

## CHINESE FICTION.

BY GEORGE T. CANDLIN.

[CONCLUDED.]

**B**UT now let us give our readers a change. We are tempted here to let a bit of our secret peep out and tell them at once that Chinese fiction broadly divides itself in our mind into a three-fold classification; the historic, the mythic, and the sentimental. History, under the potent spell of that mighty magician, the imaginative faculty, shades off on the spiritual side into the formless region of myth, where man vainly tries to express the mysterious and inexpressible side of his nature, and on the other side melts into the sentimental, where he finds happy play for its human side.

Now of the mythical novels we have four specimens on our list—*The Exorcising of the Devils*, *Diversions of a Studio*, *The Apotheosis of Spirits*, and *The Western Excursion*. This is a very important branch of Chinese fiction and is the fountain-head to which you must go if you would explore the folk-lore of the East. And it is only by knowing this that you can get at the roots of that inextricably twisted jungle-forest of superstition which chokes and shadows the Chinese mind. *The Exorcising of the Devils* is a kind of *Jack the Giant Killer* allegory. *The Diversions of a Studio* is a collection of short stories, something in the line of the *Arabian Nights*, where magical transformations and scenes of glittering enchantment abound, but all on the hypothesis that foxes constitute an intermediate order of being between the human and the demoniac, and that they assume at will the form of beautiful men and women. Their appearances are always sudden, like that of fairies, and, like fairies, they come with rich gifts, but intercourse with them is baneful. The book is exquisitely written in the most refined classic style, but as there is a translation we will say no more about it. About the third one we will say nothing at

all, because we have not read it. We will take the *Shih Yu*, The Western Excursion, as our type of the mythical novel.

Every one knows of the journey of Shuen Tsang to India to seek the Buddhist Canons. It was a journey full of danger, hardship and marvel. The author of our story is said to have made a similar journey in Mongol times. However that may be, he has used Shuen Tsang's pilgrimage as the foundation on which to build a superstructure containing all the most noted myths of Buddhist and Taoist beliefs. It is at the same time an extended allegory of a very subtle character, running into spiritual meanings of the first and second and even the third degree. Shuen Tsang is supposed to be the brother of one of the T'ang emperors who had become a priest, and who made a pious vow to perform the journey to India and fetch the holy books. But as there are always difficulties in the good man's path, he soon finds that this is no holiday excursion, but quite another guess matter. As soon as he begins to turn his steps westward his way is obstructed by the most unexampled hindrances. There are giants that want to eat him up and sorceresses that would fain betray him. He is put to it most sorely, for all the nether regions seem astir to prevent his progress. But on the other hand the celestial powers are propitious, and by dint of giving him some most marvellous travelling companions, and frequent interferences from the goddess of mercy herself, he is kept scatheless. Even the imperial sovereign of the skies, the great Yu Huang, is deeply interested in these bustling affairs. The first thing he knows he is caught up and swept off on the wings of a whirlwind by a beautiful enchantress who would have him as the companion of her bower, and his protectors have the most unheard of trouble to get him out of her clutches. He finds a betrayed maiden weeping sore in the forest, buried up to her waist in the earth, rescues her by the aid of his travelling companion, and takes her with him to the nearest monastery, full of pity for her distress. But this lovely maiden is a complete fraud, as like Armida in fact as you can expect any one woman to be like another. Sun Shing Che, his right-hand man, is at his prayers at midnight, when she steals on him and assails him with the most seductive arts. But he is a deep, suspicious customer, and has been all along persuaded that there is something wrong with her. He is not to be cajoled, but in the twinkling of an eye he finds her transformed into an Amazon of fearful might, vomiting smoke and fire, and wielding a magic sword of preternatural sharpness. In fact, you soon begin

to see that this is a *Pilgrim's Progress* and a *Faerie Queene* all in one.

This Sun Shing Che is himself a most wonderful being. The author has so far anticipated the Darwinian theory, or rather Bishop Wilberforce's jocular description of it, as to derive his origin from a monkey. He has been immortalised by the gods, and in virtue of necromatic study, is gifted with extraordinary powers of levitation, by means of which, like Puck, he can "put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes." He has another trifling accomplishment in the way of being able to transform himself at will into the form and faculty of any member of the animal or insect kingdom. He has had escapades in the heavenly regions, such as stealing the golden peaches of Paradise, and letting loose the steeds of the immortals. A burly, humorous, infinitely mischievous kind of Puck. He is a champion to one's mind, wielding an iron staff with golden bands, which he got out of the sea-dragon's cave under the ocean, which was several thousand catties in weight originally, but which he judiciously reduced by a few hundred catties, so as to make it handy. When he finds it inconvenient to carry, it can be diminished to the magnitude of a needle, which he sticks in his ear. With a travelling companion like this and two or three others, notably one who fights with a rake, the devout pilgrim has a good prospect of getting through.

Many, however, are the risks they run, and most various the inducements held out to them to abandon the object of their pilgrimage. Here is a specimen of their adventures.

They are treading their way westwards through green hills and shining waters, where they behold an endless luxuriance of vegetation, and where flowers of every hue abound. But the way is long and evening draws on apace, so the chief pilgrim puts the somewhat human inquiry, "Where shall we go to rest for the night?" The reply of Shing Che is in the most approved style of pious devotion, but not comforting to flesh and blood:

"My father, he who has left home and become a priest must dine on the wind and lodge in the water, lie down under the moon and sleep in the frost; everywhere is his home, why then ask where shall we rest?"

This is all very well for our lightsome Puck, but Pa Chieh, who is the burden-bearer and carries the pilgrim's baggage, which is not inconsiderable, regards the division of labor as unequal; and at any rate would like some more matter-of-fact arrangement for the night. At a blow from Sun Shing Che's staff Shuen Tsang's

horse has started forward at a great pace, so that from the brow of a hill Shuen Tsang espies in the distance a grove of cypress trees, beneath the shade of which is a large enclosure, which they decide to make for as a place of rest. On approaching it they find that it is all that heart could desire, in fact a spacious establishment of some magnificence, as near a palace as they can expect to come at in those regions. As there is no sign of inhabitants, Shing Che makes his way inside, and finds that it offers very attractive quarters. While he is looking round on black varnished tables and gilded pillars a large scroll meets his eye on which the motto is certainly inviting: "Gentle willows hung with floss, and on the bridge the level sun at eve. In snowy flakes the scattered bloom has filled the court with spring."

While he is examining this, a lady about middle life, but of very charming appearance and bearing, steps into the court from an inner room with the inquiry, "Who is it that has ventured to intrude upon the household of a widow?" In truth according to Eastern etiquette he is in an embarrassing situation. But the lady is most affable, and as he explains their condition, cordially invites them in to rest for the night. They all enter, and Pa Chieh, who is by no means beyond human infirmities, casts more than one sly glance at the lady, whose attractions are thus described in rhyme:

"The clouds of hair upon her brow aslant like phoenix wings,  
And set with many a precious pearl her pendant earrings.  
No artifice of 'paint' she needs her natural charms to aid,  
Yet gay and winsome is she still as any youngest maid."

The natural way of opening acquaintance is by describing their respective circumstances, and on her part the widow lady tells them that she has been left in possession of riches in abundance, her husband's parents having died as well as her husband, leaving her in charge of three beautiful daughters with three very pretty names—Truth, Love, and Pity. There is nothing like a Chinese novel for a surprise, and our private opinion is that the holy pilgrims were taken at a disadvantage of an unwarrantable kind, when the lovely widow made a plump proposal to them, not simply on her own behalf, but also on the part of her daughters three, and in a very business-like way pointed out the advantages the four pilgrims would derive from a quadruple marriage, which would secure to each of them a charming wife and store of wealth for the rest of their days. In fact, in her view they cannot do better than finish their journey here and be "happy ever afterwards." Inducements are manifold. She has mountain lands for trees and fruit,

and broad fields for grain, and flooded fields for rice, and of each kind more than five thousand acres. She has horses and oxen, pigs and sheep beyond all count, and farmsteads some sixty or seventy, on her vast domain. The grain of a dozen years is rotting in her granaries for want of eating, and mountains of silks and satins are being moth-eaten for want of wear. As for silver and gold, if the four pilgrims should turn prodigals they could not contrive to spend it in a lifetime. Prosperous Job himself was but a portionless beggar compared with her. To say nothing of herself and her lovely daughters, and though she is becomingly modest about her own attractions, they are not only the most surpassingly beautiful but the most completely accomplished of living maidens.

All this Shuen Tsang hears unmoved except by anger, not suspecting her guile but enraged that she should so tempt him from his heavenly purpose. Then ensues a contest between the lady and himself, of which we had hoped to offer our readers a translation, but no ingenuity we can command will avail to twist it into presentable English verse. The respective advantages of a life of worldly ease and of celibate devotion are sung by the two champions, and at the conclusion of the wordy contest the lady, finding her persuasions futile, angrily retires, slamming the door on them and leaving them seated in the hall disconsolate and unprovided for. During this scene the covetous Pa Chieh has taken another view of the situation. He would have been glad to close with the widow's terms, but seeing that may not be, he steals round to the back and secures a private interview, in which he seeks to arrange a marriage on his own account. Certain difficulties arise, mainly on account of his lack of masculine attractions, for as Sun Shing Che wears a monkey's form, so he wears a pig's, and his long face and big ears are objectionable. But the lady is not altogether uncompliant. She is at once so far mollified as to provide for the entertainment of the travellers, and in the meantime, through the prescience of Sun Shing Che, Pa Chieh's clandestine interview is made known to his chief. They thereupon, after sundry passages between them, insist upon his retiring within the household in the character of a son-in-law, the other three remaining merely as guests in the guest-chamber.

But now a new difficulty of a knotty kind starts up. The widow is apparently willing to give him one of her three daughters to wife, but for the life of her cannot decide which is to be the favored one. If she weds him to Truth, Love will feel neglected, and if to Love or to Pity, Truth will naturally feel aggrieved. In

this dilemma, or rather trilemma, a very cunning expedient occurs to her. She proposes to blindfold him with a handkerchief and then turn the three girls in on him and let him have whichever he can catch. Perhaps it was a supreme proof of courage, though not of discretion, for Pa Chieh is quite willing to do wittingly what many a man has had to do in real life unwittingly—play at blind man's buff for a wife. Yet as all three were consummately beautiful and accomplished, his chances could not be said to be so bad.

But alas! this was only another of those "best laid schemes" destined to "gang a glee." The bandage was tied over his eyes, he found himself groping in darkness, the tinkling sound of female trinkets was all around him, the odor of musk was in his nostrils, like fairy forms they fluttered about him, but he could no more grasp one than he could clutch a shadow. "Right and left, to and fro, he groped and fumbled. More female forms than he could count were round him, but in vain he thought to hold one. One way and another he ran till he was too giddy to stand, and could only stumble helplessly about. Eastward it was a pillar he embraced, westward he ran against a wooden partition, forwards against the leaves of the door, backwards into the wall, bumping and banging, head and heels, until with swollen tongue and bruised head, he could only sit down panting."

Thus reduced to a state of mingled exhaustion and imbecility, he was fain to seek a parley, for, as he expressed it, they "were much too slippery for him." Then his mother-in-law by anticipation unloosed his bandage and gently broke to him the intelligence that it was not their slipperiness but their extreme modesty which had prevented a capture, each of them being generously wishful to forego her claims in favor of one of her sisters. In fine, it was the old story, so true also in real life, that a lady is extremely difficult to catch when she is unwilling to be caught. Upon this he becomes very importunate and urges his suit in a most indiscriminate fashion for either one of her daughters, or for the mother herself or for all three or all four. This is beyond all conscience, but as an escape from their perplexity, the widow proposes a new criterion of choice. Each of her daughters wears a certain garment, an inner vest, embroidered in jewels and gold. He is to be allowed to try on one of these, and, in case he can get it on, he is to marry the lady who owns it. He consents, only modestly stipulating that he shall have a try with all three and succeed according to his deserts. There is no difficulty as to size, for, as most people know, all garments whatever in China would be roomy enough for Go-

liath. The good lady brings one in and he finds that one enough, for no sooner has he got it on, just as he is tying the cord round



A CURIOUS GAME AT BLIND MAN'S BUFF.  
(From an illustrated edition of the *Shih Yu*.)

his waist, than it transforms itself to strong bands of rope wound round every limb. He rolls over in excruciating pain, and as he

does so the curtain of enchantment falls and the beauties and the palace disappear.

Next morning his three companions wake up, also to find the scene changed. "As the east shone white they opened their eyes and raised their heads, only to see that the great mansion and lofty hall, the carved beams and ornamental pillars had all disappeared, and they had been sleeping all night on the ground under the cypress grove."

But where was their errant companion, the eager bridegroom of the adventure? After a short search he was found bound fast to a tree and yelling with pain. They cut him down bruised and crestfallen, to pursue the journey sadder but wiser, and subject to many a gibe from his mischievous companions.

Or as a specimen of the marvellous play of imagination which this book affords, take the episode of the burning mountain. The pilgrims find it getting hotter and hotter as they proceed, and on resting for the night at a village by the roadside are told that they can go no further in that direction, as there is an enormous mountain in their path all on fire which reduces the whole region to sterility and which they can neither cross nor get round. Our active lieutenant and man of all work, by the simple expedient of questioning a vendor of pulse at the door, learns that the only way to deal with this obstacle is to obtain the loan of a certain palm-leaf fan, *made of iron*, which will put the fire out. It is in the hands of the iron-fan fairy, who dwells in a palm-leaf cave on a mountain called Ts'ui Yun San, Beautiful Cloud Mountain. It is fifteen hundred li away. "That is of no consequence," says Wu Shing Che, and before you can wink he was there. But he finds it no such simple matter. This fairy, called also Lo Sah, is wife to the ox-demon king, and a female of an uncertain disposition. Besides, while she is a sort of aunt to our doughty adventurer, he suddenly recollects that she has an ancient grudge against him, and it is more than likely that she will not put this indispensable fan at his disposal. However, he goes on the principle that "faint heart never won fair lady," and puts a good face on the matter. The old lady is distinctly pugilistic, and they turn to with sword and staff and have a royal battle there on the mountain. Sun Shing is likely to get the better of her, but she lends him the use of the fan in a sense he did not anticipate. She gives it one wave, and to his amazement he is blown on the breath of a hyperborean hurricane, against which he is helpless, and alights only by holding hard on to a rock by both hands, fifty thousand li away, being





THE QUENCHING OF THE BURNING MOUNTAIN.  
(From an illustrated edition of the *Shih Yu*.)

lucky to stop at that. Here he is helped by a friend, who gives him a pill which he is to swallow, and then he can stand comfortably in the strongest wind that ever blew. Away he hies back, and this time the fan waves in vain. Then the old woman retires inside and slams the door on him. He turns into a bee, flies through a crack of the door, and after a most surprising battle gets the fan and makes off with it like lightning.

So now he will succeed, he thinks, and he will show his companions how it is done. They go as far toward the mountain as they can for the heat and flame. Then "Shing Che raised the fan, and advancing near to the fire waved it with all his might. At the first wave the blazing fire of the hill burst forth with intense heat. At the second wave it increased a hundred-fold. He tried a third, and the flame rose at least ten thousand feet high and singed all the hair off his legs before he could get back to Shuen Tsang. He cried out, 'Back! Back! Fire! Fire!' Shuen Tsang mounted his horse, and they all had to run for their lives."

Here's a pretty kettle of fish. The old aunty has played him a jade's trick. She has cunningly given him the wrong fan. We have no time to follow it in detail. Amongst other things, he learns, for there is deep symbolism here, that this fire-flaming mountain was kindled by himself, goodness knows how long ago. But he is not to be beaten. He personates the old lady's husband, who is playing truant with a younger fair, and goes through a very sentimental scene with her in this character, not, however, passing the bounds of propriety, if you remember the maxim, "All's fair in love and war." By this treacherous device he worms the secret out of her, and finds that the right fan, the genuine article, is a little thing, the size of an apricot leaf, but which can be magnified by touching a point in its stalk into twelve feet long. This he gets and again makes off. However, the ox-demon king is on his track, and as personification is a game at which two can play, he appears in the guise of Sun Shing's companion offering to carry the fan, which, that worthy having magnified, he does not know how to minimize, and on its being handed to him makes away back to the cave with it. Now Sun Shing's blood is up, and after a tremendous fight he gets final possession of it, and is once more before the mountain with his companions. In the meantime the "machinery" is invoked, various celestial beings are on the scene waiting for the "all-important event," and after due ceremonial "he took the fan, swung it one wave with all his might, and that fiery-flaming mountain slowly settled to rest, and the blaze went out.

Shing Che, greatly pleased, fanned one more stroke, and softly sighing winds began to move; at the third wave over the whole



THE STEALING OF THE MAGIC FAN.  
(From an illustrated edition of the *Shih Yu*.)

heavens the clouds gathered dense, and the gentle rain fell thick and pattering."

Scandinavian legends and Thor's journey to Jotunland cannot surpass this.

We have now only the sentimental novels to deal with. Of these there are seven on our list, but their characteristics must be summarised. The best known amongst them, either to foreigners or natives, is the *Dream of the Red Loft*. We are not ourselves enamored of it ; there are some pretty sentimental songs in it, but a weary lot of tiresome repetition of trivial details. Its recommendation to foreigners is that it is full of conversations in first-rate Pekinese ; but if aristocratic life in China is anything like this picture of it—dressy, vain, empty, proud, idle, sentimental, licentious—it is a wretched existence.

*Seeking a Match* is a very surprising story, and affords the most graphic representation of the wiles and tricks of the unscrupulous Celestial to be found anywhere. The *Western Room* and the *Guitar* are the work of great artists. They are called novels, but are dramas of the operatic kind, the dialogue only being prose.

By a sentimental novel we understand one the subject of which is love, but as the marriage laws in China differ from those in England, our notions on this head get a rude shock. In a certain sense the Chinese novelist may be said to enjoy a great advantage over his brother artist of the West. When, for instance, as in one of these stories, a remarkably smart Chinese girl who is sued by an unwelcome lover, has cleverly contrived to juggle the engagement document, which a treacherous uncle has compelled her to write, and to put in the name and age of her cousin, who is plain-looking, to take her place on the wedding day, so that the unwelcome suitor is successfully married to another girl ; you would expect that to be the end of the matter, and that the author had nothing for it but to bring in the right bridegroom, marry the heroine according to her heart's wish, and make them "happy ever afterwards." But the Celestial novelist is in no such straits, because the villain of the piece, though a good deal disgusted at being so tricked, need not in the least change his purpose. Having one wife, in a country where there are no laws against bigamy, does not preclude his having another, and thus his author is at full liberty to conceive a whole series of ingenious schemes and to amuse us with the story of their frustration.

Or again, where a young man is already engaged, and strangely enough a young lady disguised as a youth proposes to him on her own account, and he on his part is honest enough to tell her of his engagement, you would think that enough to discourage the

maiden. By no means. She readily signifies her willingness to accept the position of number two, and though we might think this somewhat lowered her dignity, we see the disparity of ethical standards when the author represents this as a supreme act of nobleness. Chinese heroines, by the way, are fond of assuming the masculine disguise.

We learn from these stories that the supreme height of ambition is to become a Chuang Yuen, that is, the first on the list for the Han Lin, which is the highest degree in the Government examinations. There is only one every two years, so its possessor is covered with unheard-of glory. He has plucked the "red olive spray" and is the man the Emperor himself "delighteth to honor." He is courted, caressed, famous, wealth showers in on him, beauty languishes at his feet, and he can have as many sweethearts as he likes, and marry them all when he pleases.

This class of novels is very extensive, and ranges from beautiful stories, told with unaffected simplicity and grace down to shady compositions which you can only compare with Boccaccio and Smollett. It seems to be the general belief that Chinese novels are peculiarly impure, that in fact they have no innocent novels. Stent, in the preface to his dictionary, tells us that he wanted to translate one, but "found none that he thought readable in English from the subject being utterly absurd, filthy, or childish, in fact untranslatable." To this one is bound to say he had read little or chosen badly or was a poor judge. Of the fourteen novels on our list six are so entirely innocent that they might be translated almost verbatim for a child to read, and not one of them is worse than Fielding's *Tom Jones*, which Macaulay, who will hardly be accused of low taste, declared to be the best novel in the English language. There are bad novels in Chinese, which far be it for us to defend, books to which we might well apply the saying of Carlyle concerning a novel of Diderot's, "if any mortal creature, even a reviewer, be again compelled to glance into that book, let him bathe himself in running water, put on a change of raiment, and be unclean until the even." But, on the other hand, we cannot afford to give way to a squeamish affectation which would compel us to close our Shakespeare.

It is a proof of the high degree of elaboration to which fiction literature in China has been carried, that most of their novels are thickly interspersed with poems of all orders of merit. No stronger evidence could be afforded of the fact that, whatever they lack, it is not literary finish. If anything, they have this in excess. These

poems are introduced in a variety of ways. The hero sends one in a *billet-doux* to the heroine, or he overhears her singing one, or perhaps a poetic contest is struck up, the fine on defeat being generally the compulsory drinking of so many extra flagons of wine. Wine-drinking and poetising almost invariably go together in Chinese novels, though whether they do so in real life we are unable to say. Above all things, every man who sets up to be anything in the way of a hero in Chinese fiction, must be prepared to extemporise by the ream in inimitable poetry.

Some attempt, however brief, to set forth the characteristics of this poetry should be made.

The treatment is very conventional, partly because the Chinese poet has had before him no great variety of models and partly because he is bound by mechanical fetters compared to which the most difficult Western verse is licence itself. It is nothing to see him make the same rhyme in from six to a dozen consecutive lines, and the laws which govern metre are indefinitely more complicated than our own. A favorite method is to rhyme the first, second, and fourth lines, leaving the third without any rhyme at all. This seems to have a peculiar charm for the native ear, though we have never been able to appreciate it.

There is an exasperating tendency to repeat over and over again the same succession of images. Indeed we do not know what the Chinese poet would do without his "spring winds" and "autumn moons" or if forced to speak of ladies' eyes as anything else than "autumn waves," their hair as anything other than "raven-clouds" or of their feet, crippled with bandaging to the bewitching measurement of two inches, as anything but "golden lilies"; and the hairs of his pencil would stand awry with dismay if you robbed him of his chrysanthemums and peonies, his cinnamon, peach, and plum, his willows and poplars. Even these calamities, however, are light compared with the wild despair which would fill his soul and reduce his muse to dumbness if some barbarian sportsman should recklessly shoot that darling phoenix, without which poetry could not be written, or exterminate his dragons, cranes, gibbons, his swallow, cuckoo, and oriole, and that ubiquitous pair of mandarin ducks which used to adorn the surface of English cottage dinner plates.

The only vein of feeling which the Chinese poet seems to have succeeded in giving adequate expression to is melancholy. We have never seen in Chinese poetry a pure gush of fresh and genuine delight. When they try to express pleasure they aim to be

funny, and generally end in a clumsy and coarse burlesque. A Chinaman is coarse in his pleasures, and only sadness refines him.

Yet these poems often contain exquisitely beautiful and gracefully simple language, while there is no speech in the world which can approach Chinese for terseness of expression. It is not easy to put into fourteen English syllables what the Chinese poet expresses readily in seven. The *Dream of the Red Loft* contains about the best of these sentimental poems which we have seen.

一 樵 淚 若 胭 侍 天 樹 桃 凭 閒 風 花 桃 東 簾 桃  
 聲 悴 眼 將 脂 女 機 樹 花 欄 苔 透 解 花 風 外 花  
 杜 花 觀 人 鮮 金 燒 烟 桃 人 院 簾 憐 簾 有 桃 簾  
 宇 遮 花 淚 豔 盆 破 封 葉 向 落 櫳 人 外 意 花 外  
 春 樵 淚 比 何 進 鴛 一 亂 東 門 花 花 開 揭 簾 東  
 歸 悴 易 桃 相 水 鴛 萬 紛 風 空 滿 也 仍 簾 內 風  
 盡 人 乾 花 類 來 錦 株 紛 泣 掩 庭 愁 舊 櫳 人 輒

寂 花 淚 淚 花 香 春 烘 花 茜 斜 庭 隔 簾 花 人 桃  
 寞 飛 乾 自 之 泉 酣 照 綻 裙 日 前 簾 中 欲 與 花  
 簾 人 春 長 顏 飲 欲 樓 新 偷 闌 春 消 人 窺 桃 簾  
 櫳 倦 盡 流 色 醜 醒 壁 紅 傍 干 色 息 比 人 花 內  
 空 易 花 花 人 胭 移 紅 葉 桃 人 倍 風 桃 簾 隔 晨  
 月 黃 樵 自 之 脂 珊 糝 凝 花 自 傷 吹 花 不 妝  
 痕 昏 悴 媚 淚 冷 枕 糊 碧 立 凭 情 透 瘦 捲 遠 懶

Some of the dramatic novels especially are of surprising artistic merit. Our own particular favorite is the *Guitar*, which ought to be put into English. For simplicity, naturalness, and pathos, it is exquisite. How T'sai Po Chieh's father would have him go to the capital to get his degree, while his fond mother would keep him at home, and the wife, just past the honeymoon, is divided between love and duty, but consents for him to go. How he is away long and there is no news, and famine comes, and they have nothing to eat, and the daughter goes sadly on distribution days to re-

ceive the pittance which government is doling out to the famishing. How there is no grain in the granary and the little given to her is stolen from her on her way home. How mother suspects her of eating good food in secret and giving them bad, whereas she has eaten her meals alone because she had nothing but chaff to eat while they were complaining of better food. How father dies, then mother, and she is alone and helpless, but cuts off her hair and sells it on the street to buy a coffin, and scoops the grave with her own hand, carries the earth to cover them in her apron, then, worn out with hunger and exertion, she goes off to sleep. Then the spirit of the mountain region comes to her in her dream, whispers good cheer, and tells her heavenly guards attend her, and she is bidden to take her guitar and beg her way to the capital, where she shall find her husband. All the pathos of desertion is in it; it is a thing woven out of tenderness and sorrow.

Meanwhile the other side of the picture is skilfully contrasted with this. The husband, the Chuang Yuan of his year, fêted, feasted, courted, and a great general, Niu, will have him as husband to his only child. His refusal is set aside by the Emperor himself, and against his will he is married to the matchless beauty; but in the bridal chamber he is haunted by the thought of his absent parents and wife. The motives of the actors are different from those by which we should be swayed and the hero's course of conduct different from that which a noble Englishman would pursue in a similar situation; but we must take the author's reading of the customs and sentiments of his race, and then we shall see that he has combined his scenes and characters with surpassing skill.

We have attempted a rendering of a somewhat extended scene with which we hope our readers will not be too impatient. The portions we have put into blank verse to correspond with the original should rhyme, but the work of translation was too difficult, and we have sacrificed everything in order to give, as literally as might be, the matter, not the form, of the original. We must also ask our readers to remember that this drama is operatic, which must account for the characters addressing the audience, when, as we should think, they ought to be speaking to one another. Let our readers bear in mind the position of the bridegroom in this scene. He is remembering his first wife and duty while in the presence of his second wife and pleasure.



*An inner court. [Enter bridegroom.]*

Bridegroom—

The court with shade of locust trees is thick,  
 And odors of the lotus weight the screens.  
 How shall I pass this never-ending day?  
 By leaning idly on the balustrade,  
 Or spreading out my mat of Shiang make  
 And dreaming of the hills about my home  
 Till graceful bamboos flirting in my face,  
 Or else the wind shall startle me from sleep?  
 Those waving boughs seen on the water's face  
 Show like to golden palaces. The screens  
 Reflect the deep green shade of this lone place.  
 The day is long, with naught to do but sigh.  
 Though pleasant wine invites from fragrant flask,  
 I feel too idly sad to pour and drink,  
 But, ruminating with my bitter thoughts,  
 Remember how the year has passed away  
 And yet no tidings come of those I left.  
 Life is but such a year that hurries man  
 With swift exchange of cold and heat to age.  
 I'll tell my sorrows on my jewelled lute.  
 Ho, there, attendant! bring my lute and music book.

*[Enter attendant.]*

Attendant—

A yellow scroll to while away the time  
 And a harp to play to the passing breeze.  
 Sir, here are your lute and your book.

Bridegroom—

Call my two study pages.

*[Enter two boys.]*

Boys—

From earliest childhood we've been trained  
 To keep the study neat;  
 A pleasant life indeed, say some;  
 We think it not so sweet.  
 For oh! 'tis weary waving fans  
 And burning incense still,  
 And by the flow'ry arbor sides  
 The fierce east wind is chill.  
 And then there's nothing else to do  
 But daily meals to keep;  
 And, after we can no more eat,  
 To go to bed and sleep.

Bridegroom—

The day is pleasant with its cool, fresh air  
 I'm sitting here alone with naught to do.

I'll take my harp and practise at some tune  
 To chase away my melancholy thoughts.  
 You three employ yourselves : one take the fan,  
 And one burn sticks of incense in the court,  
 The third may put the books in order for me,  
 And none of you be idle at your task."

All—

" We understand sir!" [*Bridegroom plays.*]

Bridegroom—

" That I may greet the strings auspiciously  
 I sit and face the perfumed south and play,  
 Yet conscious am I that, beneath my fingers,  
 The music has another meaning from of old.  
 For all the running streams and lofty hills  
 Before my eyes seem blown by evil winds :  
 So they showed gloomy when I left my home.  
 At every pause th' expression turns to grief,  
 The wail of widow'd swan or lone gibbon,  
 Or like the phoenix parted from his mate.  
 Ah me ! why does the sound of death hang on the string ?  
 As 'twere a mantis killing cicadas.  
 In heaven's blue field the sun is clouded o'er,  
 So when King Wang turned to a cuckoo bird  
 Bright marriage omens turned to evil fate.  
 The sweet sounds that I look for fail me now,  
 They're broken strings that cannot be pieced out.

[*To his attendants.*]

The lady is about to come forth ; you must all retire.

Attendants—

" We attend, sir !" [*Aside.*] " Just so, the fortunate have men to wait on them ; the unfortunate must wait on men." [*Exeunt attendants.*]

[*Enter bride.*]

Bride—

" The tenderest green shows in the tanks of flowers  
 Round which the fumigated air is playing,  
 And glimpses of the bridal chamber show,  
 With nursling swallows flying round its roof.  
 The flowered mats are spread and cool silk screens,  
 There's song from golden strings, the goblet's warm,  
 And happily the fierce heat cannot strike  
 Within this cool pavilion with its waters.

DIALOGUE.

Bride—

So you are here, sir, practising on your lute ?

Bridegroom—

Yes, I had nothing to do, and I thought I would amuse myself in this way.

Bride—

I have heard before that you are a most skilful musician. But why come away

where the sounds of silk and bamboo spend themselves on vacancy, unheard by other ears than your own? I count this a lucky day on which I have heard you practising. May I not make bold to ask that you will play me one more tune?

Bridegroom—

You would listen to the lute, lady? What tune would you like me to play you? What say you to the "Pheasant's Morning Flight?"

Bride—

No, do not play that. That is the song of one who was wifeless.

Bridegroom—

Then what do you say to "The Solitary Bird, the Widowed Swan?"

Bride—

What! Just when husband and wife have been newly married, you would sing of loneliness and widowhood?

Bridegroom—

Well, then, for want of anything else, I will play "Prince Chao's Complaint."

Bride—

Now, of all times, when we are at the height of married bliss, you would sing of grief in a palace? Oh, sir, all the beauties of summer are around us. Play me the tune "The Wind Through the Pines."

Bridegroom—

Very well. As it suits you. [*He plays.*]

Bride—

Stop, stop! You are mistaken. How is it that you play "Thoughts of Home?"

Bridegroom—

Hold a moment! I will play it again.

Bride—

Oh dear! You are wrong again. Now you are playing "The Crane's Lament."

Bridegroom—

Indeed I have again played wrongly.

Bride—

Sir, how is it that you contrive to play wrong every time? It must be that you are making fun of me on purpose.

Bridegroom—

How should I have such an intention? It is this lute string that I cannot use.

Bride—

Why cannot you use it?

Bridegroom—

I have only accustomed myself to play with the old string. This is a new one and I am not familiar with it.

Bride—

What has become of the old string?

Bridegroom—

The old string has been cast aside long since.

Bride—

Why did you cast it aside?

Bridegroom—

For no other reason than that I had the new string and had to cast aside the old one.

Bride—

But now, why not reject the new string and use the old one?

Bridegroom—

Lady, do you suppose I do not think of the old one? Only this new string I cannot cast away.

Bride—

Well, then, if you cannot cast away the new string, why think of the old one? Ah yes, I have it. Your heart is elsewhere and therefore all this idle talk.

Bridegroom—

Lady, the old chord is like to break,  
And the new chord I cannot use :  
'Tis hard the old chord again to take,  
And as hard the new chord to lose.  
I'll try once more,  
I'll try once more,  
And once more the notes I confuse.

Bride—

Sir, your heart is changed.

Bridegroom—

My heart has known no change,  
But strangely this cool day,  
As soon as one tune strikes your ear,  
'Tis changed by the wind to a different lay.

It comes out all right after all ; the suffering heroine finds her way to the capital, the stern general relents and acknowledges her claims, special honors are bestowed all round by the Emperor in recognition of their several virtues, and the only drawback is that the husband has two wives instead of one on his hands, which he bears with equanimity.

Here is a rhyme we would like to give our readers from the *Western Room*. The speaker sees in a cloudy but moonlit night the

閒離香風水雲  
愁恨階埽輪斂  
萬千亂殘乍晴  
種端擁紅湧空

reflexion of his own melancholy mood. It is almost impossible to do anything but parody it in English :

The clouds enshroud in gloom the eyes of space,  
The moon in bursts her watery circle shows,

The wind sweeps up the broken blossoms red,  
Which on the steps in fragrant heaps it throws:  
Resentful I, with thousand cares oppressed,  
And my sad heart is thronged with myriad woes.

Here is a Chinese love song, the *Song of the Harp*, which we are told the player did not sing, but the harp seemed to say it, being played so skilfully:

使我淪亡 不得于飛兮  
攜手相將 願言配德兮  
慰我傍徨 何時見許兮  
欲訴衷腸 張琴代語兮  
不在東牆 無奈佳人兮  
四海求凰 鳳飛翱翔兮  
思之如狂 一日不見兮  
見之不忘 有美一人兮

She is a sweet girl,  
See her and love;  
One day without her  
And mad you'll prove.

The phoenix soars far  
Seeking his mate,  
But my sweet fellow  
In vain I wait.

Come, harp, speak for me  
Tell all my heart,  
When will she pledge me,  
Bid fear depart?

I must her worth tell,  
Join hands for aye,  
Be her companion  
Else pine away.

Or take this very melancholy one, expressive of the loneliness after parting and offering a succession of graceful but gloomy images. The translation attempts to reproduce a peculiar duplicated use of epithets which is most common in Chinese poetry:

Drooping, drooping, the green willow, half-screened by the wall from sight;  
Lone, lone, the silent doorway, close-barred on clear autumn night;  
Sharp, sharp, far-sundered tree-tops drop their leaves before the wind;  
Far, far, and sad the moon peeps from the cloud's edge through the blind;  
Grand, grand, the bamboo shadows, writhing, move like dragons, snakes;  
Floats, floats, the empty vision of butterflies which "chuang tzu" makes;  
Clack, clack, the weaver-cricket beats incessant, wearisome;  
Sad, sad, the measured echo of the wash-stone's dismal drum;  
Dire, dire, the pain of parting, sadder than all these sad things;  
Burns, burns, the impatient fever, as my happy dream takes wings;  
Lone, lone, and cold I sigh; tears, tears, fall tenderly,  
For my sweetheart, where is she?

But we must close these wanderings in the field of Chinese romance. We will do so by asking the reader to join us in the conclusion that our friend John Chinaman is a being not lacking in imaginative faculty. One cannot help respecting a nation so rich in literary treasures, cannot help feeling a likeness of nature which it is well for us to feel, and, recognising how strangely similar in

the inmost essence of its life, one great nation is to another. The conventional idea of the Chinaman which prevails in England is that he is altogether a whimsical kind of being, not partaking of the ordinary qualities of human nature, full of absurdities, paradoxes, and endless topsy-turvyisms of thought and action. It is commonly supposed that he does almost everything in the opposite way to ourselves, with the implicit assumption that ours is the right way, and that he is a very funny fellow for doing things otherwise. In this is a double error, as it not only removes the Celestial from the category of rational beings and from the light of reality, but also places him in an entirely false light of spurious romance of our own invention. Those of us who have been long resident in Cathay, on the contrary, soon learn to strip off this meretricious guise of romance and to see the Chinaman in a most prosy, most commonplace, and most uninteresting light altogether. But we are too apt to give him credit for being interested in little else than "cash" and "chow-chow"; in spite of ourselves we cannot conceive him in an ideal aspect or credit him with any delicacy of feeling or fineness of taste.

Yet these people also are richly endowed with that mysterious creative power of imagination which gives to genius its light and to love its glory. Across their hearts also have swept the rush of enthusiasm for brave deeds and the sweetness of kind thoughts, trembling tenderness, discursive fancy, soft breathings of pity, and the rain of tears.

It has lifted them, as it has lifted us, above the dust, has made them fellow-heritors of the gifts of time, and taught them to build out of the rude and sordid conditions of their actual life an ideal world, wide and spacious, and filled with forms of nobleness and beauty.