

**COLLECTION OF BRITISH
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KWAIDAN, STORIES AND
STUDIES OF STRANGE THINGS**

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Collection of British Authors, Vol. 3987: Kwaidan, Stories and Studies of Strange Things by Lafcadio Hearn

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LAFCADIO HEARN

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1907

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COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS
TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 3987.

KWAIDAN. BY LAFCADIO HEARN.

IN ONE VOLUME.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

KOKORO 1 vol.

KWAIDAN

STORIES AND STUDIES OF STRANGE THINGS

BY

LAFCADIO HEARN

AUTHOR OF "KOKORO"

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1907.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE publication of a new volume of Lafcadio Hearn's exquisite studies of Japan happens, by a delicate irony, to fall in the very month when the world is waiting with tense expectation for news of the latest exploits of Japanese battle-ships. Whatever the outcome of the present struggle between Russia and Japan, its significance lies in the fact that a nation of the East, equipped with Western weapons and girding itself with Western energy of will, is deliberately measuring strength against one of the great powers of the Occident. No one is wise enough to forecast the results of such a conflict upon the civilisation of the world. The best one can do is to estimate, as intelligently as possible, the national characteristics of the peoples engaged, basing one's hopes and fears upon the psychology of the two races rather than upon purely political and statistical studies of the com-

plicated questions involved in the present war. The Russian people have had literary spokesmen who for more than a generation have fascinated the European audience. The Japanese, on the other hand, have possessed no such national and universally recognised figures as Turgenieff or Tolstoy. They need an interpreter.

It may be doubted whether any oriental race has ever had an interpreter gifted with more perfect insight and sympathy than Lafcadio Hearn has brought to the translation of Japan into terms of our occidental speech. His long residence in that country, his flexibility of mind, poetic imagination, and wonderfully pellucid style have fitted him for the most delicate of literary tasks. He has seen marvels, and he has told of them in a marvellous way. There is scarcely an aspect of contemporary Japanese life, scarcely an element in the social, political, and military questions involved in the present conflict with Russia which is not made clear in one or another of the books with which he has charmed American readers.

He characterises Kwaidan as "stories and studies of strange things." A hundred thoughts suggested by

the book might be written down, but most of them would begin and end with this fact of strangeness. To read the very names in the table of contents is like listening to a Buddhist bell, struck somewhere far away. Some of his tales are of the long ago, and yet they seem to illumine the very souls and minds of the little men who are at this hour crowding the decks of Japan's armoured cruisers. But many of the stories are about women and children,—the lovely materials from which the best fairy tales of the world have been woven. They too are strange, these Japanese maidens and wives and keen-eyed, dark-haired girls and boys; they are like us and yet not like us; and the sky and the hills and the flowers are all different from ours. Yet by a magic of which Mr. Hearn, almost alone among contemporary writers, is the master, in these delicate, transparent, ghostly sketches of a world unreal to us, there is a haunting sense of spiritual reality.

In a penetrating and beautiful essay contributed to the "Atlantic Monthly" in February, 1903, by Paul Elmer More, the secret of Mr. Hearn's magic is said to lie in the fact that in his art is found "the meeting

of three ways." "To the religious instinct of India,—Buddhism in particular,—which history has engrafted on the æsthetic sense of Japan, Mr. Hearn brings the interpreting spirit of occidental science; and these three traditions are fused by the peculiar sympathies of his mind into one rich and novel compound,—a compound so rare as to have introduced into literature a psychological sensation unknown before." Mr. More's essay received the high praise of Mr. Hearn's recognition and gratitude, and if it were possible to reprint it here, it would provide a most suggestive introduction to these new stories of old Japan, whose substance is, as Mr. More has said, "so strangely mingled together out of the austere dreams of India and the subtle beauty of Japan and the relentless science of Europe."

March, 1904.