

**Herbert Allen Giles (1845-1935) and
Pu Songling's *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio***

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It must however always be borne in mind that translators are but traitors at the best, and that translations may be moonlight and water while the originals are sunlight and wine.

— *Herbert Giles, 16 October 1883*

Dear Land of Flowers, forgive me! — that I took
These snatches from thy glittering wealth of song,
And twisted to the uses of a book
Strains that to alien harps can ne'er belong.

Thy gems shine purer in their native bed
Concealed, beyond the pry of vulgar eyes;
Until, through labyrinths of language led,
The patient student grasps the glowing prize.

Yet many, in their race toward other goals,
May joy to feel, albeit at second-hand,
Some far faint heart-throb of poetic souls
Whose breath makes incense in the Flowery Land.

— *Herbert Giles, October 1898, Cambridge*

Chronology

Born 1845, son of John Allen Giles (1808-1884), unconventional Anglican priest
Educated at Charterhouse School
1867: Entered China Consular Service, stationed in Peking
trained as Student Interpreter. Served in numerous posts in the Treaty Ports
(Tientsin, Ningpo, Hankow, Swatow, Amoy), including Taiwan — the China Coast
In Amoy involved in setting up the Freemasons Lodge
1892-1893: retired to Britain
1897: became Professor of Chinese (successor to Thomas Wade) at Cambridge
until 1928
His children: Bertram, Valentine, Lancelot, Edith, Mable, and Lionel Giles.

Publications

A Chinese-English dictionary (1892); a Biographical Dictionary (1898); a Glossary of Reference (1878); complete translation of Zhuangzi 莊子 — *Chuang-Tzu, Mystic, Moralist and Social Reformer* (1889)
Anthologies of Verse and Prose (1923)
Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio 聊齋志異, 1880, revised 1908, 1916, 1925.

The Freemasonry of the Heart

Does this question point to that higher and more ethereal scheme of morality, veiled in an allegory and illustrated by symbols drawn from operative masonry, which was initiated in pre-historic times when the human race, emerging gradually from savagery and barbarism, first turned to contemplate the wondrous works of the Great Architect of the Universe and began to recognize the mutual obligations subsisting between man and man? For this is the masonry that every enlightened mason should seek to cultivate – the masonry, not of forms and ceremonies, but of the heart.

Selected Texts

Selections from Pu Songling's *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* 《聊齋志異》 蒲松齡著, Chinese original with Giles' translation.

畫壁

江西孟龍潭與朱孝廉客都中，偶涉一蘭若，殿宇禪舍，俱不甚弘敞，惟一老僧挂褡其中。見客入，肅衣出迓，導與隨喜。殿中塑志公像，兩壁畫繪津妙，人物如生。東壁畫散花天女，內一垂髻者，拈花微笑，櫻唇欲動，眼波將流。朱注目久，不覺神搖意奪，恍然凝思；身忽飄飄如駕雲霧，已到壁上。見殿閣重重，非復人世。一老僧說法座上，偏袒繞視者甚眾，朱亦雜立其中。少間似有人暗牽其裾。回顧，則垂髻兒靦然竟去，履即從之，過曲欄，入一小舍，朱次且不敢前。女回首，搖手中花遙遙作招狀，乃趨之。舍內寂無人，遽擁之亦不甚拒，遂與狎好。既而閉戶去，囑勿咳。夜乃復至。如此二日，女伴共覺之，共搜得生，戲謂女曰：“腹內小郎已許大，尚發蓬蓬學處子耶？”共捧簪珥促令上鬢。女寒羞不語。一女曰：“妹妹姊姊，吾等勿久住，恐人不歡。”群笑而去。生視女，髻雲高簇，鬢鳳低垂，比垂髻時尤艷絕也。四顧無人，漸入猥褻，蘭麝熏心，樂方未艾。

The Painted Wall

A Kiang-si gentleman, named Mêng Lung-t'an, was lodging at the capital with a Mr. Chu, M.A., when one day chance led them to a certain monastery, within which they found no spacious halls or meditation chambers, but only an old priest in deshabelle. On observing the visitors, he arranged his dress and went forward to meet them, leading them round and showing whatever there was to be seen. In the chapel they saw an image of Chih Kung, and the walls on either side were beautifully painted

with life-like representations of men and things. On the east side were pictured a number of fairies, among whom was a young girl whose maiden tresses were not yet confined by the matron's knot. She was picking flowers and gently smiling, while her cherry lips seemed about to move, and the moisture of her eyes to overflow. Mr. Chu gazed at her for a long time without taking his eyes off, until at last he became unconscious of anything but the thoughts that were engrossing him. Then, suddenly, he felt himself floating in the air, as if riding on a cloud, and found himself passing through the wall,[1] where halls and pavilions stretched away one after another, unlike the abodes of mortals. Here an old priest was preaching the Law of Buddha, surrounded by a large crowd of listeners. Mr. Chu mingled with the throng, and after a few moments perceived a gentle tug at his sleeve. Turning round, he saw the young girl above-mentioned, who walked laughing away. Mr. Chu at once followed her, and passing a winding balustrade arrived at a small apartment beyond which he dared not venture further. But the young lady, looking back, waved the flowers she had in her hand as though beckoning him to come on. He accordingly entered and found nobody else within. **Then they fell on their knees and worshipped heaven and earth together,[2]** and rose up as man and wife, after which the bride went away, bidding Mr. Chu keep quiet until she came back. This went on for a couple of days, when the young lady's companions began to smell a rat and discovered Mr. Chu's hiding-place. Thereupon they all laughed and said, "My dear, you are now a married woman, and should leave off that maidenly coiffure." So they gave her the proper hair-pins and head ornaments, and bade her go bind her hair, at which she blushed very much but said nothing. Then one of them cried out, "My sisters, let us be off. Two's company, more's none." At this they all giggled again and went away. **Mr. Chu found his wife very much improved by the alteration in the style of her hair. The high top-knot and the coronet of pendants were very becoming to her.**

Notes:

[1] Which will doubtless remind the reader of Alice through the Looking-glass, and what she saw there.

[2] The all-important item of a Chinese marriage ceremony; amounting, in fact, to calling God to witness the contract.

畫皮

太原王生早行，遇一女郎，抱獨奔，甚艱於步，急走趁之，乃二八姝麗。心相愛樂，問：“何夙夜踽踽獨行？”女曰：“行道之人，不能解愁憂，何勞相問。”生曰：“卿何愁憂？或可效力不辭也。”女黯然而曰：“父母貪賂，鬻妾朱門。嫡妒甚，朝詈而夕楚辱之，所弗堪也，將遠遁耳。”問：“何之？”曰：“在亡之人，烏有定所。”生言：“敝廬不遠，即煩枉顧。”女喜從之。生代攜物，導與同歸。女顧室無人，問：“君何無家口？”答雲：“齋耳。”女曰：“此所良佳。如憐妾而活之，須秘密勿泄。”生諾之。乃與寢合。使匿密室，過數日而人不知也。生微告妻。妻陳，疑為大家媵妾，勸遣之，生不聽。

見乞人顛歌道上，鼻涕三尺，穢不可近。陳膝行而前。乞人笑曰：“佳人愛我乎？”陳

告以故。又大笑曰：“人盡夫也，活之何為！”陳固哀之。乃曰：“異哉！人死而乞活於我，我聞羅耶？”怒以杖擊陳，陳忍痛受之。市人漸集如堵。乞人咯痰唾盈把，舉向陳吻曰：“食之！”陳紅漲於面，有難色；既思道士之囑，遂強啖焉。覺入喉中，硬如團絮，格格而下，停結胸間。乞人大笑曰：“佳人愛我哉！”遂起，行已不顧。尾之，入於廟中。迫而求之，不知所在，前后冥搜，殊無端兆，慚恨而歸。既悼夫亡之慘，又悔食唾之羞，俯仰哀啼，但願即死。方欲展血斂尸，家人佇望，無敢近者。陳抱尸收腸，且理且哭。哭極聲嘶，頓欲嘔，覺鬲中結物，突奔而出，不及回首，已落腔中。驚而視之，乃人心也，在腔中突突猶躍，蒸氣騰蒸如煙然。大異之。急以兩手合腔，極力抱擠。少懈，則氣氤氳自縫中出，乃裂縉帛急束之。以手撫尸，漸溫，覆以衾。中夜啟視，有鼻息矣。天明竟活。為言：“恍惚若夢，但覺腹隱痛耳。”視破處，痂結如錢，尋愈。

The Painted Skin

At T'ai-yüan there lived a man named Wang. One morning he was out walking when he met a young lady carrying a bundle and hurrying along by herself. As she moved along with some difficulty,[1] Wang quickened his pace and caught her up, and found she was a pretty girl of about sixteen. Much smitten he inquired whither she was going so early, and no one with her. "A traveller like you," replied the girl, "cannot alleviate my distress; why trouble yourself to ask?" "What distress is it?" said Wang; "I'm sure I'll do anything I can for you." "My parents," answered she, "loved money, and they sold me as concubine into a rich family, where the wife was very jealous, and beat and abused me morning and night. It was more than I could stand, so I have run away." Wang asked her where she was going; to which she replied that a runaway had no fixed place of abode. "My house," said Wang, "is at no great distance; what do you say to coming there?" She joyfully acquiesced; and Wang, taking up her bundle, led the way to his house. Finding no one there, she asked Wang where his family were; to which he replied that that was only the library. **"And a very nice place, too," said she;** "but if you are kind enough to wish to save my life, you mustn't let it be known that I am here." Wang promised he would not divulge her secret, and so she remained there for some days without anyone knowing anything about it. He then told his wife, and she, fearing the girl might belong to some influential family, advised him to send her away.

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They found the destitute creature raving away by the roadside, so filthy that it was all they could do to go near him. Wang's wife approached him on her knees; at which the maniac leered at her, and cried out, "Do you love me, my beauty?" Wang's wife told him what she had come for, but he only laughed and said, "You can get plenty of other husbands. Why raise the dead one to life?" But Wang's wife entreated him to help her; whereupon he observed, "It's very strange: people apply to me to raise their dead as if I was king of the infernal regions." He then gave Wang's wife a thrashing with his staff, which she bore without a murmur, and before a gradually increasing crowd of spectators. After this he produced a loathsome pill which he told her she must swallow, but here she broke down and was quite unable to do so.

However, she did manage it at last, and then the maniac crying out, "How you do love me!" got up and went away without taking any more notice of her. They followed him into a temple with loud supplications, but he had disappeared, and every effort to find him was unsuccessful.

Overcome with rage and shame, Wang's wife went home, where she mourned bitterly over her dead husband, grievously repenting the steps she had taken, and wishing only to die. She then bethought herself of preparing the corpse, near which none of the servants would venture; and set to work to close up the frightful wound of which he died. While thus employed, interrupted from time to time by her sobs, she felt a rising lump in her throat, which by-and-by came out with a pop and fell straight into the dead man's wound. Looking closely at it, she saw it was a human heart; and then it began as it were to throb, emitting a warm vapour like smoke. Much excited, she at once closed the flesh over it, and held the sides of the wound together with all her might. Very soon, however, she got tired, and finding the vapour escaping from the crevices, she tore up a piece of silk and bound it round, at the same time bringing back circulation by rubbing the body and covering it up with clothes. In the night, she removed the coverings, and found that breath was coming from the nose; and by next morning her husband was alive again, though disturbed in mind as if awaking from a dream and feeling a pain in his heart. Where he had been wounded, there was a cicatrix about as big as a cash, which soon after disappeared.

Notes:

[1] Impeded, of course, by her small feet. This practice is said to have originated about A.D. 970, with Yao Niang, the concubine of the pretender Li Yü, who wished to make her feet like the "new moon." The Manchu or Tartar ladies have not adopted this custom, and therefore the empresses of modern times have feet of the natural size; neither is it in force among the Hakkas or hill-tribes of China and Formosa. The practice was forbidden in 1664 by the Manchu Emperor, K'ang Hsi; but popular feeling was so strong on the subject that four years afterwards the prohibition was withdrawn. Protestant missionaries are now making a dead set at this shameful custom, but so far with very indifferent success; as parents who do not cramp the feet of their daughters would experience no small difficulty in finding husbands for them when they grow up. Besides, the gait of a young lady hobbling along, as we should say, seems to be much admired by the other sex. The following seven reasons why this custom still keeps its hold upon the Chinese mind emanate from a native convert:

"1st. If a girl's feet are not bound, people say she is not like a woman but like a man; they laugh at her, calling her names, and her parents are ashamed of her.

"2nd. Girls are like flowers, like the willow. It is very important that their feet should be bound short so that they can walk beautifully, with mincing steps, swaying gracefully, thus showing they are persons of respectability. People praise them. If not bound short, they say the mother has not trained her daughter carefully. She goes from house to house with noisy steps, and is called names. Therefore careful persons bind short.

“3rd. One of a good family does not wish to marry a woman with long feet. She is commiserated because her feet are not perfect. If betrothed, and the size of her feet is not discovered till after marriage, her husband and mother-in-law are displeased, her sisters-in-law laugh at her, and she herself is sad.

“4th. The large footed has to do rough work, does not sit in a sedan when she goes out, walks in the streets barefooted, has no red clothes, does not eat the best food. She is wetted by the rain, tanned by the sun, blown upon by the wind. If unwilling to do all the rough work of the house she is called ‘gormandizing and lazy.’ Perhaps she decides to go out as a servant. She has no fame and honour. To escape all this her parents bind her feet.

“5th. There are those with unbound feet who do no heavy work, wear gay clothing, ride in a sedan, call others to wait upon them. Although so fine they are low and mean. If a girl’s feet are unbound, she cannot be distinguished from one of these.

“6th. Girls are like gold, like gems. They ought to stay in their own house. If their feet are not bound they go here and go there with unfitting associates; they have no good name. They are like defective gems that are rejected.

“7th. Parents are covetous. They think small feet are pleasing and will command a high price for a bride.” (From *On Foot-Binding*, by Miss S. Woolston)

賈兒

楚客有賈於外者。婦獨居，夢與人交，醒而捫之，小丈夫也。察其情與人異，知為狐，未幾下床去，門未開而已逝矣。

The Trader’s Son

In the province of Hunan there dwelt a man who was engaged in trading abroad; and his wife, who lived alone, dreamt one night **that some one was in her room**. Waking up, she looked about, and discovered a small creature which on examination she knew to be a fox; but in a moment the thing had disappeared, although the door had not been opened.

嬰寧

而愛花成癖，物色遍戚黨；竊典金釵，購佳種，數月，階砌藩溷無非花者。庭后有木香一架，故鄰西家，女每攀登其上，摘供簪玩。母時遇見輒訶之，女卒不改。

一日西人子見之，凝注傾倒。女不避而笑。西人子謂女意屬己，心益蕩。

女指牆底笑而下，西人子謂示約處，大悅。及昏而往，女果在焉，就而溷之，則陰如

錐刺，痛徹於心，大號而踣。細視非女，則一枯木臥牆邊，所接乃水淋竅也。鄰父聞聲，急奔研問，呻而不言；妻來，始以實告火燭窺，見中有巨蠍如小蟹然，翁碎木，捉殺之。負子至家，半夜尋卒。鄰人訟生，訐發嬰寧妖異。

Miss Ying-ning; or, The Laughing Girl

Behind the house there was one especial tree[1] which belonged to the neighbours on that side; but Ying-ning was always climbing up and picking the flowers, for which Mrs. Wang rebuked her severely, though without any result.

One day the owner saw her, and gazed at her some time in rapt astonishment; however, she didn't move, deigning only to laugh. The gentleman was much smitten with her; and when she smilingly descended the wall on her own side, pointing all the time with her finger to a spot hard by, he thought she was making an assignation.

So he presented himself at nightfall at the same place, and sure enough Ying-ning was there. **Seizing her hand, to tell his passion, he found that he was grasping only a log of wood which stood against the wall; and the next thing he knew was that a scorpion had stung him violently on the finger.** There was an end of his romance, except that he died of the wound during the night, and his family at once commenced an action against Wang for having a witch-wife.

Notes:

This scene should for ever disabuse people of the notion that there is no such thing as "making love" among the Chinese. That the passion is just as much a disease in China as it is with us will be abundantly evident from several subsequent stories; though by those who have lived and mixed with the Chinese people, no such confirmation will be needed. I have even heard it gravely asserted by an educated native that not a few of his countrymen had "died for love" of the beautiful Miss Lin, the charming but fictitious heroine of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. Play-goers can here hardly fail to notice a very striking similarity to the close of the first act of Mr. W. S. Gilbert's "Sweethearts."

[1] The Mu-hsiang or *Costus amarus*.