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Feng Shui

or
The Rudiments
of Natural Science
in China

with photographs
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Published by
Pentacle Books
6 Perry Road, Bristol

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FENG-SHUI;

OR, THE

RUDIMENTS OF NATURAL SCIENCE IN CHINA.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

What is Feng-shui? This is a question which has been asked over and over again for the last thirty years. Ever since foreigners were allowed to settle down on the confines of this strange empire of China, this same question has been cropping up continually here and there. When purchasing a site, when building a house, when pulling down a wall, or raising a flagstaff,—residents in the Treaty Ports have encountered innumerable difficulties, and all on account of Feng-shui. When it was proposed to erect a few telegraph poles, when the construction of a railway was urged upon the Chinese Government, when a mere tramway was suggested to utilize the coal-mines of the interior, Chinese officials would invariably make a polite bow and declare the thing impossible on account of Feng-shui. When, thirty years ago, the leading merchants of the Colony of Hongkong endea-

voured to place the business part of the town in the so-called Happy Valley, and to make that part of the island the centre of the whole town, they ignominiously failed on account of Feng-shui. When the Hongkong Government cut a road, now known as the Gap, to the Happy Valley, the Chinese community was thrown into a state of abject terror and fright, on account of the disturbance which this amputation of the dragon's limbs would cause to the Feng-shui of Hongkong; and when many of the engineers, employed at the cutting, died of Hongkong fever, and the foreign houses already built in the Happy Valley had to be deserted on account of malaria, the Chinese triumphantly declared, it was an act of retributory justice on the part of Feng-shui. When Senhor Amaral, the Governor of Macao, who combined with a great passion for constructing roads an unlimited contempt for Feng-shui, interfered with the situation and aspects of Chinese tombs, he was waylaid by Chinese, his head cut off, and the Chinese called this dastardly deed the revenge of Feng-shui.

Surely there must be something in Feng-shui, if it drives the lowest classes of Chinese to commit a foul murder, and is eagerly availed of by ministers of state, as a satisfactory excuse for their own unwillingness to further the progress of trade and civilisation.

What is Feng-shui? Sinologues looked through the Chinese Classics for an answer to this question,

searched through their Dictionaries, and found none. Merchants asked their compradores and house-boys, What is Feng-shui? but the replies they got were rather obscure and confused, and at best they were told, that Feng-shui means "wind and water," and is so called, "because it's a thing like wind, which you cannot comprehend, and like water, which you cannot grasp."

But, strange to say, Chinese constantly assert, that foreigners know all about Feng-shui. When mortality was frightful among the Hongkong troops quartered in Murray Barracks, and the Colonial Surgeon proposed the planting of bamboos at the back of the buildings, the Chinese justly remarked, that this measure was in strict accordance with Feng-shui; and when it was found, that disease was actually checked thereby, they looked upon it as a proof of the virtues of Feng-shui. When foreign residents of Hongkong began to build villas in Pok-foo-lum (which Feng-shui declares to be the best site of the island), when the Government began to build a reservoir there, when tanks were built on the north side of Hongkong, and the hill-side studded with trees, when the cutting of earth was forbidden in places where there is much decomposed rock, the Chinese in all of these cases supposed foreigners to know more about Feng-shui than they would tell, and the Surveyor General was put down as a profound adept in Feng-shui. Why, they say, there is Go-

vernment House, occupying the very best spot on the northern side of the island, screened at the back by high trees and gently-shelving terraces, skirted right and left by roads with graceful curves, and the whole situation combining everything that Feng-shui would prescribe,—how is it possible that foreigners pretend to know nothing of Feng-shui?

Well, if Feng-shui were no more than what our common sense and natural instincts teach us, Chinese Feng-shui would be no such puzzle to us. But the fact is, the Chinese have made Feng-shui a black art, and those that are proficient in this art and derive their livelihood from it, find it to their advantage to make the same mystery of it, with which European alchemists and astrologers used to surround their vagaries. Every resident of China, however, acquires by a few years' practical intercourse with the Chinese a tolerably clear idea of what Feng-shui is, and most of my readers no doubt know, that practically speaking it is simply a system of superstition, supposed to teach people where and when to build a tomb or to erect a house so as to insure for those concerned everlasting prosperity and happiness.

Since my arrival in China I have had a great many practical collisions with Feng-shui, and having for many years collected notes on the subject and studied its literature in all its branches, I now propose to lay the result of my studies before the public. Feng-shui is however, as I take it, but another name

for natural science; and I must ask therefore the indulgence of my readers, for my introducing a general outline of Chinese physical science in order to make the system of Feng-shui intelligible.

Natural science has never been cultivated in China in that technical, dry and matter-of-fact fashion, which seems to us inseparable from true science. Chinese naturalists did not take much pains in studying nature and ferreting out her hidden secrets by minute and practical tests and experiments. They invented no instruments to aid them in the observation of the heavenly bodies, they never took to hunting beetles and stuffing birds, they shrank from the idea of dissecting animal bodies, nor did they chemically analyse inorganic substances, but with very little actual knowledge of nature they evolved a whole system of natural science from their own inner consciousness and expounded it according to the dogmatic formulæ of ancient tradition. Deplorable, however, as this absence of practical and experimental investigation is, which opened the door to all sorts of conjectural theories, it preserved in Chinese natural science a spirit of sacred reverence for the divine powers of nature.

Though modern Confucianism has long ago discarded the belief in one supreme personal God, of which their classical writings still preserve a dead record, and though they substituted, for the personal God whom their forefathers worshipped, an abstract

regards matters of intellect,—yet I say, would God, that our own men of science had preserved in their observatories, laboratories and lecture-rooms that same child-like reverence for the living powers of nature, that sacred awe and trembling fear of the mysteries of the unseen, that firm belief in the reality of the invisible world and its constant intercommunication with the seen and the temporal, which characterise these Chinese gropings after natural science.

The system of Feng-shui is of comparatively modern origin. Its diagrams and leading ideas are indeed borrowed from one of the ancient classics, but its method and practical application are almost wholly based on the teachings of Choo-he and others, who lived under the Sung dynasty (A.D. 1126-1278), and whose commentaries to the classics are read in every school. Choo-he's mode of thinking has in fact been adopted by modern Confucianism, and forms the philosophical basis of the whole system of Feng-shui.

According to Choo-he there was in the beginning one abstract principle or monad, called the "absolute nothing," which evolved out of itself the "great absolute." This abstract principle or monad, the great absolute, is the primordial cause of all existence. When it first moved, its breath or vital energy congealing, produced the great male principle. When it had moved to the uttermost it rested, and in resting produced the female principle. After it had

rested to the utmost extent, it again moved, and thus went on in alternate motion and rest without cessation. When this supreme cause thus divided itself into male and female, that which was above constituted heaven, and that which was beneath formed the earth. Thus it was that heaven and earth were made. But the supreme cause having produced by evolution the male and female principles, and through them heaven and earth, ceased not its constant permutations, in the course of which men and animals, vegetables and minerals, rose into being. The same vital energy, moreover, continued to act ever since, and continued to act through those two originating causes, the male and female powers of nature, which ever since mutually and alternately push and agitate one another, without a moment's intermission.

Now, the energy animating the two principles is called in Chinese *Hi*, or the breath of nature. When this breath first went forth and produced the male and female principles and finally the whole universe, it did not do so arbitrarily or at random, but followed fixed, inscrutable and immutable laws. These laws or order of nature, called *Li*, were therefore abstractly considered prior to the issuing of the vital breath, and must therefore be considered separately. Again, considering this *Li*, or the general order of the universe, the ancient sages observed that all the laws of nature and all the workings of its vital breath are in strict accordance with certain mathematical prin-

ciples, which may be traced and illustrated by diagrams, exhibiting the numerical proportion of the universe called So, or numbers. But the breath of nature or the Hi, the order of nature called Li, and the mathematical proportions of nature, called So, these three principles are not directly cognizable to the senses, they are hidden from view, and only become manifest through forms and outlines of physical nature. In other words, the phenomena of nature, her outward forms of appearance, constitute a fourth branch of the system of natural science called Ying, or forms of nature. Now these four divisions, Li, or the general order of nature, So, her numerical proportions, Hi, her vital breath or subtle energies, and Ying, her forms of appearance, constitute what is popularly called the system of Feng-shui.

No Chinese work on Feng-shui, however—or at least none that I have seen or heard of—follows out this division methodically, though they all mention these four principles and give them here and there due prominence. On the other hand, this division of four branches of the Feng-shui system is not my own. A distinguished Cantonese scholar, a member of the Imperial College, mentions, in a preface which he wrote to a popular geomantic work, that the whole system of Feng-shui might advantageously be divided into the above-mentioned four parts. From this preface I have taken the hint, and propose now to set before my readers the system of Feng-shui, fol-

lowing out this fourfold plan, and working it out so that it should give them an insight into the whole system of Chinese natural science generally.
