

THE SONG BOOK

OF

QUONG LEE

by

Thomas Burke

(1886-1945)

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Buying and Selling

Throughout the day I sit behind the counter of my shop
And the odours of my country are all about me--
Areca nut, and betel leaf, and manioc,
Lychee and suey sen,
Li-un and dried seaweed,
Tchah and sam-shu;
And these carry my mind to half-forgotten days
When tales were plentiful and care was hard to hold.

All day I sell for trifling sums the wares of my own land,
And buy for many cash such things as people wish to sell,
That I may sell them again to others,
With some profit to myself.

One night a white-skinned damsel came to me
And offered, with fair words, something she wished to sell.

Now if I desire a jacket I can buy it with coin,
Or barter for it something of my stock.
If I desire rice-spirit, that, too, I can buy;
And elegant entertainments and delights are all to be had for cash.

But there is one good thing above all precious,
That no man may buy.
And though I buy readily most things that I desire,
This thing that the white maid offered at my own price
I would not buy.

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The Power of Music

In the little room behind my shop
I refresh myself of an evening with my machine-that-sings.

Two songs has my machine-that-sings:
And these are 'Hitchy Koo' and 'We don't want to lose you.'

When, in the evening, a friend honours me with a visit,
I engage his ears with the air of 'Hitchy Koo';
But when I am afflicted with a visit
From those who fill me with a spirit of no-satisfaction,
I command my machine-that-sings
To render the music of 'We don't want to lose you.'

The noise that at this moment greets the ear
Of the elegant visitor to this despicable hovel
Is the incomparable music of 'Hitchy Koo';
And the price of this person's tea, mister,
Is but a paltry six shillings the pound.

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The Lamplighter

The dark days now begin, when in afternoon
The Great Night Lantern makes a razor-edge
Of black and white in the streets.

And one comes, called the Lamplighter,
And the straight stiff lamps of these stiff London streets,
At his quick touch burst into light.

At this shy hour
I see from my unshaded window
Bright girls, hair flowing, go by with shuttered faces,
Holding close captive their warm insurgent bosoms.
And then, at the corner,
Some slender lad of bold and upright carriage
Greets them, and the shuttered lanterns of their faces
Burst with light at the touch of the lamplighter.

Oh, kind ingenious lamplighter,
Will you please step this way?

--()--

In Reply to an Invitation

Don't think of me as one of no courtesy
O elegant and refined foreign one,
If I do not accept your high-minded invitation
To drink rice-spirit with you
At the little place called The Blue Lantern, near Pennyfields.
Please don't regard me as lacking in gracious behaviour,
Or as insufferably ignorant of the teachings of the Book of Rites

But I am sojourning here in a strange land,
And am not fully informed of the usages of your dignified people.

As the wise Mencius observed in one of his inspired hours,
Doubtless thinking forward to situation of this person:
Child who has once suffered unpleasant sensation of burning,
Ever afterward reluctant to approach stove.
Wherefore, as this person once accepted an invitation,
In words as affable and polished as yours, Mister,
To drink rice-spirit at The Blue Lantern,
And was there subjected to a custom of this country
Of an entirely disturbing and displeasing nature,
Known as Ceremony of Confidence,
He has, since that day, viewed The Blue Lantern
With a feeling of most decided repugnance.

--()--

A Night-Piece

I climbed the other day up to the roof
Of the commanding and palatial Home for Asiatics
And looked across the city at the hour of no-light.

Across great space of dark I looked,
But the skirt of darkness had a hundred rents,
Made by the lights of many people's homes.

My life is a great skirt of darkness,
But human kindness has torn it through,
So that it shows ten thousand gaping rents
Where the light comes in.

--()--

A Smile Given In Passing

As I walked the street in the purring evening
A little maid with yellow curls
Tossed me a smile; and suddenly Pennyfields
Grew from darkness to light, and the light of the stars
Grew pale.

I may not see her again, but I hold her smile in my heart,
And she is with me in my shop and about the streets.
My shop may tumble down;
West India Dock may some time suffer a drought;
Grief and Joy come for a day;
And Hope and Fear, and Desire and Deed
Arise and pass, and are no more;
But the beauty born of her quickened smile
Can never die.

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Of a National Cash Register

Last week this person, desiring to make it known
That he was in all ways moving up to the date,
Introduced into his insignificant shop
A machine-that-counts,
Called a National Cash Register,
Which announces to refined and intelligent customers
The amounts of their purchases.

This week this person purchased a whole days' amusement;
And the amount he paid for this was another's discomfiture and pain.
And, after a night of cogitation,
He is moved to reflect on the far-reaching and wholesome value
Of a National Register which would announce to the face
The cost of such pleasures as this.

--()--

Under a Shining Window

A lamplit window,
At the top of a tenement house near Poplar High Street,
Shines fluently out of the night;
And looking upward I see
That the bricks of the houses are bright and fair to the eye.

There are no flowers in West India Dock Road;
Nothing but brick and stone, and iron and spent air.
But when rough brick and stone are a shrine for beauty,
They become themselves beautiful.
Perhaps if this person encloses within himself
Beautiful thoughts and amiable intentions,
His insignificant frame may acquire
The noble outlines of that tenement house.

--()--

Exchange of Compliments

At ten o'clock last night an ugly fellow,
Of skinny exterior and most ungracious manner,
Was thrown with a total loss of gravity
From the flapping doors of the Blue Lantern.

He lurched in most ungainly fashion past this person's shop--
This person standing at his door--
And used base language of an unpolished nature,
Calling him Ugly Yellow Bastard,
Hop Fiend and Dirty Doper,
Eater of Dogs and Cheater at Puckapoo,
Son-of-a-Bitch and devotee of vice.

This person did not respond in like manner,
Knowing that he is not himself all-perfect,
Nor even in every hour
A devout follower of the teachings of the Four Books.
He contented himself with repeating in a far-reaching tone,
The words of the lofty Lao Tzu:
When pot upon stove reproveth kettle for blackness,
Pot speaking out of turn.

--()--

A Song of Little Girls

I want to make a song of the little girls
That live about this quarter.
I could make a song of boys quite easily with words,
But words are too blunt for such delicate things as girls.
I would like to make my song of them with bees and butterflies.
One looks at the boy, and says Boy;
And lo, one has described him.
But little girls are morning light and melody;
Their happy hair flutters and flies, or curtains their laughing faces--
Faces glad as the sun at dawn.
Their clear, cool skin is like wine to the eyes,
The lines of their fluent limbs run like a song,
And every step is a note of grace which the frock repeats.

Don't you think it a pity, and greatly to be deplored
That these should lose this beauty,
And pass from it to the guile and trickery of woman?

--()--

Of Shop Windows

Looking closely at the glass windows of my shop,
I see in them the whole of my shop reflected.
Looking at my windows closely from the street,
I see in them the life of the street reflected.
Yet if I stand away, the glass remains transparent,
And I see clearly through it to the things beyond.

If I look with close vision
Into the hearts of men,

I see my own small heart reflected.
I will try henceforth not to look at them too closely.

--()--

At the Feast of Lanterns

Lithely on their strings swing the many-coloured lanterns,
For this is the Feast of Lanterns;
And Pennyfields and West India Dock Road
Are to-night a part of my own country,
Aglow with the hues of the Peacock's Tail,
Very amiable to the eye.

In a recess of my heart
Is a poor street hung with lanterns.
These lanterns are my thoughts,
And they are lighted at the last hours of the evenings,
When through this street
Walks the willowy maiden from the tea-shop across the road.

--()--

One Service Breeds Another

One of this person's white-skinned friends, Bill Hawkins,
Who labours at the waterside,
Had occasion, at the time of unkind weather,
To rescue from the certain peril of drowning
One who had slipped from the edge of a wharf to the dock.

Without reward the flower serves the bee.
The mother serves the child with pain and toil.
The soldier serves his king without king's gratitude.
And this person has noted with much private amusement,
How, since this one service rendered,
Bill Hawkins goes ever from his accustomed path
To add service to service to the one he rescued;
While the rescued one looks ever upon Bill Hawkins
With eyes of no-approval, indeed, with intense disgust.

--()--

An Offer of a Lodging

Little maid of the yellow curls
You look sad as you pass my window.
You look as though you would like to creep into some warm nest,
And hide your golden head.

Oh, look, little maid! I have made you a nest!
Creep into it, and I will hide you away,
Quietly, in the nest of my heart,
I will wrap you around with verses and cover you with fair thoughts.

There is yet one little corner left,
Free from the world's defilement;
One little corner where not a breath of wrong
Shall enter to disturb your slumbering.
And I will cherish you there

In the nest you will make so pure.
I will hold you and guard you safe from the snares of the stony streets.
Be at peace, little maid, and lie in trust;
For though my feet may stumble, and I may fall,
The corner that houses you I will ever keep whole.

--()--

Of Two Dwellings

At the lower end of Limehouse Causeway
Is a house where girls surrender their bodies
To the pleasures of base-minded and unpolished men,
In return for shillings.
And on the walls about this house
Blossoms at summer the wild white rose.

In a tiny room at the top of a tenement
Lives a white maid of surpassing virtue,
Gentle in manner and quiet and dutiful,
Combing her golden curls each morning
Before a window that looks out to hell;
That looks upon cesspools of mud, and mounds of refuse
and the offal of the shops.

--()--

Concerning English Gambling

One morning, at the season of Clear Weather,
As I sat alone in my Tea-House of the Refined White Lily,
A stranger of affable address approached me,
And showed me, with a multitude of argument,
To what advantage I should come
Were I to place the whole of my substance with him,
Even to my shirt,
As a token of my faith in Ice Cream Cornet for the Lincolnshire.

And because I would not do so,
He withdrew himself from me as from one of mean birth and behaviour,
Reviling me with the name of "No-Sport,"
And other characters of opprobrium.

But this person told him
That he carried always on written leaves
The words of his august father,
Concerning horses and women, and the wind in the hills
and the hooting of owls.

He did not tell him that he knew full well
That Ice Cream Cornet was a non-starter for the Lincolnshire.

--()--

Of Politicians

Upon a time the amiable Bill Hawkins
Married a fair wife, demure and of chaste repute,
Keeping closely from her, however,
Any knowledge of the manner of man he had been.

Upon the nuptial night,
Awaking and finding himself couched with a woman,
As had happened on divers occasions,
He arose, and dressed and departed,
Leaving at the couch's side four goodly coins.

But in the street,
Remembering the occasion and his present estate of marriage,
He returned with a haste of no-dignity,
Filled with emotions of an entirely disturbing nature,
Fear that his wife should discover his absence
And place evil construction upon it,
Being uppermost.

Entering stealthily, then, with the toes of the leopard,
With intention of quickly disrobing,
And rejoining the forsaken bride,
He perceived her sitting erect on the couch,
Biting shrewdly, with a distressing air of experience,
At one of the coins.

Even so it is when Big Politician meets Little Politician.

--()--

Of the Great White War

During the years when the white men fought each other,
I observed how the aged cried aloud in public places
Of honour and chivalry, and the duty of the young;
And how the young ceased doing the pleasant things of youth,
And became suddenly old,
And marched away to defend the aged.

And I observed how the aged
Became suddenly young;
And mouthed fair phrases one to the other upon the Supreme Sacrifice,
And turned to their account-books, murmuring gravely:
Business as Usual;
And brought out bottles of wine and drank the health
Of the young men they had sent out to die for them.

--()--

At the Time of Clear Weather

In the agreeable public gardens of Poplar
The bushes are bright with buds,
For this is the season of Clear Weather.
There blossom the quiet flowers of this country:
The timid lilac,
The unassuming hawthorn,
The dignified chestnut,
And the girlish laburnum;
And the mandarin of them all is the rhododendron.

In the untilled field of my heart
Many simple buds are bursting.
There is a little bush of kindness towards all men.

There is a slender tree of forgiveness for all wrongs.
There is a humble growth of repentance for past sins.
And around the field is a thick hedge of thankfulness.

And Ho! in the midst of all
Stands the tree of a hundred boughs
Laden with the sweetest of all buds
Which are breaking to flower under the sun of a maiden's eyes.

--()--

Parent and Child

Often of an evening I take the air
And linger on the bridge by the Isle of Dogs,
And sometimes see
The swan-like shape of the ship that brought me hither.
Often since then that ship has gone
To the land from which it brought me;
And on each voyage my heart accompanies it.

Should I some day in person journey with it,
My honourable father would welcome his little son.
He would not see this worn and tattered one,
This lean and sorrowful son of the waterside.
He would not see this parchment face,
This figure without lustre.
He would see his little son who left him long ago;
For love would brush away the husk of years,
And leave a little child.

--()--

Of Worship and Conduct

At the corner of the Causeway on every seventh evening
Gathers the band of Salvation Army,
Making big noise of Washed-in-Blood-of-Lamb.

At temple in East India Dock Road
Men gather in white clothes, and sing,
And march with candles and pray to Lady.

At shop in Pennyfields, many times a day,
This person pays respect to Big Man Joss,
And burns to him prayer-papers and punk-sticks.

And all day long men toil for wife and child;
Wife suffer and stint to make bigger plate for child;
Child beg in street to get food for sick mother;
Sister wear ragged clothes for sake of little brother.
And none of these has bowed to Joss,
Or marched with candle,
Or washed in blood of Lamb.

--()--

Going to Market

Good morning, Mister, how do you do?

I am going to Salmon Lane, to the cheap market for dainty foods.
Won't you come with me, Mister?

I shall buy meat and fish and a loaf of bread,
And fresh fruit and potatoes;
I shall buy a cluster of flowers and a bottle of wine,
Some butter and some jam,
And biscuits, and nuts and candy.
For I give an English feast to-night to a friend with yellow curls,
And every dish will be cooked by me.

Into the pot will go sharp spices,
To flavour your English meats:
Cayenne and thyme, and sage and salt,
A sprig of parsley for garnish,
And some delicate bamboo shoots.
But the sweetest spice will not be seen,
It will leap from my heart to the pot as I stir it.
I am going to gather it on the way to the market
From my own sweet thoughts and from elegant conversation
With notable misters.
Won't you come with me?

--()--

A Portrait

How shall I write of you, little friend,
To my father on the River of Serenity?
I will tell him of your twenty yellow curls
Tumbling in a cascade about your shoulders;
Your bright mouth and fine brow,
Lit by yet brighter eyes,
Where fireflies dance;
How in your cheeks you hold
The colours of the flower before its leaves unclose;
How the tones of your voice, sounding in my ears,
Float before my eyes like strings of lanterns;
How, when I look closely upon you,
I see my thoughts like a white river in your eyes;
How, as I walk down the street where you have trod,
The very stones are to me the smiles that you scatter as you pass.
How your look thrills my heart as a guitar thrills to the touch.

And I will tell him that you are not for me,
For you are white and I am yellow;
Unless, perchance, shame and disgrace fall upon you,
As it falls upon some girls of this quarter,
And your neighbours and friends pass by the other way.
Then, perhaps, it would be permitted to me
To render service to you.

--()--

On a Saying of Mencius

That was well said of Mencius:
The misfortunes of one are the entertainment of many.

When Prosperity attended the occasions of this person,

And his heart smiled within him,
He was regarded and received on all sides by his fellows
With attitudes of dignity and expressions of mandarin-like solemnity,
And his laughing heart could fetch no smile
To the faces of those about him.

But when, on a recent manifestation of evil spirits,
He was hailed before those in authority
And commanded to pay very many taels,
For the fault of possessing some morsels of chandu, the Great Tobacco,
And his heart was heavy and dark as a raincloud within him,
He was received on all sides
With attitudes of mirth and expressions of no-gravity.

--()--

Dockside Noises

There are in Limehouse many sounds;
A hundred different sounds by day and night.

The crash and mutter of the dockside railway,
The noise of quarrel, the noise of fist on face,
My country's songs, guitars, and gramophones,
The noise of boot on stone,
The noise of women bargaining their flesh,
The noise of singers in the ships,
Sounds of threat and sounds of fear,
Blasts of hammer and steel and iron,
The scream of syren, the wail of hooter,
The clangour of angry bells,
The boom of guns, the clatter of factories,
The panic of feet, and malevolent words.

All these sounds I know, and they disturb me not.
The sound that is to me most terrible,
That snatches slumber from me,
Is the sound that is most common:
The scream of a child at night.

--()--

Reproof and Approbation

Because I gave a piece of silk
To my friend of the golden curls,
One (may the dogs devour him) threw a stone at my window,
And hooted and jeered and made base noise with his mouth.
Nay, worse, this son of a sea-slug (may his line perish)
Hurled hard names at my friend,
Calling her Tart, and Flusey, and Tom; and, as we walked together,
Cried: 'Watcher, Nancy, who's yer friend with the melon face
And the bug-eaten cabbage-leaf on his head?'

The lean and scurvy dog that slinks about Pennyfields
Flew in great fear at sight of this reprove of our doings,
And came to me, and rubbed itself against my shoe.

--()--

The Feast of Go Nien

We are now in the Pepper Month;
And soon will come the Feast of Go Nien.
Then I will pay my debts, and gather in my dues.
I will walk in the great procession;
And afterwards I will hang up my devil-chasers
And will proceed to the restaurant of Ng Tack,
And drink spring wine with him and meet my friends.

That evening I shall eat of the best:
Of chicken cream and pigeon in soy-ed,
With a brown noodle of pork and prawn,
And a curry of fish and a large Chung Goun,
Sweet onions, and black eggs and chow chow.
And when we have done,
We will have cakes and tea, and music and songs,
And call in our white friends to sit with us.

For this one day we shall be each to the other,
What the other would desire.
Perhaps it is well that this day
Occurs but once in the year's calendar;
For if we always so behaved, one to the other,
There would be no business done.

--()--

Directions for Making Tea

In making tchah for table, each man has his own way.
Some serve it dashed with lemon, and some with bamboo shoot,
And some with sugar, in the English way,
And some with spot of sam-shu.;
But when one offers tchah to distinguished visitor,
One offers the noble suey sen, and flavors it
With the dried bud of the noble chrysanthemum.

Consider these verses, little friend,
As cups of suey sen
Flavoured with the buds of the flower of all flowers.

--()--

Of Inaccessible Beauty

Ladies in elegant silks and laces
Have come at times to my insignificant shop,
For pieces of jade, or banners, or curious cuttings of ivory.
And I look with insufferable emotion
Upon their roseleaf skin,
And breathe the soft scents that flow from their garments,
And long to soothe their lily-fingered hands.
In their presence
I am seized with longings unutterable,
And am filled with a sickness of my present unkind estate.

But then I remember
That Beauty's not always a star,
Not always remote, not always in lofty places,

Chrysanthemum-clad and lily-sheathed;
But often lies in the hedges
And peeps from street-corners
And lurks shyly behind broken doorways.

And I think upon the kind and considerate beauty
Of the maid with the golden curls,
And her patched, uncoloured robes of common cloth.
And with a change of mood I charge the elegant ladies
Three times the value of the articles chosen,
And thus tear from their flowery bodies
Pieces of their billowing silk
To deck the less fervid beauty of my friend.

--()--

Night and Day

The waters of the river flow swiftly at Limehouse Hole,
Past wharves, and ugly gardens,
Past beautiful steel ships and tawny sails,
Past clamorous factories and broken boats and bells.

Throughout the day these things are one--
One body of dire endeavour.
But when the evening introduces the night,
This thing is broken into a thousand delicacies,
And the warm notes of night
Make happy discord of the day's harsh harmonies.

--()--

Of a Night in War-Time

Upon a night I sat behind my shop,
In happy talk with casual company:
The upright Ho Ling, the grave Cheng Huan,
And the round-bodied and amiable Sway Too, of my own country;
Together with the maid of the golden curls,
A sad-eyed seaman from Malay,
And two pale Englishmen, Bill Hawkins and Jack Brown.

We sat beneath the lantern, and drank our tchah in fellowship,
And spoke of this and of that.
And the moon rose and mated with the soft smells of my store,
And brought forth a spirit that spoke to us
Of things forgotten or lost, or long despaired of.

Friendship bound us together, and we sat late,
Glad of the night, and each glad of his companions;
While men in another land
Wrought horrors upon their fellows beneath this moon,
Drunk with the wicked words of the wicked lords of men.

--()--

A Love Lesson

Last night I dreamed of the maid with yellow curls.
She came to me in the room above my shop,

And we two were alone, freed from the laws of day.
I held her then to myself.
I took from her her clothing, garment by garment,
And watched them fall about her feet,
White petals of a flower.
And I drew from her to myself her thoughts, one by one,
As often I had wished, till all of her was mine.

Then I was sad, for nothing was left to love.
And I quickly clothed her again, garment by garment,
And gave her back her thoughts, one by one,
And awoke in joy.
I was glad that the dream was a dream,
And that all of her was not mine;
For I had learned
That love released from bond, and unburdened of its fetters,
Is love no longer.

--()--

A Rebuke

Excuse me, Mister, if I enter a gentle protest
About the manner in which you comport yourself
When taking the air about the streets.
For, looking at you, one would form the opinion
That you were a man of much worth and nobility,
That you were high in officialdom,
A councillor of the king or a learned judge,
Or one whose piety and wisdom
Had marked him out to sit above his fellow.

One would think thus to see the swinging arms,
The slow protuberant belly sheathed in a vest of scarlet,
And the gold chain of Albert, the great Consort;
To see the haughty head, the portly mien,
The solemn gait, and the complacency with which you view the world.

Don't interrupt! I only wished to tell you
That your claim to the excessive esteem of your neighbours
Is wholly without foundation.
Do please remember, Mister, that that scarlet belly
Was acquired by the labours of little children
Whom you employ to stick labels on bottles.

--()--

Upstairs

I have lifted her over my threshold to-night.
Many moons have risen and set since she received my napi;
But now she is here and has entered my upper room,
Where is a shrine for the joss of happiness,
And a soft couch and delicate hanging,
And fine things for fine fingers to handle,
And shaded lanterns and a guitar and my machine-that-sings.

There are ornaments of jade and lacquer,
And the bamboo pipe and the hap-heem that I have laid aside,
And the written leaves containing my verses.

But there are no writing tables, no ink and no brushes.
For now my verses will be written upon her brow.

--()--

Footsteps

As I lie on my pallet at night
I hear from the street the sound of passing footsteps;
And I can sort and name these passing footsteps.
There are the truculent steps of the seeker after trouble,
There are the fearful feet of those who are not at ease
In the implacable streets.
There are the fugitive feet of crime,
And the solemn reassuring tread of big policemen;
And the interrupted steps of the revellers,
And the fleet feet of those who have purchased trouble.

But those that tread most heavily on my heart
Are the light and lingering footsteps of tired young women.

--()--

Making a Feast

Ho! Friends and enemies of Pennyfields,
A feast is spread, and you are all invited.
Many tides have risen and retired
Since I left the fervid skies of my own country
For the thin skies and leaden streets of the West.
Long have I sojourned, seeking my desire,
Keeping my shop, and looking always with long eyes
At others' guesting-tables, at whose top sat love.

From my cold corner
I have watched their feast of fondness, and my heart has flown away,
And has beaten like a lost bird at their windows,
And none would let him in.

But now, O honourables,
My window is alight, my room is warmed,
The table is set and the places are laid, and Love waits to greet you.

--()--

The Case of Ho Ling

Truly the ways of mandarins are inscrutable.
My estimable and upright friend, Ho Ling,
Long had desired to return to his own country.
He bore himself in Limehouse without reproach,
A reputable stranger, mild of manner and gentle of address.
Against him none could bring a charge or speak a word of upbraiding.
He conformed in all ways to the laws of correct conduct.

Yet when he sought assistance to return to his own country,
Being without means,
And hung at the ear of notable men who could help him,
They refused to hear him,
And would in no way help him to go where his heart was set.

Even the charitable ones regretted
That his case was not for them.

Wherefore my friend forsook his quiet and regular ways,
And went about as one possessed by thunder and fire,
Stormily; doing many things of a reprehensible character,
Committing grave misdemeanours in the public streets,
And following evil ways in a manner to attract attention.

Whereupon,
The lords of this country placed him upon a boat,
And commanded that he should be carried, at their own cost,
To his own country, whither he most desired to go.

--()--

An Upright Man

The grave and thin-faced one who keeps the Bespoke Tailor's Shop,
And subjects his child to treatment of a most disagreeable nature,
Never goes into the Blue Lantern,
Never takes pellet of li-un or nut of areca,
Or communes with Black Smoke,
Or loses money at puckapoo,
Or makes public outcry or gesture
Expressive of delight in his friends,
Or does foolish and unworthy things,
Or makes exchange of hats with friends.

He has no friends, for he has no weaknesses.
While others fall to the simple follies of humanity
He walks ever upright and self-contained, devout and dignified,
And ill-treats his child at night.

--()--

Breaking-Point

Many heavy blows has this patient person's back received,
These many years.
He has lost friends and money;
He has lost his own country;
His well-framed enterprises have gone awry.
And his heart has gone hungry these many years for love.

All these things he has suffered without murmur.
One thing alone has driven him to utter piercing cries,
And make gestures expressive of volcano in eruption:
And that is the bootmender across the road
Who sings hymns to himself in the evening.

For that is true that the sage has spoken:
That it is the smell of gin-and-onions about the secretary
Which drives his master, who long has suffered gin-and-cloves,
To the breaking-point of inexpressible exasperation.

--()--

An English Gentleman

I determined yesterday to become English gentleman;
And I have this morning bought a bowler hat.
I have bought brown boots and a suit of rare blue serge,
Which the affable one who supplied me with it
Spoke of as Natty, and added his assurance
That I would look Quite the Gentleman.
I have bought white collars and many-coloured ties,
And a walking-stick and a blue-spotted shirt.

Apparelled thus, I strolled this evening down Pennyfields,
And the old men came out with expressions of no-kindness.
They made ugly mouths,
And passed words one to the other of a derisive nature.

But I am young Quong Lee,
Who write verse in the English tongue,
And am quite English gentleman.
And English gentleman
Not suffer himself to be disturbed by hooting of owls.

End

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