

Mystery of Authorship of Chinese Lyrics Solved

Poems of Pai Ta-shun, Widely Discussed for Past Two Years, Were Written by Dr. Frederick Peterson, New York Physician

WHO is Pai Ta-shun? For at least two years lyrics bearing this mysterious signature have been appearing in the magazines. They have been quoted in the eclectic periodicals and praised highly by authoritative critics. Recently they were collected into a magnificent book, bound in Chinese silk and illustrated with colotype reproductions of ancient Chinese paintings, and published by Kelly & Walsh of Yokohama.

It has been thought that these poems, rich in Oriental symbolism and filled with the very spirit of Chinese philosophy and culture, were written by some talented Chinese with a thorough knowledge of English—some Chinese counterpart of Rabindranath Tagore. Also the belief was expressed that they were translations of the work of some Chinese poet of a bygone generation. But now for the first time the truth of the matter is published. The poems were written in New

York City, and they were the work of an American, Dr. Frederick Peterson.

Dr. Peterson is known as a physician, a university lecturer, a clinical professor, and the author of many standard medical works, including the American Textbook of Legal Medicine and Toxicology. His friends are aware of his enthusiasm for Chinese art and letters.

In his home on Park Avenue and in the studies and living rooms connected with his office on Fifth Street, he has a collection of old Chinese paintings and objects of art of which the equal is hard to find on this continent. There may be seen bowls and vases of peachbloom, gold and blue; curious carvings exhibiting the undying art of the Chinese lapidary, and fabrics richly embroidered with Oriental designs. And on the walls are paintings by the greatest of Chinese artists—landscapes giving, in small compass, an extraordinary sense of depth and space, and scenes in the lives of the great figures in Chinese history and legend. The rarest of these is a large

landscape 1,000 years old—the work of a painter of the Sung dynasty. The others are of age almost as great, and yet their colors seem perfectly fresh, and the passing of years has not made their message more difficult to comprehend.

To the fact that he is surrounded by paintings such as these must be attributed some of Dr. Peterson's success in putting the very soul of China into English verse. He is a student of Chinese poetry, and his poems are written in accordance with the Chinese literary tradition. But it must be remembered that Chinese painting is more literary than Occidental painting. "A picture is a voiceless poem, a poem is a vocal picture," says the Chinese proverb. Most of the famous Chinese artists were poets, and all of Dr. Peterson's lyrics, except his prefatory poem, are directly related to some of the greatest examples of Chinese graphic art.

Dr. Peterson's purpose in writing these poems was, in the first place, it will

readily be believed, to give beautiful expression to beautiful ideas. But he had also the desire to bring to Western readers, especially in these tumultuous days, a message from the wise and serene Orient. According to a great American poet, "poetry is the language which tells, by means of a more or less emotional reaction, something which cannot be stated in prose." And it is an appropriate language for the expression of the things which, in Dr. Peterson's judgment, the East has to teach the West.

The signature "Pai Ta-shun" is a Chinese rendition of Peterson. Dr. Peterson felt that his Occidental name would be inharmonious with his verses, and perhaps (in spite of the distinguished precedents of Dr. S. Weir Mitchell and Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes) he thought that his personality as a physician must be kept separate from his personality as a poet. It is probable also that he was influenced by the tradition of artistic disinterestedness known to him through his studies. The ancient Chinese

regarded a painting as the home of the painter's soul. In his "The Flight of the Dragon," (published some years ago by E. P. Dutton & Co.) Laurence Binyon tells a significant story. Wu Tao-Tzu painted a vast landscape on a palace wall, and the Emperor, coming to view it, was lost in admiration. Wu Tao-Tzu clapped his hands. A cave in the picture opened. The painter stepped within his painting and was seen upon earth no more. Artists, in pigments or in words, imbued with the belief which this story symbolizes, are not greatly concerned with deliberately associating their personalities with their work.

The relation of man to nature is the chief theme of Chinese art. Laurence Binyon points out that something deeper than innocent delight in nature caused the Chinese artists to devote themselves to landscapes. The Chinese philosopher—and the Chinese painter and poet was always a philosopher—believed in the continuity of the universe, recognized the kinship between his own life and the life of animals and birds and trees and plants. Mr. Binyon writes:

In these paintings we do not feel that the artist is portraying something external to himself; that he is caressing the happiness and soothing joy offered him in the pleasant places of the earth, or even studying with wonder and delight the miraculous works of nature. But the winds of the air have become his desires; the mountain peaks are his only aspirations; the torrents his liberated energies. Flowers, opening their secret hearts to the light and trembling to the breeze's touch, seem to be unfolding the mystery of his own human heart, the mystery of those intuitions and emotions which are too deep or too shy for speech. It is not one aspect or another of nature, one particular beauty or another; the pleasant sward and leafy glade are not chosen, and the austere crags and caves, with the wild beasts that haunt them, left and avoided. It is not man's earthly surroundings, tamed to his desires, that inspire the artist, but the universe, in its wholeness and its freedom, has become his spiritual home.

So in these lyrics by Dr. Peterson the landscape is commonly the theme, but it is the landscape in its relations to humanity and to the universe. How much of time and how much of space are contained in the following sixteen-line study of the flight of wild geese across a cloudy sky! We are reminded of the sixth century painter who could give on a fan the effect of ten thousand miles of country, and of Huang Chi's picture, "Wind-Mist," of which it was said: "It was full of depth, and caused the beholder to call up images out of its indefiniteness, now appearing, now vanishing, without end."

WILD GESE.

How oft against the sunset sky or moon
I watched that moving zigzag of spread wings
In unforgotten Autumn gone too soon.
In unforgotten Springs!
Creatures of desolation, far they fly
Above all lands bound by the curling foam:
In misty fens, wild moors and trackless sky
These wild things have their home.
They know the tundra of Siberian coasts,
And tropic marshes by the Indian seas;
They know the clouds and night and starry hosts
From Creux to Pleiades.
Dark flying rams against the western glow—
It tells the sweep and loneliness of things,
Symbols of Autumn's vanished long ago—
Symbol of coming Springs!

Laurence Binyon devotes an entire chapter of his book to a study of the symbol of the dragon. He writes:

The sense of the impermanence of things, the transitoriness of life, which in Buddhism was allied to human sorrow, became a positive and glowing inspiration. The soul identified it with the wind which bloweth where it listeth, with the cloud and the mist that melt away in rain, and are drawn up into the air; and this sovereign energy of the soul, fluid, penetrating, ever-changing, took form in the symbolic Dragon.

Here is Pai Ta-shun's poem on this subject:

THE DRAGON.

Ever-changing the cumulus surges above the horizon,
Black with thunder or white with the glitter of snow-capped mountains,
Rosy with dawn or with sunset, and age-long shifting pageant,
Stuff of chaos for dreamers to forge into magical visions,
Ranged below it the common earth and the tiger-fores,
Behind and above it unfurled the starry deeps of the heavens,
Out of the formless clouds we shaped the deathless Dragon,
Symbol of change and sign of the infinite, symbol of spirit.

Here is a poem full of the beauty of sorrow. It is a picture, one rich in emotional content. "Painting and writing

are one and the same art," said Chou Shun:

THE DESERTED GARDEN.

I hear no more the swish of silk
Along the marble walks;
The Autumn wind blows sharp and cold
Among the flowerless stalks.
In place of petals of the peach
Fast drifts the yellow leaf;
And looking in the lotus-pond
See one face of grief.

Vanished splendors with a ghostly radiance glow in the lines of "The Pai-Lou," "Ou sont les neiges d'antan?" asked the immortal Francois. But in his ballades the dead lords and the dead ladies were the theme. In this poem the difference between the Chinese and the

The tilted carts and donkeys,
The throngs in bright array?
Where are the silk-clad maidens,
O Gate of Yesterday?

Here is a poem in which the human element appears at the very beginning. But here again the landscape—the landscape that is considered not in itself but as a part of the universe—is the thing emphasized. It is easy, in the mind, to change these words to rich colors on a strip of silk—to visualize the hills and the stiles and the cedar trees, and the tiny figure of the hermit:

THE HERMIT.

Among the stant cedars
I have my habode but
Where the gates of heaven are open
And the gates of earth are shut.



Dr. Frederick Peterson.
(From Sketch by Cecelia Beaux.)

French attitudes toward life is clearly shown. In Pai Ta-shun's mind the circumstances are the important thing—he paints, in vivid words, a lovely landscape, and the human part of the past of which he sings is recalled only at the end of the last stanza.

THE PAI'LOU.

With phoenixes and ligers
And dragons' crooked files,
Palence and wood and marble
Quaint wrought, in curious styles,
The three-arched gate—a tripod
That frames the stretching miles—
Still stands a glazed glory
Of multi-colored tiles.
The wind blows through the pai'lou
Like the sound of myriad feet,
And in the ancient tujas
The rustling branches meet
As if a myriad voices
Were murmuring in the street,
The voices of the old time
The time had grown so fleet.

The pai'lou stands there lonely,
Slow falling to decay,
But where are the red-tipped canons
That knew the desert way.

With the ancient scrolls to ponder
And music of the kin,
With peace that floods the valleys
And wraps the spirit in.

Nature unrolls her picture
And present of earth and sky:
Mountain and mist and sunset
And moon and stars pass by.

There are visions that come, and voices
Within the bamboo hut
Where the gates of heaven are open
And the gates of earth are shut.

According to an old Chinese legend, the soul of a knight slain in battle revisited his lady in the form of a gay-winged parrot. Here is Pai Ta-shun's Landoresque version of the story:

THE PARROT.

A parrot at my lattice
Came beating starved and thin,
I opened wide the window
And let the starveling in.
And now he preens his feathers,
The many-colored bird,
And tries in vain to utter
A broken happy word.

In my love dead or dying,
On some wild battle plain?
I cannot see the peach trees
Because of mist and rain.

Homesickness has inspired many a poet. It drew songs of melancholy beauty from the lyres of the Greeks of classic days, it touches the hearts, now and then, even of Imagistes and Vorticists. Homesickness makes Pai Ta-shun akin to Eves Gore-Booth, the poet who wrote:

The great waves of the Atlantic sweep storming on the way,
Shining green and silver with the hidden bearings-shad;
But the little waves of Breefy have drenched my heart in spray,
And the little waves of Breefy go stumbling through my soul.

Pai Ta-shun's poem runs:

HOMESICKNESS.
It is not the wind in the meadows,
It is not the drifting leaf,
It is not the stars rising
At the end of the Autumn brief,
But I see the road to Kinsey
And my heart is full of grief.

Through leagues of pebbled poppies
And leaves on banks of tea,
Through the shading river gorges
From the hills to the sea,
To the low walls and towers
And the old sounding tree.

From one of the thousand bridges
I hear the hiwa's strain
As the golden Pagan-larges
Fluted and re-wood again—
I see the road to Kinsey
And my heart is full of pain.

Laurence Binyon tells of a print of Hokusai, which shows a young man riding out into the world for adventure, and leading his white horse gayly with a willow laugh as he passes a patient angler tamely fishing by the shores of a blue lake. The print illustrates a Chinese poem, of which the significance is: "Why should one linger in the wish that one's bones should rest with the bones of his father? 'Wherever one goes there is the green hill!' The following poem seems to be at variance with this, but the ideas are based on the same philosophy, 'Wherever one goes, there is the green hill.' And also, where the green hill is, there is all the world:

THE BRIDGE.

Across the foaming river
The old bridge bends its bow:
My father's fathers built it
In ages long ago.

They never left the farmstead
Past which the waters curled,
Why should one ever wander—
When here is all the world!

Family, friends, and garden;
Small fields of rice and tea;
The cattle in the meadow;
The birds in stream and tree:

The legend of the seasons
As the slow years go by:
Between the peaks above us
A azure bridge of sky?

Though dead, they live and linger
In each familiar place
With kindly thoughts to hearten
The children of their race.

Here is one of the most intensely personal of Pai Ta-shun's poems—a lyric which gains great poignancy by the simplicity of its refrain:

BARCAROLE.

Small fingers on the silken strings:
Sunset and rising moon;
Far hills of lapis, white of wings
Of homing birds in June;
And thou wert there, the twilight on thy brow—
O bitter is the hiwa's music now!

Beneath the scented larmarinds
On some celestial trail
We drifted with the purple winds
That filled our sampans all;
The purple winds blow once and not again—
O bitter is the hiwa's tender strain!

There are many instances of the selection by poets of pseudonyms to affix to their work, and some poets have tried to give the impression that their original work was translation. Elizabeth Barrett Browning called her sequence of love-poems to her husband "Sonnets from the Portuguese," and William Sharpe wrote so much and so well over the name Fiona MacLeod that there came into existence the legend that he was a veritable case of dual personality. Dr. Peterson's use of a pseudonym is strangely like that of William Sharpe. The staid wit became, when he wrote his poetry, Fiona MacLeod, a dreamy young girl of the haunted highlands. The eminent New York physician becomes, when he writes his poetry, Pai Ta-shun, a serene philosopher of the mysterious Orient of a day lost in the centuries.