

VERSE & WORSE

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Verse & Worse by J. O. P. Bland

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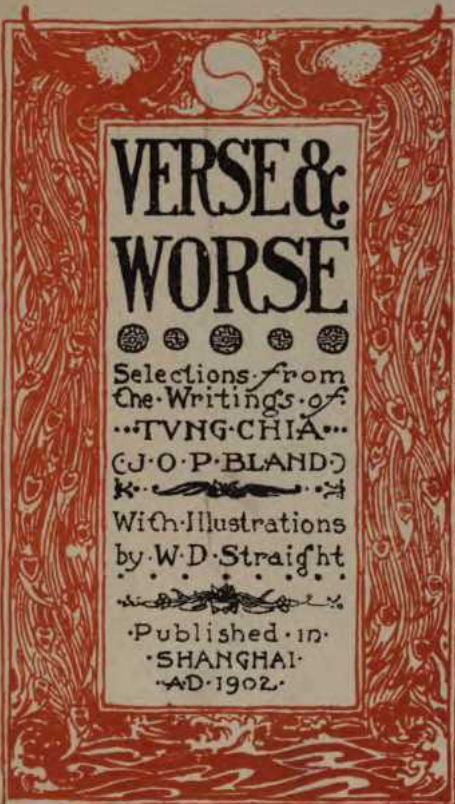
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J. O. P. BLAND

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Selections from
The Writings of

TVNG-CHIA

(J. O. P. BLAND)

With Illustrations
by W. D. Straight

Published in
SHANGHAI
AD. 1902.



PREFACE

Long ago, when the world of letters was young, it was the justifiable custom of an author in his preface to commend his work valiantly to the notice of a limited and unwearied public; having joined the then select fellowship of writers, having achieved something of immortality, it was allowed him to dwell lovingly upon the genesis of his undertaking, and to point out for the benefit of careless or illiterate readers those chief gems of beauty and wisdom to be found within his pages. If, as occasionally happened, his hors d'oeuvre were seasoned with a pinch of modest deprecation, the thing was not seriously meant; rather was it a new and pleasing affectation, as of some fair maid with her lover. Now, assuredly, have the times changed, and with them the mutual relation of those who write and those who, as they run, try to read. In these latter days of snippy, scrappy journalism, of monster editions and literary prodigies innumerable, there would seem to be real danger that in our literary playbooth most of what was once the audience will soon be upon the stage, and the craft itself perish under the weight of those who strive to practice it. For, in the ever-growing press of chorus and supers struggling towards the glare of the footlights of fame, how shall any voices, even of those cast to be "dramatis personae," reach further than the first attentive row of stalls, if haply so far?

Therefore, because of the endless making of books which are born to-day and perish unheeded to-morrow, the ancient, pleasing and intimate fashion of the preface has fallen greatly into disuse. Where all is done, reading and writing alike, in the slipshod hurry of modernity, your deliberate foreword is but waste of time. "Get on with the story, sir, let it be

*"served hot from the press and seasoned to the taste of a
"jaded palate.—What need have we of your views on the
"methods and objects of literature? Have we not been told
"in the monthly magazines all about your domestic affairs;
"we know what dogs you keep, what flowers you grow, and
"how your wife does her hair? Let that suffice."*

Nevertheless, where the preface still lingers, it is to be observed that nowadays its chief use is to plead some excuse in extenuation of the crime which adds one more to the enormities of publishers; and rightly so, for in itself the thing requires apology and defence. There have not been wanting certain misguided persons to advance the comfortable creed of "every man his message," justifying each and all in adding to the general clamour of tomes and alleging that in every work, however witless, paltry or bad, there lies, for those who seek diligently, some inner kernel of good. The modern preface has readily adopted this creed. In the scurry and press of the market-place your average maker of books no longer bestrides his tub loudly vaunting his wares; rather he takes you aside in mendicant style, plucking timidly at your sleeve for notice.

Happy, under such conditions, he who far from the busy hum of crowded marts, finds in some wayside hostelry a band of pilgrims journeying his own road, good companions, cheery fellows, ready and willing to welcome any tale or song that shall lighten to-day's weariness or to-morrow's cares. For such an one, "longer journey, better friends;" his tales, however simple, require no excuse; his songs, artless though they be, meet with the guerdon of a smile. Both are remembered in the years to come by kindly souls at winter firesides, when the erstwhile pilgrims have returned from exile to their own land. Better far such hearers than those who come and go, without largesse, in the market place; better for audience and teller those tales which bear on matters common and familiar, everyday words of things seen by the wayfarer on paths remote from the world's great highways.

Such good fortune, reader, is mine; here, amongst intimates, to fellow wayfarers of a long road of exile, my tale is of things seen by the way, told to those for whom each name and place brings back memories of past years, echoes of

laughter or tears. Therefore, by this preface, I proclaim that, in such company, no apology is needed for the making of my book.

We are here to-day, a few white men uneasily perched on the fringe of the Yellow Man's Asia. All our commercialism, our wars, our diplomacy, and our adventures have made but little mark on the celestial race in fifty years; he were a bold man who should prophecy what the White Man will be doing in China fifty years hence. It pleases me to think—and may it not be?—that, what time Macaulay's New Zealander stands pensive amidst the ruins of London, some Mongolian savant, happily unearthing this book, shall rejoice therein to find an authentic record of our European Settlements, long since swallowed up and forgotten. I rejoice to believe that the civilised Mongolian of futurity may find something to admire in the mind and manners of our Treaty Ports.

Most of "Verse and Verse" has already been published in one place or another; some in the "Rattle" some in the "North China Daily News" and some in home papers; but the illustrations, by an artist new to the Far Eastern public, will, I venture to think, afford in themselves a sufficient source of pleasure for readers to whom parts of the text may be no new thing.



Shanghai,

July, 1902.