

PS 1918

.T5











Modern Biographies

LAFCADIO HEARN









LAFCADIO HEARN

# LAFCADIO HEARN

By

EDWARD THOMAS

"

BOSTON AND NEW YORK

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

1912

PS 1918  
T 5

BUTLER & TANNER,  
THE SELWOOD PRINTING WORKS,  
FROME, AND LONDON.

1943/20  
12



To  
THE BARD GWILI



## ABBREVIATIONS

- B. I. and II. . . . Vol. I. and II. of Miss Bisland's *Lafcadio Hearn. Life and Letters* (Houghton Mifflin and Constable).
- B. III. . . . Miss Bisland's *Lafcadio Hearn : Japanese Letters* (Houghton Mifflin and Constable).
- N. . . . . Mr. Yone Noguchi's *Lafcadio Hearn in Japan* (Elkin Mathews).
- G.M.G. . . . . Dr. G. M. Gould's *Concerning Lafcadio Hearn* (G. W. Jacobs and Fisher Unwin).
- T. J. . . . . Professor Basil Hall Chamberlain's *Things Japanese* (John Murray).
- L.R. . . . . *Letters from the Raven* (Brentano's and Constable).
- C.G. . . . . *Some Chinese Ghosts* (Little Brown and Kegan Paul).
- C.N. . . . . *One of Cleopatra's Nights* (Brentano's).
- C. . . . . *Chita* (Harpers).
- F.W.I. . . . *Two Years in the French West Indies* (Harpers).
- G. . . . . *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (Houghton Mifflin and Kegan Paul).

## ABBREVIATIONS

- O.* . . . . *Out of the East* (Houghton  
Mifflin and Kegan Paul).  
*K.* . . . . *Kokoro* (Houghton Mifflin and  
Kegan Paul).  
*B.F.* . . . . *Gleanings in Buddha Fields*  
(Houghton Mifflin and Kegan  
Paul).  
*E. and R.* . . . . *Exotics and Retrospectives* (Little  
Brown and Kegan Paul).  
*G.J.* . . . . *In Ghostly Japan* (Little Brown  
and Kegan Paul).  
*S.* . . . . *Shadowings* (Little Brown and  
Kegan Paul).  
*J.M.* . . . . *A Japanese Miscellany* (Little  
Brown and Kegan Paul).  
*Kot.* . . . . *Kotto* (Macmillan Co.).  
*Kw.* . . . . *Kwaidan* (Houghton Mifflin and  
Kegan Paul).  
*J.* . . . . *Japan: an attempt at Interpre-  
tation* (Macmillan Co.).  
*M.W.* . . . . *The Milky Way* (Houghton  
Mifflin and Constable).

*Note.*—I thank the publishers of these books for their permission to make the quotations from them which are indicated in the text.



## I

IN one of his last essays Lafcadio Hearn said that he would like to be buried in the old Buddhist graveyard behind his garden. He liked the place for its beauty and antiquity, and for its great bell. This bell had "a quaintness of tone which wakens feelings, so strangely far away from all the nineteenth century part of me, that the faint blind stirrings of them, make one afraid—deliciously afraid":<sup>1</sup> it caused "a striving and a fluttering in the abyssal part of my ghost—a sensation as of memories struggling to reach the light beyond the obscuration of a million million deaths and births." It is a thought easily to be paralleled in any of his books. More than any other man he appears to have been unable to forget "the dark backward and abyss" of his own immemorial past. "Is not every action indeed the work of the Dead

<sup>1</sup> *Kw.* 212.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

who dwell within us ? ”<sup>2</sup> is a sentence which shows what governed his thinking. He himself knew less of his immediate ancestors than most men, but though he would not have expected any great illumination from a far fuller knowledge he was fond of dwelling upon his childhood and origin. How much he knew of them is uncertain. What he has said and what others have unearthed amounts to little—a suggestive and surprising little, though not enough to satisfy the man who was so impressed by the continual resurrection of the past, that he found the worship of ancestors “an extremely righteous thing.”<sup>3</sup> The Hearn family are said to have been a Dorsetshire family with “a tradition of gipsy blood,”<sup>4</sup> but settled since the end of the seventeenth century in Ireland. The head of the family was then Dean of Cashel. He had eight sons who were soldiers, and of these one was Hearn’s grandfather. His father was Surgeon-Major Charles Bush Hearn, who fell in love with a Greek girl, Rosa Cerigote, while he was in garrison, carried her off and married her. Lafcadio, named from

<sup>2</sup> *G.* 396.

<sup>3</sup> *B.* II. 28.

<sup>4</sup> *B.* I. 5.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

the island of his birth, Lefcada, was the second, but first surviving, child, born on June 27, 1850: his infant speech was Romaic and Italian. Surgeon-Major Hearn took his family to Ireland six years later, and soon afterwards his wife ran away from him or Ireland, never to return. He married again and Lafcadio, being adopted by a great-aunt, never saw father or mother after the age of seven. He remembered that his mother was small, black-haired and black-eyed, and that only once did he feel glad with his father. He favoured his mother, and sometimes thought there was nothing in him, physical or mental, of his father; but Miss Bisland says that the children of his father's second wife were much like Lafcadio,<sup>5</sup> with "dark skins, delicate aquiline profiles, eyes deeply set in arched orbits, and short, supple, well-knit figures."<sup>5</sup> He himself said that he got his impatience, sensitiveness and affection from his mother, and what pride and persistence he had from his father.

The great-aunt who adopted Hearn was a Mrs. Brenan, "widow of a wealthy Irish-

<sup>5</sup> B. I. 11.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

man, by whom she had been converted to Romanism." Hearn himself is the only authority for what we learn of his life with her, in Wales and Ireland, and what he has said is often in a heightened tone which suggests a considerable developing process, conscious or not. He says that he was "brought up in a rich home, surrounded with every luxury." He has recalled, in *Kwaidan*, the witchcraft of a Welsh or gypsy harper playing and singing to him; and in "My Guardian Angel"<sup>6</sup> how when he was "nearly six" a cousin made him "unhappy in a new and irreparable way,"<sup>7</sup> by teaching him about Hell; in "Nightmare-touch" how his fear of darkness was cruelly overridden;<sup>8</sup> and in "Idolatry" how he got to know the Greek mythology, and had an intuition "that the gods had been belied because they were beautiful," and how they made his world glow again and so absorbed him that his elders excised the breasts of the nude female figures and concealed some lines with cross-strokes of the pen, and others with bathing drawers. These autobiographical voluntaries are in

<sup>6</sup> B. I. 16.

<sup>7</sup> B. I. 27.

<sup>8</sup> S. 238.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

keeping with Hearn's belief that he was "Of a meridional race . . . a Greek," who felt rather with the Latin than the Anglo-Saxon. He boasted also of being, as a small boy, very mischievous and fond of kissing beautiful girls, and later of desiring the love of *succubi*.

In "Nightmare Touch" he speaks of being at a "children's boarding school," of which we know nothing more. He says that he "passed some years in Catholic colleges"<sup>9</sup> but was not a Catholic. He may have been at a "Jesuit college in the north of France," and was certainly at Ushaw, a Roman Catholic school at Durham. Here he is remembered to have "announced his disbelief in the Bible," and is described as a boy with a taste for drawing, fond of poetry and books of travel and adventure, "very much in earnest," sensitive, and "a very lovable character, extremely sympathetic and sincere." He speaks himself of having a "religious tutor," and though he told his brother he was not a Catholic he told the unknown of his "Letters to a Lady" that he "was once

<sup>9</sup> B. I. 33.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

a Catholic—at least, my guardians tried to make me so. . . .” Evidently he liked to dwell upon his sufferings and rebellions. In “Gothic Horror”<sup>10</sup> he describes his ghostly fear in an old church; in a letter to Professor Chamberlain<sup>11</sup> his fear of ghosts and his crying loudly at the sound of a tune played “in the midst of a fashionable gathering.” Whether it is due or not to unconscious literary influence, his recollections of childhood remind us of De Quincey’s autobiography, as some of his later recollections recall the “Confessions.”

He is supposed to have left Ushaw after and in consequence of an accident which blinded one eye. He was already “very near-sighted” and when he was only eight, says Dr. Gould, the right eyeball so conspicuous in his portraits was “about as large and protruding as in later life.”<sup>12</sup> It is not known what happened to him during the next three years. He says that his rich relatives refused to pay anything to help him to finish his education, that he had to become a servant, and that he spent two

<sup>10</sup> S. 213.

<sup>11</sup> B. III. 212.

<sup>12</sup> B. I. 37.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

years of sickness in bed. A schoolfellow has said that Hearn suffered extreme poverty in London, and in a fragment called "Stars" he has described himself sleeping in a hayloft for the sake of heat from the breath of horses below. On the other hand he told his friend, Mr. Watkin, that he had "dissipated ten years in Latin and Greek, and stuff."<sup>13</sup>

When he was nineteen it is certain that he was penniless in New York, and in the same year, 1869, working in Cincinnati for a Syrian pedlar, then as a typesetter and proof-reader. He earned the name of "Old Semicolon" by his exceptional care for what seemed to him right in printing. In 1874 he was a general reporter on the *Inquirer* at Cincinnati.<sup>14</sup> He advanced from market reports to descriptions of a murder and of Cincinnati as seen from the top of St. Peter's Cathedral spire, where he was hauled by a steeple-jack. He was hardworking and sat for hours at his table, "his great bulbous eyes resting as close to the paper as his nose would permit." Sometimes there were fourteen or fifteen

<sup>13</sup> L. R. 108.

<sup>14</sup> B. I. 50, 83.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

pages by him in one number of the *Inquirer*. He also worked for the *Commercial*, but is said to have been discharged because he sought a licence for an open marriage with a coloured woman. He haunted dark corners of the city and knew the Negroes. He also made friends with a musical critic, an artist, and a printer. The printer, Mr. Watkin, called him the Raven on account of his black hair and his love of gloom, horror, and Edgar Allan Poe. Little of his writing belonging to this period is known. He edited and for the most part wrote a comic and satiric Sunday paper, called *Ye Giglampz*. Here he was writing on subjects and in a tone so unsuitable that he is said to have done nothing worth reading. He has, however, been praised for the description in the *Commercial* of a murdered and burnt corpse. Such description awakens chiefly surprise that a man who pushed his finger into a boiled human brain to learn its consistency should have troubled the same hand with a pen. It is uncertain whether the adventure was due to natural curiosity or to a literary pursuit of the unusual and of words to suit it. In the small hours "after



## LAFCADIO HEARN

the rough work of the police rounds”<sup>15</sup> he was translating Gautier, and *One of Cleopatra's Nights*, published in 1882, is said to belong to this period.

Apparently the negress was not the only subject of difference between him and Cincinnati, and in 1877 he left it for New Orleans. On the way he spent some time at Memphis, staying in “a great big dreary room,” of a “great dreary house,”<sup>16</sup> which he describes so as to create an impression like that of the house in Greek Street where De Quincey lodged. The dead bells had been ringing for a general's funeral, and he cried “a good deal of nights,” he says, as he did when “a college boy returned from vacation.”

Arriving at New Orleans he was very poor, but he seems for the first time to have been at home in a city which was “the paradise of the South”—he said, “I never beheld anything so beautiful and so sad.” He felt that he could never leave it for the North, so much did he feel its age, its forsaken state-ness, and its quiet. That he would not stay in it for ever was clear from his heart “like a

<sup>15</sup> B. I. 61.

<sup>16</sup> L.R. 36.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

bird, fluttering impatiently for the migrating season." He would like to be a swallow with "a summer nest in the ear of an Egyptian colossus or a broken capital of the Parthenon." He still contributed to the *Commercial*, chiefly letters that were unprofitably picturesque: they are to be found in *Letters from the Raven* over the signature of "Ozias Midwinter." He tried to make money by setting up a five-cent eating house. At one time he thought of going to Japan—"splendid field in Japan." But he found journalistic work on the *Daily Item*, reading proofs, writing editorials and occasionally a translation or original sketch. In 1881 the *Times-Democrat* of New Orleans gave him work and a new opportunity, by printing week after week his translations from Gautier, Maupassant, Pierre Loti. About two hundred of these translations appeared. He contributed also other translations and many studies and stories. His three books, *One of Cleopatra's Nights*, *Stray Leaves from Strange Literature*, and *Some Chinese Ghosts*, were all collected from the *Times-Democrat*. He was getting older, "less despondent but

## LAFCADIO HEARN

less hopeful . . . more systematic and perhaps a good deal more selfish. Not strictly economical, but coming to it steadily, and in leisure hours studying the theories of the East, the poetry of antique India." About 1884 he was to meet the *First Principles* of Herbert Spencer, which gave him "unspeakable comfort" and an "eternal reopening of the Great Doubt," made pessimism "ridiculous" and taught "a new reverence for all kinds of faith."

New Orleans was the first step towards Japan. The second was the West Indies. In 1884 he visited Grande Isle in the Gulf of Mexico, a tropical island which inspired his romance called *Chita*, and made him say that "One lives here. In New Orleans one only exists." The chapters of this book as they appeared in the *Times-Democrat*, helped him to a commission from Messrs. Harper which took him in 1887 to the Windward Islands and to British Guiana. His travel-sketches appeared in *Harper's Magazine*. After an interval of only two months he returned to St. Pierre in Martinique. His love for the tropics was so strong that he wrote from

## LAFCADIO HEARN

Japan in 1890 expressing a hope that in a year or two he could earn enough to "realize his dream of a home in the West Indies."<sup>17</sup> He thought that his real field was in the Latin countries, and his dream was "to haunt the old crumbling Portuguese and Spanish cities, and steam up the Amazon or Orinoco, and get romances nobody else could find."<sup>18</sup> The dream is eloquently expressed in his *Two Years in the French West Indies* and his letters. In 1887 he half believed that he was returning to the tropics for ever. He was weary of the whole Anglo-Saxon system of life and civilization. When he was back in New York in 1889 he wanted to get back "among the monkeys and the parrots, under a violet sky among green peaks and an eternally lilac and luke-warm sea—where clothing is superfluous and reading too much of an exertion—where everybody sleeps 14 hours out of the 24," as in Japan he envied a friend "the rich, divine, moist, life-sapping and life-giving heat of the tropics"; and this, in spite of "the development of morbid nervous sensibility to material

<sup>17</sup> *L. R.* 93.      <sup>18</sup> *B. I.* 105.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

impressions, and absolute loss of thinking power, accompanied by numbing and clouding of memory." He declared that white faces became "ghostly terrible" <sup>19</sup> to him, and he felt the "black man's terror of the white." In New York he was working at his translation of *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard* for purposes of immediate gain. Then he accepted an offer to go to Japan and write articles on his journey for Messrs. Harper. He left on May 8, 1890. He threw over his journalistic work and became a schoolmaster, teaching English thenceforward with a short interval, until the year before his death. In less than nine months after leaving New York he had married a Japanese wife. By her he had two sons, and he enjoyed a home life of great sweetness and tranquillity. Among Japanese he could pass as only "a curious-looking" Japanese from some remote part of the empire; and he soon learned to squat instead of sitting. In 1896 he became a Japanese citizen. Now and then he thought of journeys to far countries, and just before his death he was thinking of going to the United States to

<sup>19</sup> B. III. 271.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

lecture. But except that he was forced by the cold climate to leave a congenial place, Matsue, he suffered only the troubles of every author who is not an exemplary pachyderm : " At home," he said, " everything is sweet " ; and again : " It is a very gentle world. It is only happy when I am happy." He was not a born schoolmaster, nor continuously cheerful at the work, but he won affection, and his difficulties were noble and created by his own high standards. This work did not rob him of spirit to plan or strength to execute, and it gave him not only a sufficient wage, but opportunities. He saw many things which the professional author might have missed, and his students gave him direct help as well as indirect. His home life made him younger by taking away the youthful consciousness of age. When he sang a child's song, says Mrs. Hearn, " he looked as if he never knew the existence of the worries of the world." <sup>20</sup> Though getting grey at forty-three, he was much stronger than at thirty. He had begun by wishing to be reincarnated as a Japanese baby, had passed through a period

<sup>20</sup> N. 57.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

when Japan gave him no thrill and he knew it, and had reached a deep studious and domestic ease. His Japanese books and letters are the sole and sufficient authority for these years from 1890 until his death in 1904. Hitherto he had been experimenting and choosing his material quite consciously and elaborating it quite consciously. Now his material began to be so abundant and insistent that he might seem to be doing nothing but arrange it.

## II

HEARN was forty when he reached Japan. He had been drifting about the world, rather more obviously a pawn of circumstances than other men. Nothing could stop him except sickness or poverty. He had made some friends and acquired some books, but there can have been few less substantial men than he. In his unfriendly way, due to his having heard that while Hearn was writing to him in love and trust he was speaking of him "with bitterness and malevolent injustice," Dr. Gould says that except in "the pursuit of literary excellence, Hearn had no character. His was the most unresisting, most echo-like mind I have ever known. He was a perfect chameleon ; he took for the time the colour of his surroundings."<sup>1</sup> This probably means little more than that Hearn was abashed before Dr. Gould, and was dimly

<sup>1</sup> G. M. G.



## LAFCADIO HEARN

aware of what the doctor thought of him. It was to Dr. Gould that Hearn said: "You have given me a soul": it was of Dr. Gould that Hearn inquired, eagerly humbling himself: "If a man lives like a rat for twenty or twenty-five years he must have acquired something of the disposition peculiar to rodents, mustn't he"? Yet even Dr. Gould, sadly compelled to accuse Hearn of having had "no romance, no love, no happiness, no interesting personal data upon which he could draw to give his imagination play, vividness, actuality, or even the semblance of reality," even Dr. Gould who lamented: "How often is the pathos of life sadly exaggerated by giving way to foolish, needless and degrading inherited instincts at the expense of the higher life and usefulness," even Dr. Gould calls Hearn an "affectionate and sweet-natured man." This is the natural man in Dr. Gould confessing that Hearn had got character. Along with this confession should be used Miss Bisland's statement that his physical cleanliness was like that of "uncontaminated savages and wild animals, which has the air of being so essential and

## LAFCADIO HEARN

innate as to make the best-groomed men and domesticated beasts almost frowzy by contrast." <sup>2</sup> She calls him about five foot three in height, and unusually broad and powerful, but graceful and light in movement: others speak of his silent feline step. He calls himself a swarthy, very short, square-set fellow of about 140 pounds when in good health;  $36\frac{3}{4}$  inches round the chest: he afterwards became corpulent and stooped. He was shy, but composed and dignified, presumably when he was surrounded. He shrank from meetings and sometimes fled from them. He walked about as he talked, a habit which his elder son also had, "touching softly the furnishings of the room or the flowers of the garden," and he poured out "a stream of brilliant talk in a soft, half-apologetic tone, with constant deference to the opinions of his companions." . . . His head was "bold and delicate" in profile, though some thought the chin weak; his brow "was square and full above the eyes," his complexion "a clear, smooth olive," or "a little brownish," and his skin "rather hairy." His large

<sup>2</sup> B. I. 77.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

seeing eye was brown and heavily lashed ; the other was filmed or pearly, and was often concealed by his hand during conversation. He was afraid that women were repelled by this eye, but though shy with them was one who took "a foolish fancy to every damozel in his path." He used a handglass for near things and a telescope for distant ; otherwise, says Dr. Gould, "the world beyond a few feet was not a three dimensioned one ; it was coloured . . . but it was formless and flat, without much thickness or solidity, and almost without perspective." Dr. Gould believes that the result of this was "what it was," i.e. that in so far as what he saw was different from what other men saw it was due to the difference between his sight and other men's. Dr. Gould says nothing to explain Hearn's own statement : that "a landscape necessarily suggests less to the keen-sighted man than to the myope. The keener the view the less depth in the impression produced." It is true that Hearn dwelt much in his books upon physical appearances, but that was due in a large part to the literary influence of

## LAFCADIO HEARN

Gautier and others, and his power in this department is not so great as to suggest any useful peculiarity of vision. If anything, it has sometimes a bad effect, that of undue emphasis upon detail, which may have been due to seeing a thing or a group bit by bit instead of as a proportioned and related whole. Heat, he said, was good for his sight, and his sight thus chose his landscape. It also unfitted him for many forms of physical exercise. But he was a good swimmer and loved the water, and one of his best pictures of himself is in "At Yaidzu,"<sup>3</sup> where he swims out at night to the fleet of tiny lighted ghost-ships after the Festival of the Dead, watching and questioning:

"Are not we ourselves as lanterns launched upon a deeper and a dimmer sea, and ever separating further and further one from another as we drift to the inevitable dissolution . . . ?"

He liked going to Yaidzu for his summer vacation, to swim and "rough it" among the fishermen. "He smoked incessantly," says Mrs. Hearn, "and he could not leave

<sup>3</sup> *G. J.* 232.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

his cigar behind even while swimming":<sup>4</sup> when he touched the shore by a paper lantern put to mark a landing spot "he was the happiest man alive." Mrs. Hearn saw in his smoking a religious act, and says: "I always wondered when I saw him smoking, what heavenly delight he felt with his pipe."<sup>5</sup> He began by living as a good appetite proposed, but became of necessity regular and careful, with very rare "debaucheries of beefsteak, whiskey and lemonade, gin, ginger ale and beer." His letters express a somewhat unusual liveliness of delight in the company of men whom he was at ease with. "Loving thanks for yesterday's extraordinary enjoyableness and for all things," he writes to a friend in 1898, and again: "I shall not thank you for my happy two days, and all the beautiful things that you 'so beautifully did.' But I felt as if the sky had become more blue . . . than could really be the case," and the phrases suggest a boyish love of being "treated." To the same friend he writes about "the most precious photographs," asks for "the one with the

<sup>4</sup> N. 82.

<sup>5</sup> N. 38.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

full dress hat on," and says: "I just love it."<sup>6</sup> Twenty years before he had described himself in a letter to Mr. Watkin as feeling "a little blue and accordingly affectionate. . . . I write extremely often because I feel alone and extremely alone. By and by, if I get well, I shall write only by weeks; and with time perhaps only by months; and when at last comes the rush of business . . . only by years—until the times and places of old friendship are forgotten."<sup>7</sup> It is certain that he did forget friends and probable that he did not make the customary efforts not to do so, being affectionate, quick and with no morbid or diffused sense of responsibility except to his family, himself and his work. Professor Chamberlain attributes his abrupt way of dropping friends to idealism: "Friends when he first made them were for him more than mortal men," and he "poured out at their feet all the passionate emotionalism of his Greek nature," but discovering feet of clay and resenting a difference from his philosophical opinions he turned away; and he himself "was a

<sup>6</sup> B. II. 368, 375.

<sup>7</sup> L. R. 39.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

greater sufferer from all this than any one else; for he possessed the affectionate disposition of a child.”<sup>8</sup>

Bound up with this quick passionateness was his sensitiveness, though sometimes his style exaggerates this, as when he says that the contemplation of the big book which might be written of incense is “terrifying.” He was, says his wife, “too enthusiastic for beauty, for which he wept, and for which he rejoiced, and for which he was angry.”<sup>9</sup> His eyes wore “a look of fearful enthusiasm” as she told him ghost stories. The howling of a dog made him “indefinably, superstitiously afraid.”<sup>10</sup> Sometimes his wife thought him mad, “because he saw things that were not and heard things that were not.”<sup>11</sup> As a child he had seen and felt “shadowy dark-robed figures, capable of atrocious self-distortion”<sup>12</sup> and of thrilling him, with a “sort of abominable electricity.” He sorrowed for the cutting down of trees. He was very tender with animals, particularly cats, and one cat was so delightful to him that he

<sup>8</sup> B. I. 59.      <sup>9</sup> B. I. 145.      <sup>10</sup> *G. J.* 135.

<sup>11</sup> B. I. 153.      <sup>12</sup> *S.* 14.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

forgot the fleas of his lodging ; but he had no unusual sympathy with animals, or he would never have written of the "great fun" <sup>13</sup> of feeding kites with "dead rats or mice which have been caught in traps over night and subsequently drowned."

He had evidently been made to feel himself an exceptional being. In 1892 he imagines his conscience saying to him, on the subject of a woman in a story : "Your ancestors were not religious people : you lack constitutional morality. That's why you are poor, and unsuccessful, and void of mental balance, and an exile in Japan. You know you cannot be happy in an English moral community. You are a fraud—a vile Latin—a vicious French-hearted scalawag ;" <sup>14</sup> and he cries : "*Vive le monde antique.*" Four years later he is saying that with an emotional nature a man is happier among Latins : "I confess that I can only bear the uncommon types of Englishmen, Germans and Americans—the conventional types simply drive me wild. On the other hand I can feel at home with even a villain, if he be Spaniard,

<sup>13</sup> *G.* 379.

<sup>14</sup> *B.* II. 85.



## LAFCADIO HEARN

Italian, or French.”<sup>15</sup> He said that the English were “mere sucking babes in the knowledge of art as compared with the Latins.”<sup>16</sup> He was often “hungry for a sensation,” from a picture, a flower, a temple, or from a book which kept him from talking because he “wanted to enjoy the pleasure of the ghostly pain.”<sup>17</sup> He was rather fond of describing himself as one of the “small people without great wills and great energies.” But he suffered from melancholy and even from remorse. When he saw his wife suffering before the birth of the first child, he often begged her forgiveness for her suffering and said that he would “atone with his writing.”<sup>18</sup> He had sobered down, it may be, chiefly by the help of an instinctive feeling that his power must be concentrated upon his work, as that work became more clear to him. But he did not turn round upon himself. He thought in 1888, and continued to think, that “what we term the finer moral susceptibilities signify a more complex and perfect evolution of purely

<sup>15</sup> B. II. 300.

<sup>13</sup> B. III. 393.

<sup>17</sup> B. III. 60.

<sup>18</sup> N. 51.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

physical sensitiveness." In 1893 he wrote : " All this woman-worship and sex-worship is tending to develop to a high degree certain moral qualities. As the pleasure of colour has been developed out of perceptions created by appetite, so out of vague sense of physical charm a sense of spiritual charm is being evolved." <sup>19</sup> He asked if a work of art ought not " to make us feel that there are things which it were beautiful to die for," but it must, he said, stir in us " the sensuous life . . . the life of desire." <sup>20</sup> He thought sensualism good " because it softens," but also because it exists ; for he came more and more to see with equanimity the orchestration of all things to an infinite music, " every school contributing some tone, some colour—else unobtainable—to that mighty future scale of emotional harmonies of which the depths and the heights are still but faintly guessed at by us." <sup>21</sup> He told his Japanese pupils simply that the man of genius was one " in whom brain has been developed at the cost of body—in whom the nervous system

<sup>19</sup> B. III. 80.

<sup>20</sup> B. III. xliv.

<sup>21</sup> B. III. 98.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

41

has a delicacy and a sensitiveness far beyond the average person. . . . It is much more difficult, or him to control his feelings than it is for the average man, because his feelings are much stronger and because the controlling machinery of will is less developed in him.”<sup>22</sup> This is the man who loved the tropics although, or because, they develop “morbid sensibility to material impressions and absolute lack of thinking power.” Great heat made him feel young, and in 1894 he said: “If I could be where it is always hot I think I should live to dry up and blow away.”<sup>23</sup> When a friend was suffering from depression and lassitude he sent him words of serious advice: “I would indulge myself if I were you . . . I would give that digestion plenty of work with claret and beef and puddings and pies and liqueurs. And I would smoke cigars; and I would drink brandy.” *Vive le monde antique!* It is not to be doubted that he reached middle age soon after Herbert Spencer dissipated “that positive scepticism that imposes itself upon an undisciplined mind,”<sup>24</sup> and having said

<sup>22</sup> N.

<sup>23</sup> B. III.

<sup>24</sup> B. I 365.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

that he believes "the mass of humanity is good," he adds that "every man must so think who has suffered much and reached middle life." He came, by himself, to the conclusion that "there is no divine love save the love of man for man; that we have no All-Father, no Saviour, no angel guardians; that we have no possible refuge but in ourselves." <sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> O. 180.

### III

HEARN was a natural and prolific letter writer, and his letters from the beginning show him as an artist in his tastes and in his power to express and his desire to improve his power. It is not known how soon he began to think of himself as a writer. If he wrote verse as a boy it has disappeared, and his later verses prove that he had no gift. But as soon as his writing began to be printed and read it drew attention, because it was the work of one who by natural feeling, as well as imitation, had developed his own standards, different from the common standards accepted by journalists at Cincinnati as everywhere else. He is said to have read poetry as a boy, and he continued to admire Longfellow and Tennyson, and to think Swinburne "as to form," as he quaintly puts it, "the greatest nineteenth century poet of England." He said that he liked, not Whitman, but what Whit-

## LAFCADIO HEARN

man felt and failed in expressing. As for Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley, he preferred "Dobson, and Watson and Lang." But his remarks on poetry are almost enough to prove that English poetry meant little to him. He liked the foreign and the fantastic and the sensuous. He read Flaubert, Pierre Loti, Balzac's *Contes Drolatiques*, "Gautier's most pre-Raphael and wickedest work,"<sup>1</sup> Swinburne, Poe, Rabelais, Aldrich, and "other odd books,"—"an agglomeration of exotics and eccentrics."<sup>2</sup> He wanted to get away from the life of everyday for stories: "I would give anything," he said in 1883, "to be a literary Columbus—to discover a Romantic America in some West Indian or North African or Oriental region. . . . If I could only become a Consul at Bagdad, Algiers, Ispahan, Benares, Samarkand, Nippo, Bangkok, Ninh-Binh—or any part of the world where ordinary Christians do not like to go!"<sup>3</sup> At one time he made up his mind to write once a month "the queerest and most outlandish fancy I can get up," in not more than two hundred words. In a

<sup>1</sup> *L. R.* 134.

<sup>2</sup> *B. I.* 350.

<sup>3</sup> *B. I.* 294.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

jest he proposed to his musical friend, Mr. H. E. Krehbiel, books on the battle cries of all nations, on the manifestation of climatic influence in popular melody, on the music of nomad races, on the peculiar characteristic of erotic music in all countries, etc. He read the Indian epics. He must at one time have read and re-read De Quincey, but that writer apparently came to stand for something in his youth which he disliked, and by 1893 "De Quincey's charm has for ever vanished"—Whittier's had increased, and Hearn was persuaded by him to a sympathy with religious emotions: "It is like hearing a great congregation singing, 'Nearer, my God, to thee.'"

It is evident that Hearn began with the aim of saying strange things in an exquisite manner. This exquisite manner was to be hunted and delved for. That it did not come by nature may be seen from phrases like "The liver had been simply roasted and the kidneys fairly fried,"<sup>4</sup> or "If it be agreeable to you I will call upon you at 1 p.m. on Sunday as per invitation."<sup>5</sup> This is from one of the "Letters to a Lady,"

<sup>4</sup> G. M. G.

<sup>5</sup> L. R. 128.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

written when he was twenty-five. He had then "not visited out since he was sixteen . . . had led a very hard and extraordinary life previous to his connexion with the press—became a species of clumsy barbarian—and in short for various reasons considered myself ostracized, tabooed, outlawed." <sup>6</sup> This was to explain that he was not used to "the cultivated class of people at all." His writing, then, was likely to be founded entirely on books, and he would revolt as far as possible from the influence of the colloquial language to which he was used. Under the influence of Gautier and his "perfection of melody, warmth of word-colouring, voluptuous delicacy," <sup>7</sup> his "engraved gem-work of words," this became certain. In most of his letters to Mr. Watkin he was free from any such influence, but used only the words and phrases which were likely to come readily to his pen and made a style which was practically written speech, and slangy speech. In 1882 he begins a letter with: "Your letter lies before me here like a white tablet

<sup>6</sup> *L. R.* 129.

<sup>7</sup> *B. I.* 269.



## LAFCADIO HEARN

of stone bearing a dead name ; and in my mind there is just such a silence as one feels standing before a tomb—so that I can press your hand only and say nothing.” This is nothing like speech. He was then writing for the *Times-Democrat* of New Orleans translations from Maupassant, Jules Lemaitre, Pierre Loti, Flaubert, Hector Malot, Camille Flammarion, Dostoievsky, Sienkiewicz, Villiers de l’Isle Adam, Matilde Serao, Tolstoy, Zola, Maxime du Camp, Coppée, Daudet, Baudelaire, and writing articles on Loti, on Arabian women, on the Roar of a Great City, etc. : he allowed a sentence of his deliberate style to enter a letter. His letters to Mr. Krehbiel had been a compromise or mixture of friendly speech and of writing elaborated for the benefit of a public in whom sympathy has to be created. It is a very attractive compromise, as in the description of his lodging in St. Louis Street, an old Creole house.<sup>8</sup>

Sometimes he is not ashamed to forget his friend and imagine a public, which he harangues about “that religion of the

<sup>8</sup> B. I. 173.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

wilderness which flies to solitude, and hath no other temple than the vault of Heaven itself, painted with the frescoes of the clouds, and illuminated by the trembling tapers of God's everlasting altar, the stars of the firmament,"<sup>9</sup> or he concludes with : " So I draw my chair closer to the fire, light up my pipe *de terre Gambière*, and in the flickering glow weave fancies of palm trees and ghostly reefs and tepid winds, and a Voice from the far tropics calls to me across the darkness."<sup>10</sup> He wrote on musical instruments, on luxury and art in the time of ELEGABALUS ; he held it to be his " artistic duty " to let himself be " absorbed into the life " of the Latin city, to " study its form and colour and passion." There were, he said in 1882, months when he could not write ; when he could it was to " write a rough sketch and labour it over and over again for half a year, at intervals of ten minutes' leisure—sometimes I get a day or two."<sup>11</sup> He foretold that he would always be " more or less Arabesque—covering his whole edifice with intricate designs,

<sup>9</sup> B. I. 191.

<sup>10</sup> B. I. 267.

<sup>11</sup> B. I. 239.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

serrating his arches, and engraving mysticisms above the portals.”

It was in 1882 that he published, in a book which took its title from the first story, translations of Gautier's *One of Cleopatra's Nights*, *Clarimonde*, *Arria Marcella*, *The Mummy's Foot*, *Omphale*, and *King Candales*. Three of these, he said, “rank among the most remarkable literary productions of the century.” He wrote a warm-hearted dedication “to the lovers of the loveliness of the antique world, the lovers of physical beauty and artistic truth, of the charm of youthful dreams and young passion in its blossoming, of poetic ambitions and the sweet pantheism that finds all Nature vitalized by the spirit of the beautiful.” A better translation is not likely to be made, because a man capable of doing it better would probably leave it alone and do original work. To those who already know the stories the translations are interesting as Hearn's early prose, a cumbrous English stiffened with beauties which do not make it beautiful. It is unwieldy but not massive, hard without being firm, and it is not alive. It is not Gautier

## LAFCADIO HEARN

and not Hearn, yet the more imposing parts of it became parts of Hearn, and he was to write many a sentence like: "She wore a robe of orange-red velvet, and from her wide ermine-lined sleeves there peeped forth patrician hands of infinite delicacy, and so ideally transparent that, like the fingers of Aurora, they permitted the sun to shine through them."<sup>12</sup> His next book, the *Stray Leaves from Strange Literatures* of 1884, consisted of stories which were "reconstructions of what impressed me as most fantastically beautiful in the most exotic literature which I was able to obtain," from the East and the West, but chiefly from the East. In the next year he published *Ghombo Zhèbes*, a "Dictionary of Creole proverbs, selected from six Creole dialects, translated into French and English with notes, complete index to subjects and some brief remarks upon the Creole idioms of Louisiana."

In 1887 came *Some Chinese Ghosts*. Hearn calls them black lilies or phosphoric roses, and chose them for their "weird beauty." In several cases ten lines of an

<sup>12</sup> C. N. 88.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

old unadorned legend was the origin of a tale of twenty pages. The Chinese outline was probably in every case a remarkable one, and such it is in Hearn. "The story of Ming-Y," for example, is of an immortal beauty. It is of a young tutor who met a beautiful woman in the woods and loved her and used to visit her beautiful palace instead of going home as he pretended. At last he was forced to confess. He showed his elders some of the gifts of his mistress and told them of her palace. The gifts seemed to have "lain buried in the earth for centuries": as to the palace, there was no house in the place which he described, and the woman was unknown to them. They went to see and found only a tomb. Then they remembered the famous courtesan who was buried there long ago, and the city of her poet lover who gave her the gifts which she had given to the young man, and were all that he ever again saw of her, the lion of yellow jade, the brush case of carven agate, and the music. These stories are good enough to keep alive the book which contains them. But they are experiments, not master's work. Each story cost

“months of hard work and study,” as he has told us, and it can be believed; for he adopted a style for them which had to be deliberately maintained. The style apparently did not grow out of his speech or his letters, but was a loftier ceremonious medium which became a second or a third nature. It cannot be analysed here sufficiently. But a few isolated points should be noticed and considered. Thus on page 31 he speaks of “savage flowers,” where he means “*wild* flowers”; but “wild” was too familiar and he did not see, in his unreal tower of composition, that “savage” was a mere synonym and an unsuitable one. So on page 65 he calls the autumn light “aureate” for no better reason. In every story description abounds, and it is of such a kind that the words call attention to themselves, and are possibly admired, but ultimately fail to produce any effect beyond themselves. For example, in “the great citron-light of the sunset faded out,” either the mind will think only of citrons, or it will painfully discover for itself a resemblance between one of the sunset colours and the colour of a citron, leaving the words

## LAFCADIO HEARN

of the writer a merely accurate statement incapable of producing a pure impression related to its context. This is far too often the reader's fortune. When he reads about an ear and a cheek in this style : "*O the jewel in her ear !* What lotus bud more dainty than the folded flower of flesh, with its dripping of diamond fire ! Again he saw it, and the curve of the cheek beyond, luscious to look upon as beautiful brown fruit,"<sup>13</sup> he finds it hard to think of human beauty, so confused is he by words and by flowers and fruit. The utmost reward of such writing is an admiration near akin to fatigue, and more often we feel that the writer has forgotten the woman and lost any possible power to suggest her by the time he has decided upon the sentence : "All suddenly he felt glide about his neck the tepid smoothness of a woman's arm." Such writing fails because it is dictated by an ideal that is not deep enough in the writer's spirit, the ideal of "one thing, one word"—one word chosen deliberately as if it were dead and still and powerless to retaliate and live alone. Much of Hearn's

<sup>13</sup> *C. G.* 122.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

care must have gone to make the eloquence of his opening and closing sentences, like : “Thrice had spring perfumed the breast of the land with flowers, and thrice had been celebrated that festival of the dead which is called *Siu-fan-ti*, and thrice had Tong swept and garnished his father’s tomb and presented his five-fold offerings of fruits and meats.”<sup>14</sup> The pity of it is that such eloquence rarely has any natural sweet cadence, and Hearn’s has not. When he wrote a letter about something he cared for and understood, his words had a flow which was inseparable from their sense ; but in this entirely self-conscious writing the spirit is never free to make music, or if one good cadence emerges the next will clash with it. Where this curious writing is most successful is in catalogues, such as this from the “Tale of the Porcelain God” : “The vases with orifices belled like the cups of flowers, or cleft like the bills of birds, or fanged like the jaws of serpents, or pink-lipped as the mouth of a girl ; the vases flesh-coloured and purple-veined and dimpled, with ears and with ear-rings ; the

<sup>14</sup> *C. G.* 81.



## LAFCADIO HEARN

vases in likeness of mushrooms, of lotus-flowers, of lizards, of horse-footed dragons woman-faced; the vases strangely translucent, that simulate the white glimmering of grains of prepared rice, that counterfeit the vapory lace-work of frost, that imitate the efflorescences of coral.”<sup>15</sup> Life is not expected in a catalogue; connexion is unnecessary; and blind attention to isolated detail can work no harm. Hearn knew this: his books are full of such catalogues and they were sometimes useful receptacles for the products of his games of skill with words.

The effect of *Chinese Ghosts* is therefore a mixed one: the story and the treatment are always separable. Hearn's contribution is decoration. He overlays the simple and beautiful outline though without concealing it. According to the reader's power of enjoying words that are without a spirit will be his enjoyment of the tales as a whole. He will be continually in the neighbourhood of the spirit of beauty, as in "The Story of Ming-Y," but he will be aware that Hearn who found the beauty also caged it,

<sup>15</sup> *C. G.* 153,

## LAFCADIO HEARN

with words pretending to be equivalent to things as well as more than names.

Two long stories followed in 1889 and 1890, *Chita* and *Youma*. They belong to the same period of his art as *Chinese Ghosts*. They are beautiful stories full of beautiful elements, but the treatment is the conspicuous thing. There is the story and there is the eloquent description of tropical nature, not exactly separable but not perfectly united by the mind which loved them both. *Chita*, for example, contains much mere eyesight and unvitalized notes of description, sometimes in the favourite form of a catalogue. The writing tends constantly towards a superhuman level of eloquence, such as may be indicated by the passage: "But she saw and heard and felt much of that which, though old as the heavens and the earth, is yet eternally new and eternally young with the holiness of beauty—eternally mystical and divine—eternally weird: the unveiled magnificence of Nature's moods—the perpetual poem hymned by wind and surge—the everlasting splendour of the sky."<sup>16</sup> It is relevant to ask why

<sup>16</sup> *C.* 148-9.

he should have dragged the girl *Chita* into such description of what he admired in nature. But even when he has not the excuse of writing about Nature in her augustness, he makes the same ceremonious approach to his subject, as in "the progressively augmenting weariness of lessons in deportment, in dancing, in music, in the impossible art of keeping her dresses unruffled and unsoiled." He translates "On with the dance" into "Better to seek solace in choregraphic harmonies, in the rhythm of gracious motion and of perfect melody."<sup>17</sup> Much of the description of beautiful things is nearly as good as possible of its kind, and the rhapsodies are likely to interest and charm students of the eloquence of Browne, De Quincey or Ruskin. But its power is halved because the writer has not chosen the right opportunity for such exercises, and exercises they remain, instead of essential elements in a work of art. The book is not without humanity, but the attitude towards human things, the most tragic and the most simple, is usually spectatorial. He describes, for example,

<sup>17</sup> *C.*

## LAFCADIO HEARN

the jetsam of a storm which destroyed an island and all its holiday population: the sheep, casks, billiard tables, pianos, children's toys, clothes, and dead bodies. The impression given by the passage is that Hearn had never got beyond the point of view that this scene was a good subject for description. He was writing as a detached æsthetic artist and this cold figure is as conspicuous as the storm and its havoc. In a different key is the description of yellow fever which ends the book. Hearn himself had nearly died of the disease in New Orleans: in *Chita* it kills a man but it gives some life to the style, because the author is writing of what he knows and has mastered too well to regard it as a subject for decoration, or for felicities like "the stridulous telegraphy of crickets," and "a soporific murmur made of leaf-speech and the hum of gnats." The whole book was the work of twelve months, and he calls it himself a "philosophic romance"<sup>18</sup> meant to reach "that something in the reader which they call Soul, God, or the Unknowable, according as the thought harmonizes

<sup>18</sup> B. I. 405.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

with Christian, Pantheistic, or Spencerian ideas without conflicting with any.”

His descriptive skill and enthusiasm found a perfect outlet in his *Two Years in the French West Indies* of 1890. Here it was his business to describe what he saw. The book contains pictures of Nature and of Negro and creole life in Martinique, and stories. Of the long “Midsummer Trip to the Tropics” he says that “in spite of sundry justifiable departures from simple note-making, this paper is offered only as an effort to record the visual and emotional impressions of the moment.” Sometimes he gives mere notes like: “Sixth day out. Wind tepid and still stronger, but sky very clear. An indigo sea, with beautiful white-caps. The ocean colour is deepening; it is very rich now, but I think less wonderful than before;—it is an opulent pansy hue. Close by the ship it looks black-blue—the colour that bewitches in certain Celtic eyes.”<sup>19</sup> At other times he finishes a little picture in two sentences like: “The steamer’s wake is a great broad, seething river of fire—white like strong moonshine :

<sup>19</sup> *F. W. I.*

## LAFCADIO HEARN

the glow is bright enough to read by. At its centre the trail is brightest; towards either edge it pales off cloudily, curling like smoke of phosphorus.”<sup>20</sup> The method is admirably suited to travel sketches written on the spot for a magazine. In the stories he still gives too much space to description, but “Ti Canotié,” for example, is not spoilt by a too exalted manner. He is lively and intelligent in his account of the character of the coloured woman and its development through generations of prostitution. He is best of all in expressing the charm of Nature and the people, the loveliness and the languor ending in dread of activity and weakening of memory. “Pa combiné, chè!” (“Do not think, dear!”) is the warning of a coloured girl to a convalescent European in one of the stories, and it ends:

“She slipped an arm about his neck.

“‘Doudoux,’ she persisted—and her voice was a dove’s coo—‘Si ou ainmein moin, pa combiné,—non!’”

“And in her strange exotic beauty, her savage grace, her supple caress, the velvet

<sup>20</sup> *F. W.* 1.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

witchery of her eyes—it seemed to me that I beheld a something imaged, not of herself, not of the moment only—a something weirdly sensuous; the spirit of tropic Nature made golden flesh, and murmuring to each lured wanderer: ‘If thou wouldst love me, do not think!’”<sup>21</sup>

Hearn himself did not weary “of watching this picturesque life—of studying the costumes, brilliant with butterfly colours—and the statuesque semi-nudity of labouring hundreds—and the untaught grace of attitudes—and the simplicity of manners.” The necessity of writing more rapidly than usual gave a fluency which was beneficial to his exuberant picturesqueness, in spite of the use of “minuscule” as a synonym for “very small” and the inversion of “changes extraordinary,” and similar signs of care.

Just before going to Japan, and “in sore distress for money,” he wrote his translation of *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard* in a few weeks. Everything in his first day in Japan was “unspeakably pleasurable and new,” and he was not offended by the “shop of American sewing-machines next

<sup>21</sup> *F. W. 1.*

## LAFCADIO HEARN

to the shop of a Buddhist image maker " in Yokohama. His eyes were delighted, his mind at ease: asked by a temple attendant if he was a Christian he said: " No," and to " Are you a Buddhist ? " replied " Not exactly." <sup>22</sup> He was at the school in Matsue—Matsue, the " chief city of the province of the Gods "—in August, 1890, after a period of " living in temples and old Buddhist cemeteries, making pilgrimages and sounding enormous bells and worshipping astounding Buddhas," <sup>23</sup> and making the acquaintance of Professor Basil Hall Chamberlain, author of *Things Japanese*. He began writing at once, recording his " First Day in the Orient," contributing essays to the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1891 and onwards, and publishing his first Japanese book, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, in 1894.

The change of life was like " escaping from an almost unbearable atmospheric pressure into a rarefied, highly oxygenated medium." <sup>24</sup> He found it partly a gain that " in Japan the law of life is not as with us—that each one strives to expand his own

<sup>22</sup> G. 8.

<sup>23</sup> B. II. 5.

<sup>24</sup> B. I. 35.



## LAFCADIO HEARN

individuality at the expense of his neighbour's"; but partly a loss, because there was "never a fine inspiration, . . . never a thrill." Therefore, he said, literary work was "dry, bony, hard, dead work."<sup>25</sup> It is more likely that his discomfort was due to the inevitable straining effort to come rapidly to terms with a life so different in detail and in the whole. He came to doubt whether the development of the individuality in a community was a "lofty or desirable"<sup>26</sup> tendency, but also to suspect that that "depth does not exist in the Japanese soulstream." He felt that he would "never get close to the men." He discovered "how utterly dead Old Japan is, and how ugly New Japan is becoming."<sup>27</sup>

*Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* consists chiefly of descriptions of visible things—people, customs, dresses, gardens, shrines, and gods, seen at home or on travel. There are also stories outlined or elaborated, and essays like those on lovers' suicides, and the Japanese smile, and extracts direct from his diary as a teacher. His "un-

<sup>25</sup> B. I. 35.

<sup>26</sup> B. I. 40.

<sup>27</sup> B. II 223.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

familiar” Japan was that of the mass not yet Europeanized, “the great common people, who represent in Japan, as in all countries, the national virtues, and who still cling to their delightful old customs, their picturesque dresses, their Buddhist images, their household shrines, their beautiful and touching worship of ancestors.”<sup>28</sup> His sympathy was extreme. He was one who not merely felt “the divine in all religions,”<sup>29</sup> but thought Christianity far more irrational than Buddhism. He saw in a figure of the god Jizō a dream “more sweet than any imaged Christ,” as well as a work of art so charming that he felt “a pain at being obliged to pass it by,” that “playfellow of dead children.”<sup>30</sup> When a missionary had told one of Hearn’s pupils that the Japanese were savages, he answered: “I think, my dear lad, that he himself was a savage—a vulgar, ignorant, savage bigot. I think it is your highest social duty to honour your Emperor. . . . I think it is your duty to respect the gods of your fathers, the religion of your country—even if you yourself cannot believe all

<sup>28</sup> *G.* viii.

<sup>29</sup> *G.* v.

<sup>30</sup> *G.* 48.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

that others believe." If the multitude and strangeness of things at times confused his sense of form, they had also touched his gravity as well as his curiosity, so that the book is incomparably richer than its predecessors. He had now to write to give information and this checked his eloquence. He had little room for rhapsody, even if he had felt sufficiently at ease for it, though he was like his native neighbours in at least one characteristic: that they "make pilgrimages not more for the sake of pleasing the gods than of pleasing themselves by the sight of rare and pretty things." He travelled to Oki, where not even a missionary had been. The light of Japan, as "gentle as the light of dreams," and "the all-temperate world" of men and Nature, sobered him after the garish tropics. He tells us that he came "to understand the unspeakable loveliness of a solitary spray of blossoms arranged as only a Japanese expert knows how to arrange it,"<sup>31</sup> and to admire it far above that "vulgar murdering of flowers," the Western bouquet.

<sup>31</sup> *G.* 345.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

“Gentler and kindlier faces” he never saw than among the people who bowed in apology even while gazing at the foreigner. In his own writing moderation, gentleness and kindness are certainly more noticeable than before. Descriptions of new things, by a man who had probably to use everything that he saw and could not afford to pick and choose, could hardly be better done. There are still catalogues, but used with a purpose, not merely to give an excuse for artfully enumerating precious or strange objects. He can be dull—how could he not be at such a task? Yet aiming as he does at fulness and accuracy, not at impressions and finished pictures, he not only charms us by bringing charming things before us, but by his own modesty and grace. There are some wildernesses of adjectives; there is a page where he uses “dwarf,” “miniature,” “microscopic,” “tiny” and “lilliputian” in turn; there are some pompositives like “solemn, profound, mighty,” “colossal, severe, superb”; and there is the phrase “mesmeric lentor.” There are also a thousand tender, lovely, or grim things described in such a way

## LAFCADIO HEARN

that the reader feels himself to have been all but naturalized.

In *Out of the East*, which followed in 1895, the disturbance of initiation had ceased, and the first delight. There is very little description and less rhapsody. Hearn thinks more and uses the note book less. He is observing principles and tendencies, beginning to generalize and compare. The sub-title of the book is: "Reveries and Studies in New Japan." The "beautiful illusion" of Japan had faded out in five years and he "had learned to see the Far East without its glamour,"<sup>32</sup> but with no loss of admiration. He had seen Japan holding her own against the world in the war with China, the enthusiasm of the nation concentrated and silent; and he had come to the conclusion that the day of Western influence was over. Whatever "the limitations of personal individuality among the Japanese," it is his belief that "as a nation Japan possesses an individuality much stronger than our own." He tells the story of the girl Yuko who offered up her life that the sorrow of the Emperor

<sup>32</sup> O. 325.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

might cease, on the occasion of the attack on the Czarevitch. She cut her throat after binding her girdle tightly above her knees, because "the daughter of a Samurai must be found in death with limbs decently composed"; and the Ministers whispered: "All else will change; but the heart of the nation will not change."<sup>33</sup> What he calls "the vague but immeasurable emotion of Shinto" has grasped him, and he embodies it in the character of one of his pupils departing for the war, who told him of a military excursion in his last year at school: "We marched to a shrine in the district of Iu, where the spirits of heroes are worshipped. It is a beautiful lonesome place, among hills; and the temple is shadowed by very high trees. It is always dim and cool and silent there. We drew up before the shrine in military order; nobody spoke. Then the bugle sounded through the holy grove, like a call to battle; and we all presented arms; and the tears came to my eyes—I do not know why."<sup>34</sup> . . . He concluded that only half-education could tempt this people to

<sup>33</sup> O. 341.      <sup>34</sup> O. 298.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

“servile imitation of Western ways.” He made some slips, as when he said that the typical woman in Japanese romance never appears as “a sentimental maiden, dying, or making others die, for love”;<sup>35</sup> a slip which he corrected by several stories in later books. But as a rule he spoke with great accuracy and weight. He showed that the religion, the morality, and the art of the Japanese were “evolved out of ancestral habits, customs, ethics, beliefs, directly the opposite of our own in some cases, and in all cases strangely different,” and not to be molested without damage to one party or to both. He went farther, and in the matter of art, for example, expressed the opinion that the Japanese art would, in an appreciative and unprejudiced mind, modify “almost every pre-existing sentiment in relation to the beautiful.” After school hours he used to go up into an old village cemetery and look at the stone Buddha smiling “the smile of one who has received an injury not to be resented,”<sup>36</sup> and the contrast between this and the utilitarian modern college<sup>37</sup> below

<sup>35</sup> O. 92.

<sup>36</sup> O. 58.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

set up a dialogue in his mind between East and West. Science speaks for the West of the Cosmos, resolved into a nebula, recondensing to form another swarm of worlds on which reappears the same peasant and his ox and plough as before. Buddhism replies that this same peasant in Japan knows and has long known what the East has "mathematically discovered," and has been taught something of his "innumerable faiths, and of the apparition and disparition of universes and of the unity of life."<sup>37</sup> The West speaks of the perpetual record of "the least of human thoughts." The East knows more, and the man has been taught "that the thoughts and acts of each being projected beyond the individual existence, shape other lives unborn," and taught "to control his most secret wishes, because of their immeasurable inherent potentialities"; and Hearn tells a story of a dead woman who haunted a place and was blamed, even by those who pitied her, because "she should have known that anger, secretly indulged, can have ghostly consequences."<sup>38</sup> Having

<sup>37</sup> O. 168.      <sup>38</sup> O. 176.



## LAFCADIO HEARN

spoken of his own conclusion that "we have no possible refuge but in ourselves," he quotes the revelation of Buddha: "Be ye lamps unto yourselves; be ye a refuge unto yourselves. . . . Look not for refuge to any beside yourselves."<sup>39</sup>

*Kokoro* belongs to 1896, and is of the same substance as *Out of the East*. Shintoism and the religious emotion which is one with patriotism and family piety fascinate him. He compares with the Western man, insensible to the past, the Japanese uttering the Shinto prayer: "Ye forefathers of the generations, and of our families, and of our kindred—unto you, the founders of our houses, we utter the gladness of our thanks." But it must be remembered that Hearn knew far more about the domestic life of Japan than of England or the United States. His comparisons are sometimes rash and seldom necessary: his fine expressions of Japanese ideals and realities are effective without comparisons. In "Japanese Civilization" he dwells upon the lightness and mobility of Japanese life, the impermanence of things, the lack of

<sup>39</sup> O. 181.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

encumbrances and of "egotistical individualism." Shinto has taught the individual to think of Emperor and country before family and self: Buddhism, "to master regret, to endure pain, and to accept as eternal law the vanishing of things loved and the tyranny of things hated."<sup>40</sup> He tells how he saw by accident the relaxed face of a male servant who had long seemed happy: "Hard lines of pain and anger appeared in it, making it some twenty years older"; but at a warning cough the man was rejuvenated. It is no wonder that in "A Glimpse of Tendencies" he declares that the barriers between East and West "of racial feeling, of emotional differentiation, of language, of manners and beliefs, are likely to remain unsurmountable for centuries." Nevertheless, he imagines an approaching of East and West, producing a Western religion which should combine synthetic philosophy and Buddhism, and "differing from Buddhism mainly in the greater exactness of its conceptions":<sup>41</sup> and again: "A Buddhism strongly fortified by Western science will meet the future needs

<sup>40</sup> K. 36.

<sup>41</sup> K. 244.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

of the race.”<sup>42</sup> He, at least, like Maeterlinck, does not dread the disintegration of the Ego after death on which Buddhism and science insist: “Rather than an end to be feared,” he says, “the dissolution of self is the one object of all objects to which our efforts should be turned.” He repeats that “the soft serenity” and “passionless tenderness”<sup>43</sup> of the face of Buddha might yet give peace of soul to the West. The Shinto idea that “the world of the living is directly governed by the world of the dead”<sup>44</sup> was beginning to haunt him. Spencer had helped him to it, as may be seen in “From a Travelling Diary,”<sup>45</sup> where he quotes from Spencer that first love is “absolutely antecedent to all relative experience.” It was to become a literary obsession to Hearn, if not what it was to the Japanese with whom “the constant presence of the dead has been a matter of conviction for thousands of years.” This book is not all philosophical, though it is more so than *Out of the East*. Even the stories in it are directly useful as illustra-

<sup>42</sup> K. 193.

<sup>43</sup> K. 221.

<sup>44</sup> K. 268.

<sup>45</sup> K. 59.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

tions of Japanese ideas. Such is the story of a boy of seven who saved his father from a tyrant by showing a severed head which he pretended to be his father's, and after saluting it reverently, cut out his own bowels in grief to make the deception complete. There is no longer much question of style. He writes with lucidity, precision and flow, now and then returning to his old ways and writing: "These things *make appeal extraordinary* to emotional life," or "there is a *cavernous world tremendous*,"<sup>46</sup> or "a *limpid magnificence of light indescribable*." These were temporary indulgences of a sober man who was too busy to try to write better than he was born to do. This mature style was not one which he would have been proud of ten years before, for it owed much of its individuality to these occasional slips; but it was sufficient and without pretension.

*Gleanings from Buddha Fields*, published in 1897 but written before he came to Tokyo, is continued from its two predecessors. He returns in "Nirvana" to his opinion that because Buddhism in many

<sup>46</sup> K. 16 n.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

ways appeals to Western reason it offers us "larger religious possibilities—the suggestions of a universal scientific creed nobler than any which has ever existed,"<sup>47</sup> Light, he says, is "offered from the East." In "Notes of a Trip to Kyoto," however, he finds one source of "the contentment and simple happiness of Japanese common life" in the cheapness of pleasure, "creating the beautiful out of nothing,"<sup>48</sup> really enjoying landscapes and the sight of animals, insects, and flowers: in the essay "In Osaka" he finds another reason for it in the Japanese "birthright" of taste. His chief business is still with description and exposition of what he has learnt about Japanese life, art, and religion, in essays on the city of Osaka, on "Buddhist Allusions in Japanese Folk-song," and so on. Except in language he is often hardly English at all, so transparent a medium does he make of himself for the visible and invisible Japanese world. It is true that to the end he could not read a Japanese newspaper and could only just write a letter home,<sup>49</sup> but as Professor Chamberlain says: "Laf-

<sup>47</sup> *B. F.* 265.

<sup>48</sup> *B. F.* 60,

<sup>49</sup> *B. II.* 486.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

cadio Hearn understands contemporary Japan better and makes us understand it better, than any other writer, because he loves it better";<sup>50</sup> and Mr. Noguchi states that in all his books there is not one misspelling of a Japanese word.<sup>51</sup> He is most individual when he submits to his favourite obsession, that of the infinite ancestry of every soul and every act. In "Dust" it is the inspiration of a thin rapture of the intellect. "We are," he says, "each and all, infinite compounds of fragments of anterior lives."<sup>52</sup> His mind is not "a kingdom" but "a fantastical republic, daily troubled by more revolutions than ever occurred in South America," and he exclaims: "I, an individual; an individual soul! Nay, I am a population—a population unthinkable for multitude, even by groups of a thousand millions! Generations of generations I am, æons of æons! Countless times the concourse now making me has been scattered, and mixed with other scatterings. Of what concern, then, the next disintegration? Perhaps, after trillions of ages of burning in different

<sup>50</sup> *T. J.* 65.

<sup>51</sup> *N. v.*

<sup>52</sup> *B. F.* 92.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

dynasties, the very best of me may come together again."

Whether this idea preyed upon him, or whether it was simply his dislike of a great modern city, he was not at ease writing in Tokyo in 1897. He complained that he got "no thrill, no *frisson*, no sensation," that "the Holy Ghost had departed" from him: or perhaps, he says, "the power to feel thrill dies with the approach of a man's fiftieth year." He felt his work to be poor, though it had improved by re-writing. He was referring to the "Retrospectives" in *Exotics and Retrospectives* of 1898. He had got back to himself again, after the long period when the novelty, the charm, and the abundance in Japanese life had taken him out of himself and supported him. His work is now more and more a collection of short sketches, reflections, and stories, quite distinct from one another, not only in *Exotics and Retrospectives*, but in the successive books, *Ghostly Japan* (1899), *Shadowings* (1900), *A Japanese Miscellany* (1901), *Kotto* (1902), *Kwaidan* (1904), and the posthumous *Milky Way* (1905). The stories increase in number;

## LAFCADJO HEARN

*Kwaidan* contains little else. When he writes anything beyond the length of a very short essay or story it is a string of notes and quotations like "Japanese Buddhist Proverbs" in *Ghostly Japan*, "Japanese Female Names" in *Shadowings*, "Songs of Japanese Children" in the *Miscellany*. For many of these he had the valuable help of his pupil, Mr Otani, as collector. It is to be noticed that of all the books published between 1898 and 1904, only three chapters had already appeared in American magazines, which had hitherto printed a considerable portion of Hearn's essays. As early as 1893 he had said that an inspiration or strong emotion was impossible in Japan: that all his work had to be forced. In 1895 he added that writing was the only antidote to "vexation and anger and imaginings and recollections of unpleasant things said or done." He describes how he wrote everything at first "hurriedly without care,"<sup>53</sup> and then re-wrote four or five times, letting the thought "define and crystallize itself." The concluding paragraphs of his chapter on dragonflies in *Kotto* was re-

<sup>53</sup> B. III. 42.



## LAFCADIO HEARN

written seventeen times. He looked back at his early florid writing with shame, and found himself "forced to study simplicity,"<sup>54</sup> though at first he was alarmed at the "lack of colour" in his Japanese writing; he was forty-three but felt his style "not yet fixed—too artificial." This self-criticism is just, though it may be doubted whether it helped or hindered him; for his writing often suggests that little good save neatness was gained by his labours. But the instinct, or the old habit of his Gautier period, was very strong, and he could not help "polishing up"<sup>55</sup> passages in his letters. That he had a disturbing consciousness of the character of words would be clear from one sentence in a letter of 1892, speaking of architecture: "Gothic is soul—or better Spirit, using the sharp-angled flame word." He had long kept note books for "every sensation or idea," every "new and strong impression," and classified them. Yet he knew well that "our best work is out of the unconscious." For some writers the unconscious is strong and full in the first and only form of a book

<sup>54</sup> B. III. 62.

<sup>55</sup> B. III. 291.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

or chapter ; for others, doubtless, only in the third or tenth revision. There is, however, a danger to those who are overmuch impressed by Flaubert's sweating and grunting at literature, that they may think the seventeenth revision in any case better than the sixteenth. It is certain that much of Hearn's elaboration ended in rhetoric which leaves us cold and even without admiration. Such is the "Revery" in *Kotto*. In these later essays he is less mastered by his subjects and has leisure to elaborate very small things. He had time to use words like "pulchritude," and to speak of "the enormity of day" in ignorance or rash carelessness of the customary meaning of the word "enormity";<sup>56</sup> he still thought Pierre Loti "the world's greatest prose writer."<sup>57</sup> In "Incense" he returned to his love of precious catalogues. These are little things, but the important point is that the essays and reveries in which they occur, like "Azure Psychology," "Parfum de Jeunesse," "Nightmare Touch," leave us unmoved and therefore free to observe trifles which would be lost

<sup>56</sup> *E. and R.* 234.

<sup>57</sup> *S.* 88.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

in the sweep of a powerful thought or emotion. In "Vespertina Cognitio," e.g., there is nothing to blind us to the absurdity of "The stealthy step approached, —but with *lentor malevolently measured.*" Is it possible that a word like "lentor" could haunt a man who was born to write well? The writing has the appearance of being a quite conscious decoration of a subject of which the writer has exaggerated the importance to himself. Even the thought of the past living in the present, though it may have genuinely haunted Hearn, is introduced time after time with ineffectual monotony, as at the conclusion of "Fireflies" in *Kotto*. It is less a haunting idea than a trick, and it has perhaps become so through being used too deliberately. The childish reminiscences are injured in the same way. The desire to impress is too obvious for the reader to feel the power.

From the "Retrospectives" in these volumes it is a pleasure to turn to the stories and to the essays of pure information. Some of the stories he calls "only curios," and they are told definitely to "illustrate some strange beliefs." If he

## LAFCADIO HEARN

only fulfilled this purpose they must live long. But he does very much more. He gives us a large number of stories, weird, romantic, heroic, and horrible, all of them with the fascination of strangeness and yet made perfectly intelligible to English readers. Some are from books, some from oral sources. It will be long before we know how much of them Hearn contributed. To some he may have added little or nothing. His great achievement is harmony of tone; his additions are not noticeable. To a stranger they seem perfectly Japanese, though this may only be a way of saying that they are pure Lafcadio Hearn. They read like the most delicate and modest of translations, whether he is translating or not. Thus "Of a Promise Kept," in the *Miscellany*, seems a good translation of a perfect story, which illustrates Japanese belief and character in a vivid way. One brother going a long journey promises to be back by a certain day when "the chrysanthemums will be in bloom and we can go together to look at them." When that day arrived, they prepared a feast. As the evening grew and

## LAFCADIO HEARN

the traveller had not returned, the mother went to bed. The brother kept a look out but was about to re-enter the house for the last time when he saw a tall man—yes! his brother, Akana. He came in and sat down, but touched neither food nor wine. He explained his lateness. He had been kept back forcibly by a cousin at the command of a tyrannical lord. He had hoped to escape from the castle in time, but “until to-day” he could not find a way. His brother was incredulous, for it was two hundred and fifty miles away. “Yes,” he answered, but a soul can go a thousand leagues a day, and he had been allowed to keep his sword. “Thus only was I able to come to you. . . . Be good to our mother.” Then he disappeared. The brother went to the castle and killed the treacherous cousin in the midst of his family, and escaped alive because the lord admired the friendship and courage of the two men. The “curios” of *Kotto*, the “Stories from Strange Books” in *Shadowings*, the tales scattered through *Ghostly Japan* and almost filling *Kwaidan*, certainly make up one of the greatest treasures ever found by a

## LAFCADIO HEARN

translator in an utterly foreign land. Their beauty, their splendour, tenderness or horror is not to be denied, whether readers care much or nothing for Japan. Most are told without any interruption from the translator, and exist by themselves, with just that slight something absent which suggests the translation from a remote language. A few, like the "Story of Divination," in *Ghostly Japan*, are introduced by Hearn in person. This story, e.g., was taken from an old fortune-teller whom he knew—a man with "a love of independence as savage as a gypsy's" who would never stay more than two days at a time with Hearn. The story is of a famous fortune-teller living in a mountain hut with a tile for a pillow. One day a rat wakened him and he flung the tile at it and broke it. As he was reproaching himself he saw writing exposed by the fracture in the tile, saying: "In the year of the Hare in the fourth month, on the seventeenth day, at the Hour of the Serpent, this tile, after serving as a pillow, will be thrown at a rat and broken." He discovered the seal and name of the maker, and seeking him

## LAFCADIO HEARN

out learnt that an old fortune-teller had written the characters in the clay. He went in search of this man but arrived to hear that he was just dead. The visitor was, however, not unexpected, and at that very hour. A book had been left for him and in it he read about a treasure hidden near his own hut. He found it and became a very wealthy man. As to Hearn's old friend, he was found dead in the snow, standing erect at the foot of a pine upon the mountains; and Hearn remembered the Japanese saying: "The fortune-teller knows not his own fate."<sup>58</sup> The style of these stories, translations or not, is never, or practically never, disfigured by signs of uninspired labour like the essays: in them he has learnt to sacrifice the part to the whole. It is a plain, lucid, unnoticeable style, a little stiff and lacking in movement and natural continuity, but for the most part leaving the reader free to listen to speeches and watch events.

The informing essays are almost equally good of their kind, though they make room occasionally for phrases like that in the

<sup>58</sup> *G. J.* 49.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

description of a street of shops, "full of toys indescribable—dainty puerilities, fragile astonishments, laughter-making oddities." <sup>59</sup> He is a little stiff in his manner, saying, for example: "Before speaking further of the poetical literature of sémi, I must attempt a few remarks about the sémi themselves." <sup>60</sup> The *Miscellany* is full of interesting and often charming things, as in the "Songs of Japanese Children," songs relating to weather and sky and animals, play songs, narratives, and lullabies: or as in the "Dragonflies," where he gives many examples of tiny poems suggested by dragonflies, such as that famous one: "Catching dragonflies—I wonder where *he* has gone to-day" (the words uttered by a mother thinking of a dead child who used to play at catching dragonflies). It is the custom to write poems for a consolation in trouble, and in *Kotto* Hearn quotes several by a simple woman of the people, as they occur in a diary of her married life which he is translating. These essays of information, with their notes, touch so many different matters in so many

<sup>59</sup> *E. and R.* 40.      <sup>60</sup> *S.* 78.



## LAFCADIO HEARN

different ways that a knowledge of them would mean a deep knowledge of Japan. The "Japanese Buddhist Proverbs," e.g., are richer in suggestion than some of Hearn's rhapsodical meditations in achievement; and this is a comparison which can fairly be made, say in the case of the proverb: "Even the touching of sleeves in passing is caused by some relation in a future life."<sup>61</sup> After some of these proverbs it is not easy to enjoy his rapture upon the belief that "all being is One. One I felt myself to be with the thrilling of breeze and the racing of wave—with every flutter of shadow and flicker of sun—with the azure of sky and sea—with the great green bush of the land";<sup>62</sup> one with the fire, for he asks: "Have you never, when looking at some great burning, found yourself exulting with remorse in the triumph and glory of fire."<sup>63</sup> . . . "Beside the Sea" in the *Miscellany* shows us that in spite of his rapture about the One he could still be very tender over "the poor dead" and could not convince himself "that even the grosser substance of van-

<sup>61</sup> *G. J.* 191.    <sup>62</sup> *Kot.* 182.    <sup>63</sup> *E. and R.* 180.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

ished being ever completely dies, however dissolved or scattered—fleeting in the gale—floating in the mists,” etc.

In 1903 he was writing a series of chapters on Japan “from the standpoint of ancestor-worship.” At first he thought to use them as lectures in the United States, but in 1904 they were published under the title of “Japan: an attempt at interpretation.” He was afraid of the “real sociologist’s” opinion; thinking that he ought to stick to “birds and cats, insects and flowers, and queer small things”; and certainly it needed a superhuman effort for a man who saw the multitudes of little things from close at hand, to try to see the proportioned whole. Fortunately the book is substantial enough not to depend entirely upon breadth of view. For he put into it the main results of his reading of Japanese life and books, and made it probably the best single book, not a work of reference, upon Japan. He begins by recognizing the charm of a land where “every relation appears to be governed by altruism, every action directed by duty, and every object shaped by art,” where “for no little time

## LAFCADIO HEARN

these fairy folk can give you all the soft bliss of sleep.”<sup>64</sup> His business is with the nation which has “entered into the world’s political struggle”; but in “The Higher Buddhism” he again points out that “some Buddhist ideas offer the most startling analogy with the evolutionary ideas of our own time,” and also that there is no scientific counterpart to the belief that thoughts and deeds affect not only the next rebirth but “the nature of worlds yet unevolved, wherein, after innumerable cycles, you may have to live again.” He makes also the personal statement that Spencer helped him to see in Buddhist philosophy more than a romantic interest.<sup>65</sup> He is, however, more often concerned with Shinto. He shows us the development of the well-conducted family where the daily life “represents religion in the best and purest sense,” united under the blessed shadow of ancestors, “the makers and teachers of the present.” He suggests that three thousand years ago life in a Greek city was severe and cheerful, much like this Japanese life. And the family piety extends and

<sup>64</sup> *J.* 18.      <sup>65</sup> *J.* 232.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

by a natural process becomes "the loyalty that prays for seven successive lives to lay down on behalf of the sovereign."<sup>66</sup> In obedience to an imperial order the nation offered itself up to a reconstruction which has made it within thirty years formidable among "modern civilized powers." This power she owed to "the moral habit derived from her ancient cult—the religion of the ancestors"<sup>67</sup>—a religion which was inseparable from government and traditional ideas. He forecasted that Russia would have to fear this power more than repeating rifles:<sup>68</sup> he also expressed a fear lest success in a struggle with Russia should give Japan confidence to allow right of land tenure to foreigners, by means of which foreign capital, he thought, must triumph, and the country be lost. "Behind her military capacity," he explains, "is the disciplined experience of a thousand years; behind her industrial and commercial power, the experience of half a century."<sup>69</sup> This, however, is a purely scientific argument and may well be overthrown by the greater subtlety of facts. He shows at

<sup>66</sup> *J.* 58.    <sup>67</sup> *J.* 412.    <sup>68</sup> *J.* 507.    <sup>69</sup> *J.* 510.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

what a cost—to Western eyes—this disciplined power has been achieved. For example, a man's house is not "his castle," for to close it would be to insult the community. There is no privacy, and "the slightest divergence from rule,"<sup>70</sup> is frowned on. But on the other hand the community has a voice in more than daily conduct. For example, the principal of a college "holds his office only on the condition that his rule gives satisfaction to a majority of the students."<sup>71</sup> When Hearn was dismissed from the University there was an attempted agitation among the students to reinstate him. The same force forbids competition. Even the swift jinrikishaman may not pass the weak and slow, or if he dares to, the angry appeal to him may be translated, says Hearn: "This is a hard calling; and our lives would be made harder than they are, if there were no rules to prevent selfish competition."<sup>72</sup> But while admiring this, Hearn sees an impassable gulf between it and the European civilization with "unlimited individual right" to starve or purchase a peerage.

<sup>70</sup> *J.* 112.   <sup>71</sup> *J.* 437.   <sup>72</sup> *J.* 440.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

Hearn saw the horrors of this free society, but dreaded Socialism, which he called a "reversion toward the primitive conditions of human society."<sup>73</sup> He foresaw centuries of effort needed to burst "the fetters which Socialism now seeks to impose on human society."<sup>74</sup> He foresaw "a democracy more brutal than any Spartan oligarchy";<sup>75</sup> within twenty years (of 1904) a man would only write what he was told:<sup>76</sup> and this he confused with Socialism. As for Japan he held it to be obvious that "any society where ethical traditions forbid the individual to profit at the cost of his fellowmen will be placed at an enormous disadvantage when faced with the industrial struggle for existence against communities whose self-government permits of the widest possible freedom, and the widest range of competitive enterprise."<sup>77</sup> In this he is supported by a letter from Spencer (quoted in an appendix) offering to a Japanese statesman the advice to keep Americans and Europeans "as much as possible at arm's length," to forbid, for example, the

<sup>73</sup> *J.* 279.

<sup>74</sup> *B. II.* 184.

<sup>75</sup> *B. II.* 205. <sup>76</sup> *B. II.* 512. <sup>77</sup> *J.* 279.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

intermarriage of foreigners and Japanese, and this on the ground that "the result is inevitably a bad one in the long run." Hearn follows with a concluding comment, saying that "in another generation Japan will be able, without peril, to abandon much of her conservatism; but, for the time being, her conservatism is her salvation."<sup>78</sup> He just lived to see the sure promise of her triumph over Russia, and to record in one of his last essays "the joyous tone of public confidence"—"the playful confidence"—"the admirably restrained pride of the nation in its victories."<sup>79</sup> He died on September 28, 1904. The "Interpretation" can only be judged by sociologists and by the greatest of them, Time. It was an extraordinary effort—Mrs. Hearn tells us of his long struggles—to express what one man could not possibly grasp, especially one who knew, as he said himself, enough about Japan to know that he knew nothing. He did violence to himself by the asceticism of subduing for the purpose of this book a great part of himself and of what he had taken to be himself. The

<sup>78</sup> *J.* 534.

<sup>79</sup> *M. W.* 183.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

most he allows himself is a catalogue now and then and a brief picture of a dance or of a scene from the wild Oki coast—"the naked figure of a young fisherman erect at the prow of his boat, clapping his hands in salutation to the rising sun, whose ruddy glow transformed him into a statue of bronze."<sup>80</sup> There is perhaps not a single example in the book of his characteristic bad writing, though in *The Milky Way* he showed himself still capable of using "facile" simply as a synonym for "easy." But the book is more than the marvellous *tour de force* of a writer about "cats and birds and little things." His other books give scattered impressions, this an abstract of them arranged and extended under the guidance of a scientific spirit; and it is hard to imagine a better book which is neither a cyclopædia nor a traveller's bird's-eye view. Hearn knew too much and was too sober for the bird's-eye view and was unprepared to immolate himself in a cyclopædia; but his compromise, taken with the stories, the studies, the impressions, and the articles of pure information, pre-

<sup>80</sup> *J.* 152.



## LAFCADIO HEARN

sents a marvellously detailed picture which is yet always and everywhere alive. The personality of the writer is in his best work shown by his abnegation of personality, though this was probably due to no conscious effort: the effort was needed rather to obtrude it. We can perhaps never be sure whether he really had reconciled in his heart, as a French critic has said, the science of the West and the religion of the East; but his books set them side by side or inextricably mingled in a manner both useful and attractive. No one has done more to "remind Europe of the importance of Eastern civilization." Professor Chamberlain testified to the "scientific accuracy of detail" and the "tender and exquisite brilliancy of style," in these pictures of "Japanese life, manners, thoughts, aspirations, the student-class, the singing girls, the politicians . . . not men only but ghosts and folk-lore fancies, the scenery of remote islands which Hearn alone among Europeans has ever trod,"<sup>81</sup> everything in fact, except "the humorous side of native life": to expect humour from so solitary

<sup>81</sup> *T. J.* 65.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

and pitiful a man would be unreasonable. Mr. Yone Noguchi says that the Japanese were "regenerated by his sudden magic, and baptized afresh under his transcendental rapture; in fact, the old romances which we had forgotten ages ago were brought again to quiver in the ear, and the ancient beauty which we buried under the dust rose again with a strange yet new splendour;"<sup>82</sup> and he foresees that Hearn's books will be an inspiration in Japanese literature. He became, says Mr. Noguchi, a Japanese writer, and I sometimes feel that with Japanese writers he should be compared. The material in which he worked is still so foreign to most of us that it is not easy to say how much is his in the stories, for example, which are his finest work. I have said that they are like choice translations. He has been accused of submitting himself in a passiveness more pure than wise to Japanese influence; but the blind minnow cannot assume the colour of its environment. Personality of the vivid militant kind is just now worshipped, and the silver grey is hidden

<sup>82</sup> N. 17.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

from us. Some day it may be discovered that what we think is Japanese in his work is really Hearn, shorn of his French romanticism. Certainly he has either imposed on us a personal impression of Japanese things not the less deep for its delicacy, or he has made himself a mirror in a manner unapproached by other observers of foreign countries. To impute observation to his maturest work is an insult; he had become the thing observed: he was a Japanese writer "in perfect accord with the sweet glamour of Old Japan,"<sup>83</sup> to use again the words of Mr. Noguchi, whose fine Japanese mind has not been clouded by the acquisition of a beautiful English style.

<sup>83</sup> N. 5.

# WORKS BY LAFCADIO HEARN.

---

**The Romance of the Milky Way** and other Studies  
and Stories. Crown 8vo., 5s. net.

"The book is full of prettiness . . . not a page is without its charm and beauty."—*Athenaeum*.

**Letters from the Raven.** The Correspondence of  
Lafcadio Hearn with Henry Watkin. Edited with an intro-  
duction by MILTON BRONNER. Illustrated. Crown 8vo.,  
5s. net.

"The book is a pleasant one, attractively commemorative of a highly  
gifted writer."—*Globe*.

"These Letters are rich in sidelights on Eastern civilization. . . .  
The book is a veritable human document."—*The Standard*.

**Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn.** Edited by ELIZA-  
BETH BISLAND. 2 vols. Illustrated. Demy 8vo., 24s. net.

"A wholly delightful book put together just as such a book should  
be—allowed to tell its own tale."—*Queen*.

**The Japanese Letters of Lafcadio Hearn.** Edited by  
ELIZABETH BISLAND. Illustrated. Demy 8vo, 12s. net.

This collection of the Correspondence of Lafcadio Hearn contains the  
fullest expression of his temperament, his views on life, methods of  
work, etc. The volume is fully illustrated, in part from Hearn's own  
sketches of Japanese scenes, and uniform with the "Life and Letters  
of Lafcadio Hearn."

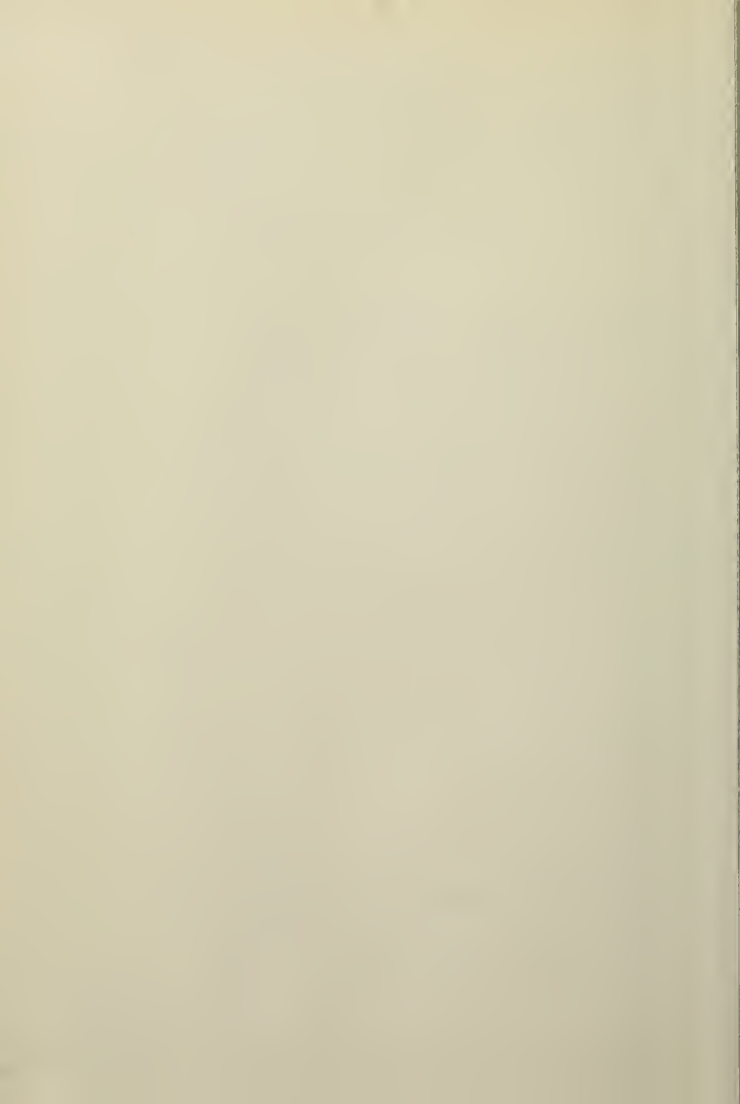
"The book is a rare feast for readers who are fond of a good letter  
writer."—*Scotsman*.

"The charm and fancy and humour which illumine these admirable  
letters. Everywhere are fascinating glimpses such as no one else has  
given us, and no one else will ever give us of the Japan which is fast  
becoming merely a great power like the rest of us."—*Observer*.

---

LONDON: CONSTABLE & COMPANY, LTD.













OCT 7 1906

DOBBS BROTHERS LIBRARY BINDING CO.

ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 018 597 587 3

