand in the list we will not venture to say, but it is the work of a most gifted artist, and whether we recognise the fact or not, it deserves as much to be ranked with the world's great books (perhaps in the humblest place) as the Iliad, the Æneid, the Jerusalem, the Orlando Furioso, the Niebelungen Lied, or the Paradise Lost.

This novel is typical of a whole class, the historical novel. The two others we have on our list of this kind are the *Annals of the Water Marshes* and the *Contending States of the Eastern Chou*. Of these we shall have no room for extended illustrations.

Take the latter one first. The Chinese regard it as something like authentic history. It is not a book for conscientious reading. The parts of it which alone can pretend to be serious history constitute such a crowd of names of persons, names of places, and dates, which with an elaborate show of order are jumbled into a hopeless state of confusion, that if your intellect withstands the strain, you are assured against a lunatic asylum for the rest of your days. But having in mind the delicacy of the cerebral organisation in man, we would not advise our readers to risk it. You are familiar with the confusion which arises in the unstudious mind from reading the book of Chronicles, and finding the events and dates of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel recorded contemporaneously. The writer hops to and fro from Israel to Judah with an alacrity which you cannot imitate, and you find yourself every now and then in Israel when you ought to be in Judah, hobnobbing with Jehosophat when you ought to be walking with Ahab in Naboth's vineyard. But that is lucidity itself compared with this. This is as though a man should undertake to write the history of the Saxon Heptarchy, carrying the whole seven kingdoms along on his back in one continuous narrative, and keeping the other six in your mind as he speaks of each one. Only, guessing at it, we should think there are thirty or forty of them instead of seven. The sole redeeming merit of the book is its lies. The author him-

self, or else one of his editors, warns you what to expect. In the introduction to the work he tells you that "all other light literature, such as the *Shui Hu*, the *Shih Yu*, and the *Feng Shen Yen Yi*, are a pack of falsehoods, the *San Kuo Tzu* alone having a measure of truth in it, but the *Lieh Kuo* is different, being true in every detail and in every sentence," that as "he is unable to record the whole truth, where should he have the time to add make-ups, and though on this account it is less readable, yet its thoroughly reliable character is its recommendation." *Sancta Simplicitas!* And then we have amongst court chronicles and battle scenes, unilluminated by a spark of fire or life, such an endless series of absurd and superstitious legends as were never launched on the world before or since. They are all detailed in a tone of pious severity, but that does not hinder them from being so extravagant, miraculous, and scandalous, that Herodotus would blush to own them. It is the most magnificent collection of historic yarns which China, as prolific in these as it is in proverbs, can boast. These, and these alone, if you skip judiciously, make the book readable.

In the *Annals of the Water Marshes* we come back to a book much like the *Three Kingdoms* but of a lower strain. It contains less history and more personal narrative. Its style is phenomenal. Coarse, direct, graphic, intense, each word is like a fierce stroke from a graver's tool. If you have any notion that Mandarin Chinese is unexpressive, read this book. Here is the rude strength of the mountain quarryman, who cleaves deep into the heart of the rock; wild, fierce, sincere, Dante himself is not more terse and vivid. In the one quality of power, rugged, relentless, gloomy, like a storm-beat precipice, there is no book in Chinese to equal it, and no book in any language to surpass it. It is all pictures, struck with sharp, rough, but masterful strokes, and all the pictures are silhouettes.

In one respect this book is the very opposite of the *Three Kingdoms*. That rings all through with the clarion-tone of loyalty; this echoes only the harsh and menacing tone of rebellion. It represents the sinister side of the shield, discontented China. Its plot is laid in the time of Hui Tsung, one of the Sung emperors, and it is occupied in detailing the exploits of one hundred and eight famous outlaws whose stronghold was Liang San amongst the "Water Marshes." The stern, implacable demand of the undaunted rebel spirit for a justice which the law is too feeble and too corrupt to give, is enforced with terrible emphasis, and, as in Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, or Schiller's *Robbers*, we get a deep insight into

cruelties and oppressions done in an age when right is defenceless and authority takes the side of the wrong-doer. This book illustrates one somewhat repulsive side of Chinese humor. The fact is not generally known in the Western World, but nearly every one who has been long resident in China is aware that he is known among the natives around him by a name which he neither derived from his parents nor received at the baptismal font, one quite unclassical and generally not flattering. You can usually get to know other people's but not your own. Nobody can nickname like the Chinese. Their genius in this direction is preternatural. In this novel we have a fine display of it. "The Little Whirlwind," "Jade Unicorn," "The Leopard-Headed," "The Devil's Neighbor," "Hail-Fire," and "The Black Whirlwind," are but a few of them. The book is the work of a powerful mind, though it is hung over with menace and gloom. Unscrupulous, defiant, stern as the fates, but true in covenant and brave in conflict, these men and women are not of the smiling, temperate, human sort; they are terrible; beings of the cave and the mountain den. On account of its subject the book is a forbidden one, but in China that is no hindrance to your getting it if you want to.

[TO BE CONCLUDED.]