# MODERN ENGLISH ESSAYS
## FOR CHINESE STUDENTS

SELECTED AND EDITED WITH NOTES

BY

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THE COMMERCIAL PRESS, LIMITED

SHANGHAI, CHINA

1930

# PREFACE

This collection of modern essays in English is intended for Chinese advanced students with the aim to drive home the idea that an understanding appreciation of literature means an understanding appreciation of life. The editor attempts to lead the reader to understand and appreciate most naturally modern English literature in the form of essays by presenting to him some observations of rare insight, some new vistas in life—in a word, a few vital messages from the mature minds to the younger generation. Such an attempt represents a new conscientious approach to the problem of teaching English in China.

The essays in this volume are chosen from a wide range of contemporary authors, the great majority of whom are still alive. Generally, material often reprinted is not used. The editor assumes no responsibility that the selections are perfect models for study. Nor is he conceited to believe that he has procured the best or representative essays in the English language. Nevertheless, it is his conviction that they are of literary value and absorbing interest to every thoughtful youth, and that through their medium the Chinese student is enabled to feel much at home in English literature.

To enhance this at-home feeling some writings of Chinese authors are included. In as much as they are not renderings, but essays actually written in English by these Anglo-Chinese scholars of high standing, there is justification in representing them in this volume of English prose.

The selections center on six themes, strung together by the main theme of LIFE. Some of them may be criticized as short of modernity, and still it is but of

yesterday that, for instance, the ancient type of Chinese civilization has begun to give place to the new, and part of it, however small, will remain intact after revaluation. Of course the editor's task is not to arrange the selections in such a way as to fix or reconcile ideas. Rather he seeks to provoke ideas in the young minds for the purpose of stimulating their mental reactions and exercising their critical talent.

The book may be used in a variety of ways. As an end in itself, it serves for a textbook of modern essays. As a means, it may be employed for a volume of readings to accompany essay writing, since they are as varied in treatment as in thought. In either case, high efficiency can be gained if both teacher and pupil will from time to time apply such methods as analysis of thought and treatment, prêcis writing, outline making, correlation study, collateral reading, criticism, etc.

By correlation study is meant the method of studying some essays, one after another, which bear some particular relationship to the same subject matter. For example, "The Civilizations of the East and the West," by Dr. Hu Shih, may be read in contrast with Mr. Ku Hung-ming's "Spirit of the Chinese People." Again Lafcadio Hearn's lecture on "The Insuperable Difficulty," which throws a sidelight on the woman question, may be studied with the first essays in Group III by way of reference or supplement. Thereby the critical ability of the pupil is called forth.

For rhetorical purposes these selections may be studied in the same way. Between "National Characteristics as Molding Public Opinion" and "How to Read a Classic," between the first and the last essay in this volume, the distinction is that of general and specific exposition, of a common type of catalogue-form writing and a rare type of interpreting fully one instance to support a central theme. The distinction is sharp, and it may be expected of the teacher to pick out other

essays to serve as intermediate links. He is also requested to call the student's attention to the fact that a simple essay like James Bryce's has a type of writing called sketch at the other extreme of the evolution of essay writing, which finds its example in "With the Photographer." To mention another phase of style: As "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" is followed by "The Irony of Nature," the student is apt to discover how greatly they differ in treatment, though the arguments in each composition all lead to its conclusion. The one seems to be a desultory talk of a philosopher, while the other is wrought by literary craftsmanship.

As for collateral reading, the instructor has an immense field of material for his choice. The editor suggests as an illustration that G. K. Chesterton's "French and English" may be supplemented by the first half of Chapter I in his other book entitled "The Victorian Age in Literature," by Washington Irving's essay on the "Rural Life in England," or by Dr. Min-ch'ien T. Z. Tyau's chapter on "English Characteristics" in his "London Through Chinese Eyes." The other methods of study, like prècis writing and outline making, perhaps need no explanation.

Footnotes in the text consist of explanations of allusions, quotations, foreign words, proper names, etc. With the help of them the student is expected to read the selections all the more intelligently and eagerly.

There is also a biographical index, which purports to introduce him to the authors.

The whole scheme of this work is to present the essays which cater to the zest and needs of the growing intellect in the country, in the light of those factors which will contribute to the appreciation in a most natural and pleasant way of modern English literature as an interpreter of life, and of the language as a great vehicle for expressing thought and emotions. It is

hoped that such a presentation by the editor will win the good opinion and support of teachers of English, and that in the following pages will be met in some measure the wide and long-felt demand for an adequate textbook teaching modern English in China.

The editor takes pleasure in acknowledging his indebtedness to the authors and publishers for the use of the essays in the volume. To Dr. Hu Shih, Professor M. H. Throop, and Mr. Tseu Yih Zan a word of gratitude is also expressed for their valuable suggestions and helps, and to Miss Alice M. Roberts for proof reading and other assistance. The editor is especially obliged to Dr. Fong F. Sec, who has taken much pains in reading over the manuscript.

TOONG ZEU-BANG.

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# I. EASTERN AND WESTERN LIFE

"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East or West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth."

— RUDYARD KIPLING.

# MODERN ENGLISH ESSAYS

## NATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS AS MOLDING PUBLIC OPINION[1]

By James Bryce

As the public opinion of a people is even more directly than its political institutions the reflection and expression of its character, we may begin the analysis of opinion in America by noting some of those general features of national character which give tone and color to the people's thoughts and feelings on politics. There are, of course, varieties proper to different classes, and to different parts of the vast territory of the Union;[2] but it is well to consider first such characteristics as belong to the nation as a whole, and afterwards to examine the various classes and districts of the country. And when I speak of the nation, I mean the native Americans. What follows is not applicable to the recent immigrants from Europe, and, of course, even less applicable to the Southern negroes.

The Americans are a good-natured people, kindly, helpful to one another, disposed to take a charitable view even of wrongdoers. Their anger sometimes flames up, but the fire is soon extinct. Nowhere is cruelty more abhorred. Even a mob lynching a horse thief in the West[3] has consideration for the criminal, and will give him a good drink of whisky before he is strung up.

[1] From "The American Commonwealth," 1911, James Bryce, The Macmillan Company.

[2] **The Union:** The United States.

[3] **The West:** The western part of the United States.

Cruelty to slaves was unusual while slavery lasted, the best proof of which is the quietness of the slaves during the war[1] when all the men and many of the boys of the South were serving in the Confederate armies.[2] As everybody knows, juries are more lenient to offenses of all kinds but one, offenses against women, than they are anywhere in Europe. The Southern "rebels" were soon forgiven; and though civil wars are proverbially bitter, there have been few struggles in which the combatants did so many little friendly acts for one another, few in which even the vanquished have so quickly buried their resentments. It is true that newspapers and public speakers say hard things of their opponents; but this is a part of the game, and is, besides, a way of relieving their feelings: the bark is sometimes the louder in order that a bite may not follow. Vindictiveness shown by a public man excites general disapproval, and the maxim of letting bygones be bygones is pushed so far that an offender's misdeeds are often forgotten when they ought to be remembered against him.

All the world knows that they are a humorous people. They are as conspicuously the purveyors of humor to the nineteenth century as the French were the purveyors of wit to the eighteenth. Nor is this sense of the ludicrous side of things confined to a few brilliant writers. It is diffused among the whole people; it colors their ordinary life, and gives to their talk that distinctively new flavor which a European palate enjoys. Their capacity for enjoying a joke against themselves was oddly illustrated at the outset of the Civil War, a time of stern excitement, by the merriment which

[1] **The war:** The Civil War, 1861–1865. Its chief causes were the antislavery agitation and the development of the doctrine of state sovereignty.

[2] **Confederate armies:** The armies of the Confederate States, eleven in number, which seceded from the United States in 1860 and 1861 and formed a *de facto* government.

arose over the hasty retreat of the Federal troops[1] at the Battle of Bull Run.[2] When William M. Tweed[3] was ruling and robbing New York, and had set on the bench men who were openly prostituting justice, the citizens found the situation so amusing that they almost forgot to be angry. Much of President Lincoln's[4] popularity, and much also of the gift he showed for restoring confidence to the North at the darkest moments of the war, was due to the humorous way he used to turn things, conveying the impression of not being himself uneasy, even when he was most so.

That indulgent view of mankind which I have already mentioned, a view odd in a people whose ancestors were penetrated with the belief in original sin, is strengthened by this wish to get amusement out of everything. The want of seriousness which it produces may be more apparent than real. Yet it has its significance; for people become affected by the language they use, as we see men grow into cynics when they have acquired the habit of talking cynicism for the sake of effect.

They are a hopeful people. Whether or no they are right in calling themselves a new people, they certainly seem to feel in their veins the bounding pulse of youth. They see a long vista of years stretching out before them, in which they will have time enough to cure all their faults, to overcome all the obstacles that block their path. They look at their enormous territory with its still only half-explored sources of wealth, they reckon

[1] **Federal troops:** The armies of the Federal States, those Northern States which were faithful to President Lincoln.

[2] **The Battle of Bull Run:** Fought on August 30, 1861. The Federals were defeated by the Confederates.

[3] **William M. Tweed** (1823–1878): Democratic politician and notorious criminal. As the head of a group of influential politicians, known as the "Tweed Ring," he succeeded in getting control of the financial affairs of New York, and in robbing it of many millions of dollars.

[4] **President Lincoln:** Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865), the sixteenth president of the United States (1861–1865). His election was the signal for the secession of the slave states of the South.

up the growth of their population and their products, they contrast the comfort and intelligence of their laboring classes with the condition of the masses in the Old World.[1] They remember the dangers that so long threatened the Union from the slave power, and the rebellion it raised, and see peace and harmony now restored, the South more prosperous and contented than at any previous epoch, perfect good feeling between all sections of the country. It is natural for them to believe in their star. And this sanguine temper makes them tolerant of evils which they regard as transitory, removable as soon as time can be found to root them up.

They have unbounded faith in what they call the People and in a democratic system of government. The great States of the European continent are distracted by the contests of Republicans and Monarchists, and of rich and poor, — contests which go down to the foundations of government, and in France are further embittered by religious passions. Even in England the ancient Constitution is always under repair, and while some think it is being ruined by changes, others hold that further changes are needed to make it tolerable. No such questions trouble native American minds, for nearly everybody believes, and everybody declares, that the frame of government is in its main lines so excellent that such reforms as seem called for need not touch those lines, but are required only to protect the Constitution from being perverted by the parties. Hence a further confidence that the people are sure to decide right in the long run, a confidence inevitable and essential in a government which refers every question to the arbitrament of numbers. There have, of course, been instances where the once insignificant minority proved to have been wiser than the majority of the

[1] **The Old World:** Europe and Asia. America is spoken of as the New World.

moment. Such was eminently the case in the great slavery struggle. But here the minority prevailed by growing into a majority as events developed the real issues, so that this also has been deemed a ground for holding that all minorities which have right on their side will bring round their antagonists, and in the long run win by voting power. If you ask an intelligent citizen why he so holds, he will answer that truth and justice are sure to make their way into the minds and consciences of the majority. This is deemed an axiom, and the more readily so deemed because truth is identified with common sense, the quality which the average citizen is most confidently proud of possessing.

This feeling shades off into another, externally like it, but at bottom distinct — the feeling not only that the majority, be it right or wrong, will and must prevail, but that its being the majority proves it to be right. This idea, which appears in the guise sometimes of piety and sometimes of fatalism, seems to be no contemptible factor in the present character of the people. It will be more fully dealt with in a later chapter.

The native Americans are an educated people, compared with the whole mass of the population in any European country except Switzerland, parts of Germany, Norway, Iceland, and Scotland; that is to say, the average of knowledge is higher, the habit of reading and thinking more generally diffused, than in any other country. They know the Constitution of their own country, they follow public affairs, they join in local government and learn from it how government must be carried on, and in particular how discussion must be conducted in meetings, and its results tested at elections. The Town Meeting[1] was for New England the most

[1] **The Town Meeting:** An assemblage of the citizens of a town in New England for the transaction of business relating to their self-government.

perfect school of self-government in any modern country. In villages, men used to exercise their minds on theological questions, debating points of Christian doctrine with no small acuteness. Women, in particular, pick up at the public schools and from the popular magazines far more miscellaneous information than the women of any European country possess, and this naturally tells on the intelligence of the men. Almost everywhere one finds women's clubs in which literary, artistic, and social questions are discussed, and to which men of mark are brought to deliver lectures.

That the education of the masses is, nevertheless, a superficial education goes without saying. It is sufficient to enable them to think they know something about the great problems of politics: insufficient to show them how little they know. The public elementary school gives everybody the key to knowledge in making reading and writing familiar, but it has not time to teach him how to use the key, whose use is, in fact, by the pressure of daily work, almost confined to the newspaper and the magazine. So we may say that if the political education of the average American voter be compared with that of the average voter in Europe, it stands high; but if it be compared with the functions which the theory of the American government lays on him, which its spirit implies, which the methods of its party organization assume, its inadequacy is manifest. This observation, however, is not so much a reproach to the schools, which generally do what English schools omit — instruct the child in the principles of the Constitution — as a tribute to the height of the ideal which the American conception of popular rule sets up.

For the functions of the citizen are not, as has hitherto been the case in Europe, confined to the choosing of legislators, who are then left to settle issues of policy and select executive rulers. The American citizen is one of the governors of the Republic. Issues

are decided and rulers selected by the direct popular vote. Elections are so frequent that to do his duty at them a citizen ought to be constantly watching public affairs with a full comprehension of the principles involved in them, and a judgment of the candidates derived from a criticism of their arguments as well as a recollection of their past careers. The instruction received in the common schools and from the newspapers, and supposed to be developed by the practice of primaries and conventions, while it makes the voter deem himself capable of governing, does not fit him to weigh the real merits of statesmen, to discern the true grounds on which questions ought to be decided, to note the drift of events and discover the direction in which parties are being carried. He is like a sailor who knows the spars and ropes of the ship and is expert in working her, but is ignorant of geography and navigation; who can perceive that some of the officers are smart and others dull, but cannot judge which of them is qualified to use the sextant or will best keep his head during a hurricane.

They are a moral and well-conducted people. Setting aside the *colluvies gentium*[1] which one finds in Western mining camps, now largely filled by recent immigrants, and which popular literature has presented to Europeans as far larger than it really is, setting aside also the rabble of a few great cities and the negroes of the South, the average of temperance, chastity, truthfulness, and general probity is somewhat higher than in any of the great nations of Europe. The instincts of the native farmer or artisan are almost invariably kindly and charitable. He respects the law; he is deferential to women and indulgent to children; he attaches an almost excessive value to the possession of a genial manner and the observance of domestic duties.

[1] ***Colluvies gentium:*** A rabble of all kinds of people. (Latin)

They are also — and here again I mean the people of native American stock, especially in the Eastern and Middle States — on the whole, a religious people. It is not merely that they respect religion and its ministers, for that one might say of Russians or Sicilians, not merely that they are assiduous churchgoers and Sunday-school teachers, but that they have an intelligent interest in the form of faith they profess, are pious without superstition, and zealous without bigotry. The importance which some still, though all much less than formerly, attach to dogmatic propositions, does not prevent them from feeling the moral side of their theology. Christianity influences conduct, not indeed half as much as in theory it ought, but probably more than it does in any other modern country, and far more than it did in the so-called ages of faith.

Nor do their moral and religious impulses remain in the soft haze of self-complacent sentiment. The desire to expunge or cure the visible evils of the world is strong. Nowhere are so many philanthropic and reformatory agencies at work. Zeal outruns discretion, outruns the possibilities of the case, in not a few of the efforts made, as well by legislation as by voluntary action, to suppress vice, to prevent intemperance, to purify popular literature.

Religion apart, they are an unreverential people. I do not mean irreverent, — far from it; nor do I mean that they have not a great capacity for hero worship, as they have many a time shown. I mean that they are little disposed, especially in public questions — political, economical, or social — to defer to the opinions of those who are wiser or better instructed than themselves. Everything tends to make the individual independent and self-reliant. He goes early into the world; he is left to make his way alone; he tries one occupation after another, if the first or second venture does not prosper; he gets to think that each man is his own best helper