

**CHINESE NIGHTS
ENTERTAINMENTS:
STORIES OF OLD CHINA**

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Chinese Nights Entertainments: Stories of Old China by Brian Brown

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BRIAN BROWN

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Stories of Old China

SELECTED AND EDITED BY
BRIAN BROWN

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FOREWORD BY
SAO-KE ALFRED SZE
Chinese Minister to the United States

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FOREWORD

In the old quaint tea houses by the roadside or the crowded houseboats on their way to the temple, the Chinese, since time immemorial, had the habit, like the people in the time of Chaucer, of telling stories. Some would narrate their own experiences, while others would simply repeat what they had committed to memory since their childhood. These tales were handed down from one generation to another until they became a part and parcel of the nation's culture and life.

Fantastic and mysterious, these fables were originally intended for entertainment. As time went on, however, greater significance was attached to them. Leslie Stephen spoke of Horace Walpole's "*Castle of Otranto*": "Absurd as the burlesque seems, our ancestors found it amusing, and, what is stranger, awe-inspiring." The same might be said of the stories collected in this volume.

Fiction is not necessarily entirely devoid of truth. Practically in every one of these stories, one will find bits of information about China's

FOREWORD

custom, manners, history, and even philosophy. Their grotesqueness never mars their theme; and, like the Fables of Æsop or Le Fontaine, each of them imparts a moral. Chinese hedonism is never perfect without a lesson.

In the days of old, novels and short stories had no recognized place in Chinese literature. The old literati never aspired to be a story teller. Time has changed and now the bookstores in China are literally flooded with stories. A fairly educated man is supposed to be familiar with the works of Chekov, Maupassant, and Kipling.

It is quite noticeable that the American public is taking a deeper interest in Chinese literature now than they ever did before. The mysterious East is gradually revealing itself to the Occident. Miss Amy Lowell's recent translations of Chinese poems have been very favorably received by the reading public in this country, and I am quite certain that Mr. Brown's present collection will be accorded an equally warm reception.

SAO-KE ALFRED SZE

June 8, 1922
Washington, D. C.

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T. Werner Laurie, Ltd., London, for the use of some stories from Herbert A. Giles, "Strange Stories from A Chinese Studio." While the arrangement of the tales in this volume is my own, and though I have changed the structure of many of them materially, the rewriting was always done with the assistance of some Chinese friends and the original sense of the tales preserved in every case.

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I wish to express my thanks to these, my Chinese friends, who are so modest that they do not wish their names mentioned. I also wish to thank Sao-Ke Alfred Sze, Minister from China to United States, for his kindness in writing a foreword for these tales, and for giving suggestions that helped the effort greatly.

BRIAN BROWN