

FORGOTTEN TALES. OF ANCIENT CHINA

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WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS

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EMPEROR FU HSI, FOUNDER OF THE
CHINESE EMPIRE

“As they sat in the cool fragrance of this delicious spot, Lalla Rookh remarked that she could fancy it the abode of that Flower-Loving Nymph whom they worship in the temples of Kathay.”

Fu Hsi was the son of the Flower-Loving Nymph, the Daughter of Heaven, worshiped in China for so long. The story is that the nymph one day was gathering flowers upon the banks of a stream when a glittering rainbow enfolded her in an embrace of love. At the end of twelve years her hour came and of her was born a son, Fu Hsi, who was as marvelous in nature, though not so beautiful, as herself.

FOREWORD

“Midnight finds me with an expiring lamp, while the wind whistles mournfully without; and over my cheerless table I piece together my tales.”

P'u Sung-ling wrote that three hundred years ago here in China. Many a night lately I could have said the same thing—with some modifications in the situation. I have been piecing together some exceedingly interesting old tales, and here they are—the best book on China since Marco Polo wrote his *Travels*. Do you hear me, P'u Sung-ling, out there in your green mound?

I am going to talk to you for a page or two, my dear dead fellow craftsman, and other folk may listen in if they so desire. Midnight will come before I finish writing this foreword, but there will be no expiring lamp unless something goes wrong in the French Town power house. There is no smoking wick before me to sputter and fail, but, instead, the constant glow of imprisoned sunbeams dancing on a wire in a crystal globe.

And my table is anything but cheerless. It has a pipe, some cigars, and some cigarettes, and a bottle or two of red wine—and that is cheerful; a vase of flowers—the kind of flowers that perhaps used to gladden your vanished eyes; and there are books and other things.

While the table, the light, and the writer are different, the night outside is the same. The graves and the

gloom are still there, and the spirits of the myriads of black-haired people who have come and gone; and again the wind stirs mournfully in the weeping willow trees by the dark water's fringe.

And, too, China's past has not changed since you died. The people and the places are all here — here the romance and the glory. Listen, P'u Sung-ling, and I shall tell you what I have done. I have wandered back across the fields of time,— back to the day when Flaming Pearl was the jewel of the Dragon Court, and beyond that to Wu Wang, and Yü, and the Yellow Emperor, and Fu Hsi,—for five thousand years, to the very beginning of things in the Middle Flowery Land. What I have gathered of history that should not be forgotten, of myths, of legends, of traditions, and of stories surpassing strange, I have put together in this book.

Did you know when you were alive that China had had twenty different designations throughout the centuries — Serica, Thin, "The Dawn," Taugas, Cathay, and the rest? Well, I tell about these in the first chapter, and it is surprising. I follow on with an account of Great Yü's nine provinces, and then, in turn, give the stories of the old feudal states; an account of "The Three Kingdoms"—China's time of chivalry; the annals of the old imperial capitals; the myths of the mountains; not forgetting the tale of Si Wang Mu, the Goddess of the West, who lived by the Lake of Gems; the lore of the rivers; the legends of the lakes; old traditions of the islands; an account of Macao and Hongkong, two famous foreign colonies; and the history of the Grand Canal and the Great

FOREWORD

v.

Wall, which were known of old as the "Imperial River" and the "Red Rampart."

If you were alive, P'u Sung-ling, and could read English, I believe you would like what I have pieced together, and no doubt be willing to spend four Mexican dollars for it.

VERNE DYSON.

SHANGHAI,

MIDNIGHT, NOVEMBER 6, 1927.

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FORGOTTEN TALES OF ANCIENT CHINA

I

CHINA'S DIFFERENT NAMES THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES

SO old is China that she has outlived many names, no one designation having the lastingness of the nation itself nor the ability to endure the wearing grind of time through twenty-two dynasties and the reigns of two hundred forty different Emperors. One name, it seems, was far from enough for immemorial China; as she has a veritable chain of names, reaching back through five thousand years, and pendent to its links, like gems from the hand of an ancient lapidary, are the remembrances of those old fiefs and kingdoms, durbars and battles, old gray walls, temples, pagodas, palaces, silk and jade and ivory and shining feathers, pallid lotus blossoms in the Emperor's gardens, heroes and famous beauties, and lost and forgotten cities. How fascinating are the imperishable recollections of these adventures, romances, mysteries, conquests, and splendors!

• 2 FORGOTTEN TALES OF ANCIENT CHINA

Old as China is, the West has only vague memories of this country, and one must seek in her own books, monuments, and ruins for her connected story. Time and again, in the dawn of history, the nation of black-haired people on the far shore of Asia focused the attention of Europe upon themselves, then became completely forgotten, to reappear centuries later under a new designation. The fitful ebb and flow of China into the consciousness of the West under new names, sometimes definite but more often vague and shadowy, is one of the oddities of history.

In the long course of her existence, China has had, perhaps, twenty-five different names, and while only three or four of them have become definitely established in the literature of the Occident, each one of them is rich in historical memories. Tzinistā, Taugas, Chinasthana, Thin—concerning these, and other impermanent appellations for the Flowery Kingdom, are many fanciful conjectures, strange stories, and mythical geographical settings. The three designations for the Land of the Dragon that have become most firmly fixed in world history are Seres, the classical name used in ancient Rome and Greece; Cathay, the romantically flavored term employed by Marco Polo and other Mediæval adventurers; and China, the name universally used in modern times, and connoting trade and commerce.

There are two peculiar features attached to the study of the name "China," now so firmly established in the mind of the world. It is, first, a surprising fact that this word falls strangely upon the ears of

the people whom we designate as the Chinese. They do not now call their country by this name nor have they ever at any time in the past done so. "China" is purely a foreign designation for the country which by its natives has long been known as the "Middle Kingdom."

Further, it is curious that the term "China," which came into general use only in the last few hundred years is perhaps the oldest of all the names that have been applied to the country by foreigners. After the scholars of the West had quite generally agreed that this word was derived from Ts'in, or Ch'in, the title of the dynasty of 255-206 B.C., it was found in the *Code of Manu* and in the *Mahabharata*, that Indian epic, eight times as long as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined, which was written a thousand years before the Ts'ins. In this connection S. Wells Williams affirms that the occurrence "of the name of China, applied to a land or to a people with whom the Hindus had intercourse in the Twelfth Century before Christ and who were probably the Chinese, throws the origin far back into the remotest past." Thus, the word "China" lay forgotten in the books of India all through the period of Greece and Rome and until the Middle Ages, when it was occasionally mentioned with indefinite denotation. Finally, in modern times it arose out of its literary oblivion and spread rapidly through the writings of all civilized nations except those of China herself.

The Bible contains an interesting but somewhat disputed reference to China. Many have believed that

the prophet Isaiah was thinking of this country when he wrote, "Behold, these shall come from far; and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim."

The people mentioned by the prophet as living at the extremity of the known world were either in the south or the east. Early interpreters usually adopted the former view, but the Greek version in the Septuagint favors the latter, as do some eminent modern scholars, particularly Gesenius, the distinguished German orientalist; Hitzig, the great Biblical critic; and Knobel, a German authority on the Old Testament, and the author of a standard commentary on Isaiah. These authorities identify Sinim with the classical Sinæ, the Latin name for the inhabitants of China.

四海會同

The Chinese characters for "All Within the Four Seas."

Apparently the first designation employed by the Chinese people for their country was Tien Hsia, "All Beneath the Sky," the term now used for the "world." This cannot be regarded as a name, but more as a descriptive term. A similar vanity is disclosed in the slightly later expression, "All Within the Four Seas," of which there are classic examples in the "Tribute of Yü" and in Wu Wang's "Great Declaration" at the Ford of Meng. In describing the monumental labors of Yü, the *Shu Ching* (*Book of History*) says that "access to the capital was secured for All Within

the Four Seas." Wu Wang appealed to his vassals, in this fashion, "Do you aid me, the one man, to cleanse All Within the Four Seas?"

Early in the feudal age, "Middle Kingdom" and "Middle Land" came into use by the Chinese as names for their native country, each one based upon a conceited popular belief that China was at the central position of the world. It is possible that at first the phrase "Middle Kingdom" referred to the place of the imperial domain in the center of a protecting group of vassal states, but more likely it visualized a cultured and superior empire surrounded by uncouth barbarians. One of the earliest appearances of this name was in the *Book of Odes* in a poem admonishing Emperor Li, and from which come these lines:

中
國

The Chinese characters for "Middle Kingdom."

"And still you (and your creatures) go on in this course.
Indignation is rife against you here in the Middle Kingdom,
And extends to the demon regions."

In the Chou Dynasty, which succeeded the Shang, "Middle Kingdom" became the popular native designation of the country. An expanding knowledge of geography, and the discovery that other civilized nations existed, did not discourage the use of this expression in the succeeding centuries. In A.D. 1656, two thousand years and more after Emperor Li was given the unheeded warning in the Middle Kingdom, we find John Nieuhoff writing about the enduring fondness of the Chinese for this name: