

STRANGE  
STORIES

FROM A

CHINESE  
STUDIO

聊齋志異

# STRANGE STORIES

FROM A

## CHINESE STUDIO

TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED

BY

HERBERT A. GILES

HON. M.A. (CANTAB.),

HON. LL.D. (ABERD.), PROFESSOR OF CHINESE IN  
THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE AND SOME  
TIME H.B.M. CONSUL AT NINGPO

FOURTH REVISED  
EDITION

KELLY & WALSH, LIMITED  
SHANGHAI, HONGKONG, SINGAPORE

1926

STRANGE STORIES

FROM A

CHINESE STUDIO

STRANGE STORIES  
FROM THE  
CHINESE STUDIO

THE STRANGE AND MYSTERIOUS  
STORIES OF THE  
CHINESE STUDIO  
BY  
HERBERT A. GILES  
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
THE CHINESE STUDIO  
AND A FOREWORD BY  
THE AUTHOR

KELLY & WALSH, LTD., PRINTERS, SHANGHAI.

TO  
MY GRANDCHILDREN

PENELOPE ESBELL LAURENCE

MARGARET VALÉRIE ST. GILES

SYLVIA SARAH GILES

ROSAMOND ST. GILES

AUSTIN LOUDON VALENTINE ST. GILES

JOHN ALLEN LAURENCE

AUDREY LAURENCE

## INTRODUCTION

THE barest skeleton of a biography is all that can be formed from the very scanty materials which remain to mark the career of a writer whose work has been for the best part of two centuries as familiar throughout the length and breadth of China as are the tales of the "Arabian Nights" in all English-speaking communities. The author of "Strange Stories" was a native of Tzū-ch'uan, in the province of Shan-tung. His family name was P'u; his particular name was Sung-ling; and the designation or literary epithet by which, in accordance with Chinese usage, he was commonly known among his friends, was Liu-hsien, or "Last of the Immortals." A further fancy name, given to him probably by some enthusiastic admirer, was Liu-ch'üan, or "Willow Spring;" but he is now familiarly spoken of simply as P'u Sung-ling. We are unacquainted with the years of his birth or death; however, by the aid of a meagre entry in the *History of Tzū-ch'uan* it is possible to make a pretty good guess at the date of the former event. For we are there told that P'u Sung-ling successfully competed for the lowest or bachelor's degree before he had reached the age of twenty; and that in 1651 he was in the position of a graduate of ten years' standing, having failed in the interim to take the second, or master's, degree. To

this failure, due, as we are informed in the history above quoted, to his neglect of the beaten track of academic study, we owe the existence of his great work; not, indeed, his only production, though the one by which, as Confucius said of his own "Spring and Autumn,"<sup>1</sup> men will know him. All else that we have on record of P'u Sung-ling, besides the fact that he lived in close companionship with several eminent scholars of the day, is gathered from his own words, written when, in 1679, he laid down his pen upon the completion of a task which was to raise him within a short period to a foremost rank in the Chinese world of letters. Of that record I here append a close translation, accompanied by such notes as are absolutely necessary to make it intelligible to non-students of Chinese.

### AUTHOR'S OWN RECORD

"Clad in wistaria, girdled with ivy;"<sup>2</sup> thus sang Ch'ü-P'ing<sup>3</sup> in his *Falling into Trouble*.<sup>4</sup> Of ox-headed devils and serpent Gods,<sup>5</sup> he of the long-nails<sup>6</sup> never wearied to tell. Each interprets in his own way the music of heaven;<sup>7</sup> and whether it be discord or not, depends upon antecedent

<sup>1</sup> Annals of the Lu State.

<sup>2</sup> Said of the bogies of the hills, in allusion to their *clothes*. Here quoted with reference to the official classes, in ridicule of the title under which they hold posts which, from a literary point of view, they are totally unfit to occupy.

<sup>3</sup> A celebrated statesman (B.C. 332-295) who, having lost his master's favour by the intrigues of a rival, finally drowned himself in despair. The annual Dragon Festival is said by some to be a "search" for his body. The term *San Lü* used here was the name of an office held by Ch'ü-P'ing.

<sup>4</sup> A poem addressed by Ch'ü-P'ing to his Prince, after his disgrace. Its non-success was the immediate cause of his death.

<sup>5</sup> That is, of the supernatural generally.

<sup>6</sup> A poet of the T'ang dynasty whose eyebrows met, whose nails were very long, and who could write very fast.

<sup>7</sup> "You know the music of earth," said Chuang Tzû; "but you have not heard the music of heaven."



causes.<sup>8</sup> As for me, I cannot, with my poor autumn fire-fly's light, match myself against the hobgoblins of the age.<sup>9</sup> I am but the dust in the sunbeam, a fit laughing-stock for devils.<sup>10</sup> For my talents are not those of Kan Pao,<sup>11</sup> elegant explorer of the records of the Gods; I am rather animated by the spirit of Su Tung-p'o,<sup>12</sup> who loved to hear men speak of the supernatural. I get people to commit what they tell me to writing and subsequently I dress it up in the form of a story; and thus in the lapse of time my friends from all quarters have supplied me with quantities of material, which, from my habit of collecting, has grown into a vast pile.<sup>13</sup>

Human beings, I would point out, are not beyond the pale of fixed laws, and yet there are more remarkable phenomena in their midst than in the country of those who crop their hair;<sup>14</sup> antiquity is unrolled before us, and many tales are to be found therein stranger than that of the nation of Flying Heads.<sup>15</sup> "Irrepressible bursts, and luxurious

<sup>8</sup> That is, to the operation of some influence surviving from a previous existence.

<sup>9</sup> This is another hit at the ruling classes. Hsi K'ang, a celebrated musician and alchemist (A.D. 223-262), was sitting one night alone, playing upon his lute, when suddenly a man with a tiny face walked in, and began to stare hard at him, the stranger's face enlarging all the time. "I'm not going to match myself against a devil!" cried the musician, after a few moments, and instantly blew out the light.

<sup>10</sup> When Liu Chüan, Governor of Wu-ling, determined to relieve his poverty by trade, he saw a devil standing by his side, laughing and rubbing its hands for glee. "Poverty and wealth are matters of destiny," said Liu Chüan; "but to be laughed at by a devil—," and accordingly he desisted from his intention.

<sup>11</sup> A writer who flourished in the early part of the fourth century, and composed a work in thirty books entitled *Supernatural Researches*.

<sup>12</sup> The famous poet, statesman, and essayist, who flourished A.D. 1036-1101.

<sup>13</sup> "And his friends had the habit of jotting down for his unfailing delight anything quaint or comic that they came across."—*The World* on Charles Dickens, July 24, 1878.

<sup>14</sup> It is related in the *Historical Record* that when T'ai Po and Yü Chung fled to the southern savages they saw men with tattooed bodies and short hair.

<sup>15</sup> A fabulous community, so called because the heads of the men are in the habit of leaving their bodies, and flying down to marshy places to feed on worms and crabs. A red ring is seen the night before the flight encircling the neck of the man whose head is about to fly; at daylight the head returns. Some say that the ears are used as wings; others that the hands also leave the body and fly away.



ease,"<sup>16</sup>—such was always his enthusiastic strain. "For ever indulging in liberal thought,"<sup>17</sup>—thus he spoke openly without restraint. Were men like these to open my book, I should be a laughing-stock to them indeed. At the cross-road<sup>18</sup> men will not listen to me, and yet I have some knowledge of the three states of existence<sup>19</sup> spoken of beneath the cliff;<sup>20</sup> neither should the words I utter be set aside because of him that utters them.<sup>21</sup> When the bow<sup>22</sup> was hung at my father's door, he dreamed that a sickly-looking Buddhist priest, but half covered by his stole, entered the chamber. On one of his breasts was a round piece of plaster like a *cash*;<sup>23</sup> and my father, waking from sleep, found that I, just born, had a similar black patch on my body. As a child, I was thin and constantly ailing, and unable to hold my own in the battle of life. Our own home was chill and desolate as a monastery; and working there for my livelihood with my pen,<sup>24</sup> I was as poor as a priest with his alms-bowl.<sup>25</sup> Often and often I put my hand to my head<sup>26</sup> and exclaimed, "Surely he who sat with his

<sup>16</sup> A quotation from the admired works of Wang Po, a brilliant scholar and poet, who was drowned at the early age of twenty-eight, A.D. 676.

<sup>17</sup> I have hitherto failed in all attempts to identify the particular writer here intended. The phrase is used by the poet Li T'ai-po and others.

<sup>18</sup> The cross-road of the "Five Fathers" is here mentioned, which the commentator tells us is merely the name of the place.

<sup>19</sup> The past, present, and future life of the Buddhist system of metempsychosis.

<sup>20</sup> A certain man, who was staying at a temple, dreamt that an old priest appeared to him beneath a jade-stone cliff, and, pointing to a stick of burning incense, said to him, "That incense represents a vow to be fulfilled; but I say unto you, that ere its smoke shall have curled away, your three states of existence will have been already accomplished." The meaning is that time on earth is as nothing to the Gods.

<sup>21</sup> This remark occurs in the fifteenth chapter of the Analects or Confucian Gospels.

<sup>22</sup> The birth of a boy was formerly signalled by hanging a bow at the door; that of a girl, by displaying a small towel—indicative of the parts that each would hereafter play in the drama of life.

<sup>23</sup> See Note 2 to No. II.

<sup>24</sup> Literally, "ploughing with my pen."

<sup>25</sup> The *patra* or bowl, used by Buddhist mendicants, in imitation of the celebrated alms-dish of Shākyamuni Buddha.

<sup>26</sup> Literally, "scratched my head," as is often done by the Chinese in perplexity or doubt.

face to the wall<sup>27</sup> was myself in a previous state of existence ; " and thus I referred my non-success in this life to the influence of a destiny surviving from the last. I have been tossed hither and thither in the direction of the ruling wind, like a flower falling in filthy places ; but the six paths<sup>28</sup> of transmigration are inscrutable indeed, and I have no right to complain. As it is, midnight finds me with an expiring lamp, while the wind whistles mournfully without ; and over my cheerless table I piece together my tales,<sup>29</sup> vainly hoping to produce a sequel to the *Infernal Regions*.<sup>30</sup> With a bumper I stimulate my pen, yet I only succeed thereby in "venting my excited feelings,"<sup>31</sup> and as I thus commit my thoughts to writing, truly I am an object worthy of commiseration. Alas ! I am but the bird, that dreading the winter frost, finds no shelter in the tree ; the autumn insect that chirps to the moon, and hugs the door for warmth. For where are they who know me ?<sup>32</sup> They are " in the bosky grove, and at the frontier pass " <sup>33</sup>—wrapped in an impenetrable gloom !

From the above curious document the reader will

<sup>27</sup> Alluding to Bôdhidharma, who came from India to China, and tried to convert the Emperor Wu Ti of the Liang dynasty ; but, failing in his attempt, because he insisted that real merit lay not in works but in purity and wisdom combined, he retired full of mortification to a temple at Sung-shan, where he sat for nine years before a rock, until his own image was imprinted thereon.

<sup>28</sup> The six *gati* or conditions of existence, namely :—angels, men, demons, hungry devils, brute beasts, and tortured sinners.

<sup>29</sup> Literally, " putting together the pieces under the forelegs (of foxes) to make robes." This part of the fox-skin is the most valuable for making fur clothes.

<sup>30</sup> The work of a well-known writer, named Lin I-ch'ing, who flourished during the Sung Dynasty.

<sup>31</sup> Alluding to an essay by Han Fei, a philosopher of the third century B.C., in which he laments the iniquity of the age in general, and the corruption of officials in particular. He finally committed suicide in prison, where he had been cast by the intrigues of a rival minister.

<sup>32</sup> Confucius (*Anal.* xiv.) said, " Alas ! there is no one who knows me (to be what I am)."

<sup>33</sup> The great poet Tu Fu (A.D. 712-770) dreamt that his greater predecessor, Li T'ai-po (A.D. 705-762) appeared to him, " coming when the maple-grove was in darkness, and returning while the frontier-pass was still obscured ;"—that is, at night, when no one could see him ; the meaning being that he never came at all, and that those " who know me (P'u Sung-ling) " are equally non-existent.

gain some insight into the abstruse, but at the same time marvellously beautiful, style of this gifted writer. The whole essay—for such it is, and among the most perfect of its kind—is intended chiefly as a satire upon the scholarship of the age; scholarship which had turned the author back to the disappointment of a private life, himself conscious all the time of the inward fire that had been lent him by heaven. It is the keynote of his own subsequent career, spent in the retirement of home, in the society of books and friends; as also to the numerous uncomplimentary allusions which occur in all his stories relating to official life. Whether or not the world at large has been a gainer by this instance of the fallibility of competitive examinations has been already decided in the affirmative by the millions of P'u Sung-ling's own countrymen, who for the past two hundred years have more than made up to him by a posthumous and enduring reverence for the loss of those earthly and ephemeral honours which he seems to have coveted so much.

*Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, known to the Chinese as the *Liao Chai Chih I*, or more familiarly, the *Liao Chai*, has hardly been mentioned by a single foreigner without some inaccuracy on the part of the writer concerned. For instance, the late Mr. Mayers states in his *Chinese Reader's Manual*, p. 176, that this work was composed "circa A.D. 1710," the fact being that the collection was actually completed in 1679, as we know by the date attached to the "Author's Own Record" given above. I should mention, however, that the *Liao Chai* was originally, and for many years, circulated in manuscript only. P'u Sung-ling, as we are told in a colophon by his grandson to the first

edition, was too poor to meet the heavy expense of block-cutting; and it was not until so late as 1740, when the author must have been already for some time a denizen of the dark land he so much loved to describe, that his aforesaid grandson printed and published the collection now universally famous. Since then many editions have been laid before the Chinese public, the best of which is that by Tan Ming-lun, a Salt Commissioner, who flourished during the reign of 'Tao Kuang, and who in 1842 produced, at his own expense, an excellent edition in sixteen small octavo volumes of about 160 pages each. And as various editions will occasionally be found to contain various readings, I would here warn students of Chinese who wish to compare my rendering with the text, that it is from the edition of Tan Ming-lun, collated with that of Yü Chi, published in 1766, that this translation has been made. Many have been the commentaries and disquisitions upon the meaning of obscure passages and the general scope of this work; to say nothing of the prefaces with which the several editions have been ushered into the world. Of the latter, I have selected one specimen, from which the reader will be able to form a tolerably accurate opinion as to the true nature of these always singular and usually difficult compositions. Here it is:—

## T'ANG MÊNG-LAI'S PREFACE

The common saying, "He regards a camel as a horse with a swelled back," trivial of itself, may be used in illustration of greater matters. Men are wont to attribute an existence only to such things as they daily see with their own eyes, and they marvel at whatsoever, appearing before them at one instant, vanishes at the next. And yet

it is not at the sprouting and falling of foliage, nor at the metamorphosis of insects that they marvel, but only at the manifestations of the supernatural world; though of a truth, the whistling of the wind and the movement of streams, with nothing to set the one in motion or give sound to the other, might well be ranked among extraordinary phenomena. We are accustomed to these, and therefore do not note them. We marvel at devils and foxes: we do not marvel at man. But who is it that causes a man to move and to speak?—to which question comes the ready answer of each individual so questioned, “*I do.*” This “*I do,*” however, is merely a personal consciousness of the facts under discussion. For a man can see with his eyes, but he cannot see what it is that makes him see; he can hear with his ears, but he cannot hear what it is that makes him hear; how, then, is it possible for him to understand the rationale of things he can neither see nor hear? Whatever has come within the bounds of their own ocular or auricular experience men regard as proved to be actually existing; and only such things.<sup>34</sup> But this term “experience” may be understood in various senses. For instance, people speak of something which has certain attributes as *form*, and of something else which has certain other attributes as *substance*; ignorant as they are that form and substance are to be found existing without those particular attributes. Things which are thus constituted are inappreciable, indeed, by our ears and eyes; but we cannot argue that therefore they do not exist. Some persons can see a mosquito’s eye, while to others even a mountain is invisible; some can hear the sound of ants battling together, while others, again, fail to catch the roar of a thunder-peal. Powers of seeing and hearing vary; there should be no

<sup>34</sup> “Thus, since countless things exist that the senses *can* take account of, it is evident that nothing exists that the senses *can not* take account of.”—The “Professor” in W. H. Mallock’s *New Paul and Virginia*.

This passage recalls another curious classification by the great Chinese philosopher Han Wên-kung. “There are some things which possess form but are devoid of sound, as, for instance, jade and stones; others have sound, but are without form, such as wind and thunder; others, again, have both form and sound, such as men and animals; and lastly, there is a class devoid of both, namely, *devils and spirits.*”

reckless imputations of blindness. According to the schoolmen, man at his death is dispersed like wind or fire, the origin and end of his vitality being alike unknown ; and as those who have seen strange phenomena are few, the number of those who marvel at them is proportionately great, and the "horse with a swelled back" parallel is very widely applicable. And ever quoting the fact that Confucius would have nothing to say on these topics, these schoolmen half discredit such works as the *Ch'i chieh chih kuai* and the *Yü ch'u-chii*,<sup>35</sup> ignorant that the Sage's unwillingness to speak had reference only to persons of an inferior mental calibre ; for his own *Spring and Autumn* can hardly be said to be devoid of all allusions of the kind. Now P'u Liu-hsien devoted himself in his youth to the marvellous, and as he grew older was specially remarkable for his comprehension thereof ; and being moreover a most elegant writer, he occupied his leisure in recording whatever came to his knowledge of a particularly marvellous nature. A volume of these compositions of his formerly fell into my hands, and was constantly borrowed by friends ; now, I have another volume, and of what I read only about three-tenths was known to me before. What there is, should be sufficient to open the eyes of those schoolmen, though I much fear it will be like talking of ice to a butterfly. Personally, I disbelieve in the irregularity of natural phenomena, and regard as evil spirits only those who injure their neighbours. For eclipses, falling stars, the flight of herons, the nest of a mainah, talking stones, and the combats of dragons, can hardly be classed as irregular ; while the phenomena of nature occurring out of season, wars, rebellions, and so forth, may certainly be relegated to the category of evil. In my opinion the morality of P'u Liu-hsien's work is of a very high standard, its object being distinctly to glorify virtue and to censure vice ; and as a book calculated to elevate mankind, it may be safely placed side by side with the philosophical treatises of Yang Hsiung<sup>36</sup> which Huan Tan<sup>37</sup> declared to be so worthy of a wide circulation.

<sup>35</sup> I have never seen any of these works, but I believe they treat, as implied by their titles, chiefly of the supernatural world.

<sup>36</sup> B.C. 53-A.D. 18.

<sup>37</sup> B.C. 13-A.D. 56.

With regard to the meaning of the Chinese words *Liao Chai Chih I*, this title has received indifferent treatment at the hands of different writers. Dr. Williams chose to render it by "Pastimes of the Study," and Mr. Mayers by "The Record of Marvels, or Tales of the Genii;" neither of which is sufficiently near to be regarded in the light of a translation. Taken literally and in order, these words stand for "Liao—library—record—strange," "Liao" being simply a fanciful name given by our author to his private library or studio. An apocryphal anecdote traces the origin of this selection to a remark once made by himself with reference to his failure for the second degree. "Alas!" he is reported to have said, "I shall now have no resource (*Liao*) for my old age;" and accordingly he so named his study, meaning that in his pen he would seek that resource which fate had denied to him as an official. For this untranslatable "Liao" I have ventured to substitute "Chinese," as indicating more clearly the nature of what is to follow. No such title as "Tales of the Genii" fully expresses the scope of this work, which embraces alike weird stories of Taoist devilry and magic, marvellous accounts of impossible countries beyond the sea, simple scenes of Chinese everyday life, and notices of extraordinary natural phenomena. Indeed, the author once had it in contemplation to publish only the more imaginative of the tales in the present collection under the title of "Devil and Fox Stories;" but from this scheme he was ultimately dissuaded by his friends, the result being the heterogeneous mass which is more aptly described by the title I have given to this volume. In a similar manner, I too had originally determined to publish a full and complete translation of the whole of



these sixteen volumes ; but on a closer acquaintance many of the stories turned out to be quite unsuitable for the age in which we live, forcibly recalling the coarseness of our own writers of fiction in the-eighteenth century. Others, again, were utterly pointless, or mere repetitions in a slightly altered form. From the whole, I therefore selected one hundred and sixty-four of the best and most characteristic stories, of which eight had previously been published by Mr. Allen in the *China Review*, one by Mr. Mayers in *Notes and Queries on China and Japan*, two by myself in the columns of the *Celestial Empire*, and four by Dr. Williams in a now forgotten handbook of Chinese. The remaining one hundred and forty-nine have never before, to my knowledge, been translated into English. To those, however, who can enjoy the *Liao Chai* in the original text, the distinctions between the various stories in felicity of plot, originality, and so on, are far less sharply defined, so impressed as each competent reader must be by the incomparable *style* in which even the meanest is arrayed. For in this respect, as important now in Chinese eyes as it was with ourselves in days not long gone by, the author of the *Liao Chai* and the rejected candidate succeeded in founding a school of his own, in which he has since been followed by hosts of servile imitators with more or less success. Terseness is pushed to extreme limits ; each particle that can be safely dispensed with is scrupulously eliminated ; and every here and there some new and original combination invests perhaps a single word with a force it could never have possessed except under the hands of a perfect master of his art. Add to the above, copious allusions and adaptations from a course of reading which would seem to have been co-extensive with the

whole range of Chinese literature, a wealth of metaphor and an artistic use of figures generally to which only the writings of Carlyle form an adequate parallel ; and the result is a work which for purity and beauty of style is now universally accepted in China as the best and most perfect model. Sometimes the story runs along plainly and smoothly enough ; but the next moment we may be plunged into pages of abstruse text, the meaning of which is so involved in quotations from and allusions to the poetry or history of the past three thousand years as to be recoverable only after diligent perusal of the commentary and much searching in other works of reference. In illustration of the popularity of this book, Mr. Mayers once stated that " the porter at his gate, the boatman at his midday rest, the chair-coolie at his stand, no less than the man of letters among his books, may be seen poring with delight over the elegantly-narrated marvels of the *Liao Chai* ; " but he would doubtless have withdrawn this statement in later years, with the work lying open before him. During many years in China, I made a point of never, when feasible, passing by a reading Chinaman without asking permission to glance at the volume in his hand ; and at my various stations in China I always kept up a borrowing acquaintance with the libraries of my private or official servants ; but I can safely affirm that I never once detected the *Liao Chai* in the hands of an ill-educated man. In the same connection, Mr. Mayers observed that " fairy-tales told in the style of the *Anatomy of Melancholy* would scarcely be a popular book in Great Britain ; " but except in some particular points of contact, the styles of these two works could scarcely claim even the most distant of relationships.