



CLASSICS TO GO

**SOME
CHINESE GHOSTS**
LAFCADIO HEARN

Some Chinese Ghosts

Lafcadio Hearn

PREFACE

I think that my best apology for the insignificant size of this volume is the very character of the material composing it. In preparing the legends I sought especially for *weird beauty*; and I could not forget this striking observation in Sir Walter Scott's "Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad": "The supernatural, though appealing to certain powerful emotions very widely and deeply sown amongst the human race, is, nevertheless, a *spring which is peculiarly apt to lose its elasticity by being too much pressed upon.*"

Those desirous to familiarize themselves with Chinese literature as a whole have had the way made smooth for them by the labors of linguists like Julien, Pavie, Rémusat, De Rosny, Schlegel, Legge, Hervey-Saint-Denys, Williams, Biot, Giles, Wylie, Beal, and many other Sinologists. To such great explorers, indeed, the realm of Cathayan story belongs by right of discovery and conquest; yet the humbler traveller who follows wonderingly after them into the vast and mysterious pleasure-grounds of Chinese fancy may surely be permitted to cull a few of the marvellous flowers there growing,—a self-luminous *hwa-wang*, a black lily, a phosphoric rose or two,—as souvenirs of his curious voyage.

L.H.

NEW ORLEANS, March 15, 1886.

CONTENTS

THE SOUL OF THE GREAT BELL

THE STORY OF MING-Y

THE LEGEND OF TCHI-NIU

THE RETURN OF YEN-TCHIN-KING

THE TRADITION OF THE TEA-PLANT

THE TALE OF THE PORCELAIN-GOD

The Soul of the Great Bell

She hath spoken, and her words still resound in his ears.

HAO-KHIEOU-TCHOUAN: C. IX.

THE SOUL OF THE GREAT BELL

The water-clock marks the hour in the *Ta-chung sz'*,—in the Tower of the Great Bell: now the mallet is lifted to smite the lips of the metal monster,—the vast lips inscribed with Buddhist texts from the sacred *Fa-hwa-King*, from the chapters of the holy *Ling-yen-King*! Hear the great bell responding!—how mighty her voice, though tongueless!—*KO-NGAI!* All the little dragons on the high-tilted eaves of the green roofs shiver to the tips of their gilded tails under that deep wave of sound; all the porcelain gargoyles tremble on their carven perches; all the hundred little bells of the pagodas quiver with desire to speak. *KO-NGAI!*—all the green-and-gold tiles of the temple are vibrating; the wooden goldfish above them are writhing against the sky; the uplifted finger of Fo shakes high over the heads of the worshippers through the blue fog of incense! *KO-NGAI!*—What a thunder tone was that! All the lacquered goblins on the palace cornices wriggle their fire-colored tongues! And after each huge shock, how wondrous the multiple echo and the great golden moan and, at last, the sudden sibilant sobbing in the ears when the immense tone faints away in broken whispers of silver,—as though a woman should whisper, "*Hiai!*" Even so the great bell hath sounded every day for well-nigh five hundred years,—*Ko-Ngai*: first with

stupendous clang, then with immeasurable moan of gold, then with silver murmuring of "*Hiai!*" And there is not a child in all the many-colored ways of the old Chinese city who does not know the story of the great bell,—who cannot tell you why the great bell says *Ko-Ngai* and *Hiai!*

Now, this is the story of the great bell in the Ta-chung sz', as the same is related in the *Pe-Hiao-Tou-Choue*, written by the learned Yu-Pao-Tchen, of the City of Kwang-tchau-fu.

Nearly five hundred years ago the Celestially August, the Son of Heaven, Yong-Lo, of the "Illustrious," or Ming, dynasty, commanded the worthy official Kouan-Yu that he should have a bell made of such size that the sound thereof might be heard for one hundred *li*. And he further ordained that the voice of the bell should be strengthened with brass, and deepened with gold, and sweetened with silver; and that the face and the great lips of it should be graven with blessed sayings from the sacred books, and that it should be suspended in the centre of the imperial capital, to sound through all the many-colored ways of the City of Pe-king.

Therefore the worthy mandarin Kouan-Yu assembled the master-moulders and the renowned bellsmiths of the empire, and all men of great repute and cunning in foundry work; and they measured the materials for the alloy, and treated them skilfully, and prepared the moulds, the fires, the instruments, and the monstrous melting-pot for fusing the metal. And they labored exceedingly, like giants,—neglecting only rest and sleep and the comforts of life; toiling both night and day in obedience to Kouan-Yu, and striving in all things to do the behest of the Son of Heaven.

But when the metal had been cast, and the earthen mould separated from the glowing casting, it was discovered that, despite their great labor and ceaseless care, the result was void of worth; for the metals had rebelled one against the