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TWENTY
CHINESE POEMS



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The Orpheus Series

No. 3

TWENTY
CHINESE POEMS

Paraphrased by
CLIFFORD BAX

With four illustrations in colour by
ARTHUR BOWMAR-PORTER

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To
EDGAR DAVIES

941953

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DEDICATION

· LOVER of all that is noble and fair
Take from the heart as the hand of a friend
These that I fashioned with joy and with care,
All, or the best, I can send.

Nothing they have as I know that may please
More than the breath or the bloom of a flower :
Songs that are painted on silk like these
May but content us an hour.

Dark is the world as it seeks to discern
That which is hid in the Spirit afar ;
Great is the need of a song that should burn
Clear as a torch or a star :

Yet, if I may not the deep and the strong,
This would I give you, the blossom of Spring,
Haply the herald of mightier song,—
All that I purpose to sing.

WITNESSES

That I, the undersigned, have seen and
know the contents of the foregoing
and the same to be true and correct
* as the same appears by the

original and true copy of the same
which is on file in the office of the
Secretary of the Board of Health
at the City of New York

Witness my hand and seal this _____ day
of _____ 19____
at the City of New York

Witness my hand and seal this _____ day
of _____ 19____
at the City of New York

FOREWORD

A FEW years ago, when travelling in the Orient, I sailed from China to Japan, little dreaming how pleasant a surprise was there awaiting me, little hoping that I should leave the land with a relic so unusual.

Almost immediately I chanced upon Tsutomi Inoūyë, a man of remarkable ability; a Buddhist, a poet, and a linguist of such capacity that he spoke not only German, English, Russian, and French, but half a dozen dialects of Chinese. I was fortunate enough to procure him as a guide, and while we were journeying from one place to another he told me stories of the great revolution when the old-world fairy-tale Japan passed finally away. Then, as the days went by and he found in his questioner one who was familiar with the teachings of the Buddha, he told me much that was beautiful concerning the temples that we visited, the

lives of the quiet meditative priests, and the marvels of an ancient magic not yet wholly carried away on the wide flood of materialism. Often he would refer with bitterness to that passion for material power which has won for his country the applause of the West, lamenting the loss of religion among the people of the newer times, and asking me whether Christianity must not likewise have lost a moiety of its power.

Thus in a little while we became good friends, and at length on arriving at Kyōto, the most picturesque of her larger cities and the olden capital of Japan, we would pass enchanted hours among the antique temples with their lily-lakes, their rocky winding gardens, their perfumed silences, and the faint-lit golden figures of the Buddha.

But with the fall of dusk we wandered back from the holy places and would talk of a hundred matters while warming ourselves at the brazier set in the middle of my room. On one such evening I spoke to him of certain Japanese poems translated by Lafcadio Hearn,—little “swallow-flights” of emotion, which two lines of English are large enough to render. Some of these he recognised, and then proceeded to write out rough translations of others that rose up in his memory. So much did their tenderness and flower-like fragrance delight me that I praised them with enthusiasm. “Ah well,” said he, “if you think so highly of these, what will you say, I wonder, when you read the Chinese poems! They are much more beautiful; they are much more philosophic. To-morrow, if you care, I will bring you some specimens and you shall see what they are like.”

So for a number of evenings he would sit opposite me, translating, as well as he could, those of his favourite poems which occurred to him, until

in a week some twenty-five were done. When I suggested that I would shape them into English verse and issue them in a book, he responded with naïveté and animation, "My countrymen think much of the Chinese, but English people do not know anything about them. If you put these poems into your own speech perhaps they will understand why it is that we respect so highly the Chinese people." Not, indeed, with ambition so large and vain did I set myself to work one green July, but yet with a certain hope that those to whom the labours of men were meaningless apart from the search for beauty might share the pleasure that came from this handful of songs to him who shaped them anew and in our language. Now to the poems I add this foreword as a token of thanks to my friend who fittingly enough is in summer a guide but in winter a vendor of lily-bulbs.

May the friendship between us, by which we were enabled to fashion this book, be only a prophecy in miniature of a true understanding between East and West, fruitful to either, and based not merely on armaments and commerce but also upon the surer foundation of the soul's desire for beauty.

January, 1910. Chelsea.

*

SPRING

*

THE WIND AND THE WILLOW

Down the river-side the willows droop their long
luxuriant hair,
Soft and verdant, veiled in clouds of airy-floating
spray.
Now the young man, reining back his horse a
moment, pauses there,
Breaks a branch, and rides along his way.

Holding loose the fluttering branch, carelessly he
rides, and now
Lightly runs the wind of Spring after him with
plaintive song.
It seems as though she could not bear to sever from
her willow-bough,
Having been his lover for so long.

A NIGHT IN SPRING

LOVING and fragrant and full of the Spring is the
breeze ;
Odorous mist in the garden covers the trees.

Round the verandah the flowers and the foliage
cling ;
Softly their shadows are moved by the moon of the
Spring.

Now in the silver holder setting alight
Candles, all in the hush, by the glimmer they
send,
Over the face of the delicate flowers we bend,
Wondering are they asleep in the death of the
night ?

A WALK BY THE RIVER AT NIGHT

LIKE a hundred hovering fire-flies round the windows
far and wide
Paper-lanterns green or golden burn along the river-
side.

Through the dark I hear a plashing ever more and
more remote,—
Creak of oars and wash of water rippling round a
hidden boat.

Now it fades afar but softly on the night that else
were mute
Come the tender plaintive pipings of a silver-throated
flute.

Someone plays it while they drift along below the
starry dome ;
Thus I know the little pleasure-boat is drawing near
to home.

A SONG TO MOURN MY MAIDEN IN THE
LATTER PART OF THE SPRING

Now have I bidden farewell to the Spring that is
ah! how fleet,
And a long farewell to my lover; alas, how long
is the pain!

Truly the flowers in a year will blossom afresh at
my feet,
But never the season return when I and my darling
shall meet.

Who gave me a gift so precious but left me to
love it in vain?
The Master of Magic who sent it, ah surely could
send it again!

If only to darken the darkness, O Thou in Thy
heavens above,
Why dost Thou light for a moment the lamp of a
beautiful thing ?

Who is there now that will carry my little wine-
gourd for love
When I go next year to the meadow to look on
the joy of the Spring ?

*

CHERRY-FLOWERS

ROUND me the cherry-trees are deathly still,
Full-bloomed and snowy-soft, with branches bowed,
And where they flower along the distant hill
Seem as white mist or cloud.

(How sad it is to think that in one hour
All that on earth we know of should attain
Its plenitude of beauty or of power
Only at once to wane !)

A cloud of blossom trembled, broke, and fell,
Stirred only when the soft vibration cast
From out the old hill-temple floated past
At sounding of the mournful evening-bell.

(How brief a while the cherry-petals last !)

SUMMER

*

THE COTTAGE

THE limpid river flows at ease
Along the level pasture-land ;
A wood there is on either hand
Of little twisting trees.

For such a while has water run
Across the roots that everywhere,
Like fallen harp-strings, clean and bare
They glitter back the sun.

And now along the ever-shifting
Leafy shadows of the tide
A little boat is seen to glide,—
But whither is it drifting ?

Only down the riverside
Half a mile away one sees
A cottage all among the trees.

BY THE SEA

ISLANDS out on the ocean ; then,
Far-seen in the heat-haze, islands again !

On those that lie in the great mid-sea
Are inch-high horses and pea-sized men.

On those far out where the lit sea shines
One marks not well in the long low lines
Of cloud and forest (a faint blue mist)
If pines are clouds or if clouds are pines.

The boats of the fishermen, joyous and free,
As wide and as far as the eye can see

Float like a fleet of the curled-up leaves
Dropped on a pool by the boughs of a tree.

Here where the wave and the sand embrace
I dozed in the warm little house for a space,

And only awoke when the soft sea-wind
Cooler than ice went over my face.

THE CHESS-PARTY

THE sudden summer-shower has ceased ;
The arbours in the garden spill
Their golden drops, and all the loud
Cicalas in the trees are still.

Now too the players one by one
Have all departed west or east,
And far away the falling sun
Burns in a fiery wreath of cloud,
Encircling the blue hill.

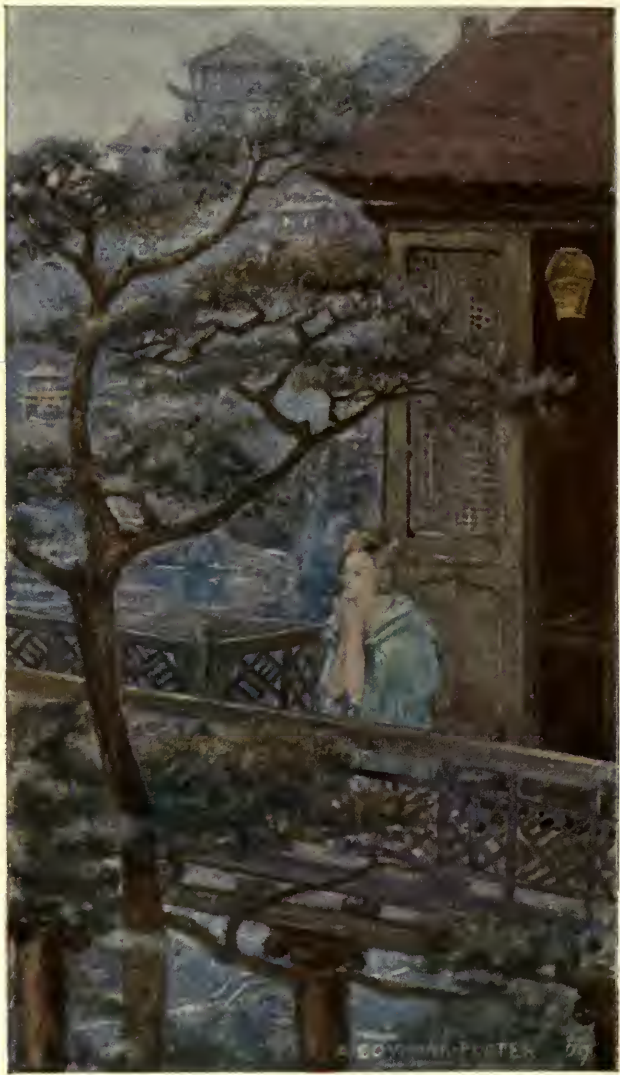
Within the summer-house are seen
The chessmen on their boards alone,
Where, ever lengthening more and more,
The ruddy rays that fall between
The curtains of bamboo have thrown
Tree-shadows on the floor.

THE NIGHTINGALE

THE garden-house lay deep-embowered
In leafy arbours dewy-wet,
And round it everywhere were set
Pomegranates fully-flowered :
Their crimson glory glittered through
The fresh green curtains of bamboo.

No friend had come ; the hush was deep,
And I, when even noon had fled,
Upon the table bowed my head
And softly fell asleep.

Awhile I dozed but not for long ;
My spirit in her dreaming stirred,
And even while I woke I heard,
Twice or thrice a nightingale,—
A nightingale in song !



GIOVANNI PERREN

A SINGING-GIRL

THE beautiful night is hushed ; it is near to the death
of the night.

A singing-girl out in the starlight alone at her
silver screen,
Is looking in vain for the coming of him who should
give her delight :
Her golden hair-pin glitters, her gown is of delicate
green.

She could not bear any longer to lie on her lonely
bed :
Faint is the light of her lamp and the fire of her
brazier dead.

Nothing may comfort her now save only for thought
of her love
To sing in the dark her songs that falter, waver,
and weep,
Borne to the tune of a samisen softly sounded above,
High in the neighbouring house by one too happy
to sleep.

THE FRIENDLY LAMP

THE clouds that bear upon their wings the rain
Turn home toward the darkening mountain-tops ;
And on the maple-leaves I hear again
The first few large and hesitating drops.

Evening is nigh ; the noises change or cease.
There is no time for philosophic thought
So dear to me as when I muse at peace
In cool dark silence undisturbed of aught.

Starlike among the many-branching leaves
Flicker the fire-flies on their golden wings :
The little wind-bell under the cottage-eaves
"Chirin " and "chirin" . . . "chirin-chirin" sings.

No sorrows have I, sitting here apart :
Rather I know that sorrow comes indeed
Of nothing but one's own insatiate heart.

And now, as if desiring me to read,
The little lamp, whereby I love to bend
In happy study when the dark returns,
Like some old, kindly, sympathetic friend
There at the papered window waits and burns.

*

*

AUTUMN

100 *

CONTENT

THE wind of Autumn blows my gown to left or right,
And while the shaken leaves are falling round my
head,
I pace the woodland path now deeply overspread
With sunset-coloured leaves that loosened yester-
night.

(I feel my soul no better than even the very dogs
To walk on all this beauty with old and muddy
clogs!)

The happy-hearted birds who sing at close of day
Are sweet as instruments of many mingling tones;
One might believe that all these curious grey
stones
Were tigers, wolves, or lions that prowl in search of
prey.

The clouds are all aglow ; the wind of evening
chills ;
The belling cry of deer goes echoing miles away,
And oh ! the endless pleasure and oh ! the endless
hills !

But I . . . so glad of heart, so thoughtless did
I roam,
I noted not the sun go sinking down to rest,—
Yet lo ! as now I turn my way toward the West
The moon is like a friend with whom I wander home.

*

THE PAGODA

FROM far away like heavy smoke they seem,
The naked willows down beside the stream.

The sense of evening, solemn, deep, and still,
Falls earliest where the shadows touch the hill.

The birds above go flocking home to nest,
And where the valley dips toward the west
Are thin-blown clouds, a golden sea of light.

Half-hid in mist of ever-nearing night,
Full on the sunglow, many-tiered, one sees
The great pagoda mounting from tall trees.

MOONRISE

WHERE woody hill and river met
I wandered so content of heart,
So happy with the twilight-peace,
I did not know the sun had set,
But everywhere the men depart,
The voices that were talking cease :
And in the after-hush I hear
The murmurings of the water near
Becoming strangely loud and clear.

Although the moon is hidden still
She must be mounting up, I think,
Above the tree-tops where the hill
Droops to the water's brink.



A HOWARD P. RICE - 01

And even while I wait, behold—
In all the softly-shaken trees
The sapphire-dark interstices
Are dimmed with pallid gold,
And now, ah now, in upward flight,
Above the hill, the waves of light,
The tender, rippling, moonlight-waves
Foam on the shores of night!

*

THE AUTUMN MELANCHOLY

Not only mine is Autumn, yet I grieve
With long grey thoughts of such a sombre tone
That I can almost make myself believe
She comes to me alone.

All that one looks upon and all one hears
Now seem to share the sad autumnal eve,
And fraught with all the sorrow man has known,
To fill one's eyes with tears.

The swallow long ago went overseas
And in her place the wild-goose only comes ;
Amid the bare, the many-twisting, trees
The crows are watching how to steal the plums.

Soon from the temple, standing all in shade,
The gloomy bells begin to sob, and soon
Across the window-paper shine or fade
The lights and shadows of the uprising moon.

Among the withered weeds the cricket sings,
And high across the grey unhappy skies
Rush the wild-geese on rain-bedraggled wings
Uttering their dismal cries.

*

THE MOUNTAIN-SHADOW

THE willow-boughs are bare ; as if asleep
The half-lit river runs ; from rock and ridge
The mountain throws a shadow long and deep
Across the broken bridge.

Made fertile by the sharp and heavy showers
The borders of the river seem to keep
An odour as of late autumnal flowers.

Down the full stream the water-fowl have strayed,
Blithe and oblivious of their homeward track,
For though the sunset-fire begins to fade
They have not yet come back.

The sombre river now lies all in shade.

WINTER

*

THE OLD FISHERMAN

THE blast of the north begins to blow,
For the storm awakes:
The reed-flowers, flying above and below,
Whiten the air like fluttering flakes
Of snow.

Beyond a fence of the osier-stalks
The misty half-moon sets,
But the old, old fisherman laughs or talks
While patching the broken nets.

Now is the year at an end ;
The wandering salmon descend
Far down to the shore where the rivers run free
And are lost in the salt of the sea.

A ROUGH SEA

DANGEROUS cliffs to the northward would seem to be
shattered asunder

Yet from the cruel tremendous hand of the wave
they emerge.

Westward and southward are only the great green
hollows of thunder,

Range upon range of the mountainous billowing
mass of the surge.

Hither and thither the gulls awing in the spray and
the sleet

Scatter the tops of the waves with foam-wet hovering
feet.

Only a few poor sampans that hardly the fisher
relies on
Sink in the wash of the wave or are flung to the
sky on the crest.
Somewhere away to the eastward afar on the hidden
horizon
Slumbers the beautiful haven, Formosa the Island
of Rest.

*

A WINTER'S NIGHT

THE road of human life is far more steep
Than any mountain road ;
The poor man frets beneath a long oppression
Yet the rich man supports a heavier load,
For where is any trouble half so deep
As much possession ?

It seemed as I was reading here to-night
The sage's book, now closed and put in place,
That round each word were haloes of soft light
That lit my bended face.

The world is quiet ; only the falling snow
Flutters against the window soft and shy,
And on the paper shadows come and go,
Moon-shadows of a rough and cloudy sky ;

The pine-tree close at hand,
Blown by the wind, begins to sob and moan :—
Who is there now that could not understand
How men by everything they call their own
Add only so much to the weight of care
That rich or poor must bear ?

*

OLD MANY-BATTLED SEA

THE wind is asleep and the whole of the sea lies
dead in the calm of the night :

Not a voice can be heard,—not a sound,—for the
land, as the sea, lies dead :

Between the two great eyes of the boat, at the prow,
there is one red light ;

I muse by the sail and the stars are above my
head.

Fierce-eyed and enormous the spirits of those who
were heroes in battles of old

Come forth in the death of the night, and rejoicing
again to be free,

With brandishing swords, with terrible helmets, with
armour of black and of gold

They stride with inaudible steps on the field of
the sea.



A. BOWMAR-PORTER. 1900

The wavering lights of the will-o'-the-wisp fly hither
and thither ; the sound
Of bells in a temple afar floats fluttering over the
deep ;
What hour is it then ? There is only a silence, a
darkness, above and around ;
It is not yet near to the dawn, and the wind is
asleep.

*

EPILOGUE

(To the Authors of these Poems)

O KINDLY poets to whom no breath,
No sound, may pierce of our life to-day,
What are you dreaming—far and away
In the peaceful garden of death?

For me you dwell as in bygone hours
Among your cherry and almond flowers;
I see you cross in the garden-walk
At fall of dusk in the world of dreams
Your wooden bridges and fairy streams,—
I mark you gather, I hear you talk;
For there I too, unseen and apart,
Have lingered near you and watched you long
Writing with delicate brush your song,
A wonderful two-fold art.

But now the shadow of Time descends,
My dreams are over, and gone the spell :
I leave you alone on the matted floor,
Lay down my cup of the golden tea,
Push back the frame of the sliding-door,
And say to you all wherever you be.
O shadowy good hospitable friends,
O kindly poets, fare-well !

*

NOTE

To certain readers it may be of interest to learn that the poems rendered in this volume were written about three hundred years ago, by poets who lived in or around the strange old city of Canton. A large majority of the Chinese poets is reported to have come from the same district.

NOT TRUE
MOST OF
THEM WERE
FROM THE
NORTHERN
PART OF
CHINA.

I should also like to add that the reader whose first acquaintance with Chinese poetry is due to the present examples, if they should have surprised him pleasantly, would do well to procure *The Lute of Jade* and *The Classics of Confucius*, two little books of Chinese verse published by Mr. Murray in the series called *The Wisdom of the East*. The poems in these books are mostly rendered with rare grace, and the translator brings to his work a scholarship so lit with the evident poetry of his own nature that, instead of over-burdening, it illuminates the text. In these times of shameless advertisement it were well perhaps to say that in recommending these two books I am actuated by no *arrière pensée*, but solely by the pleasure which they have given me.

The illustrator of the present book would like to acknowledge the most valuable assistance which was given to him so readily by the authorities at the British Museum.

ORPHEUS

THIS series of booklets is being issued in connection with ORPHEUS, a Quarterly Magazine of Mystical Art, edited by Clifford Bax, and sold at one shilling per copy (two pence extra by post) or at four shillings and eight pence (post free) for the year. The contributors to ORPHEUS are desirous of bringing back to the arts a more religious or mystical inspiration than is to be found, with a few exceptions, in the painting and literature of the present age. The magazine contains pictures, poems, articles and stories. It may be had from Herbert Sidley, Esq., Strathleven, Oakleigh Park, London, N., or from the address given below.

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III. TWENTY CHINESE POEMS, 2/6.

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