

YUTANG

WITH LOVE AND IRONY

LIN YUTANG

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Illustrated by Kurt Wiese



BLUE RIBBON BOOKS

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TO THE MEMORY OF
HEYWOOD BROUN
FRIEND OF MEN

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN I was living in Nanking, China, I followed with sharp interest several new and struggling little magazines, because of my concern with what was taking place around me in a revolutionary China. There was one in English called *The China Critic*. I read it from cover to cover every week, since in it young Chinese intellectuals were expressing their thoughts and hopes. Their language was English, partly because they wanted English-speaking readers, partly because they wrote, some of them, more easily in English than in Chinese. Then there began to appear in its pages a column entitled "The Little Critic," signed by one Lin Yutang, of whom until then I had never heard. The column was unvaryingly a fresh, keen, accurate comment on some aspect or occurrence of daily life, political or social. What won my first admiration was its fearlessness. At a time when it was really dangerous to criticize those in power, The Little Critic criticized boldly and freely, saving himself, I am sure, only by the humor and wit with which his opinions were expressed. This wit, clothing fearlessness where others were timid, mercilessness where no mercy was due, and sympathy for and appreciation of the common people of China, bourgeoisie as well as proletariat, soon drew the attention of many readers besides myself, and people began to ask, "Who is this Lin Yutang?"

Many readers in many countries have asked that since,

and have found out who he is. His books explain him. But this book explains him in a peculiar way. It contains the kind of writing which is perhaps above all others most native to Lin Yutang's genius, and genius unquestionably he is. These writings represent the sparkling, thrusting quality of his thought. They are the instinctive expression of the working of his mind, glancing, darting, penetrating, laughing.

Over a period of years Lin Yutang has written down these short pungent pieces, and from them, past and present, this book has been made. They are not all here, by any means, for many of them were timely and are no longer in point. But enough are here to show variety, and variety is Lin Yutang's delight, although his interest can hold a subject long and deeply, too, when it is profound.

There is another thing I might tell. One night in 1933 I was dining in Lin Yutang's home, then in Shanghai. We had been speaking of foreign writers about China, when he said suddenly, "I should like to write a book telling exactly how I feel about China."

"You are the one who could do it," I replied with utmost enthusiasm. I had longed for just such a book from a Chinese. Lin Yutang wrote it, and it was called *My Country and My People*. The basic sources of that book, and indeed many passages in it and in *The Importance of Living* which followed it, were first in the columns of "The Little Critic." Before either was written, I gathered together some of those columns and sent them to America, to *Asia Magazine*. One of them was published in that magazine, and was the first work of Lin Yutang to appear in this country. It was "The Lost Mandarin," which is included in the present volume.

Lin Yutang has spent the last months in the heart of China.

He has shared with millions of others the cruel experiences of war. But whatever those experiences have been he will remain what he is in this book, the little critic, humorous, wise, and unaffected in his sincerity.

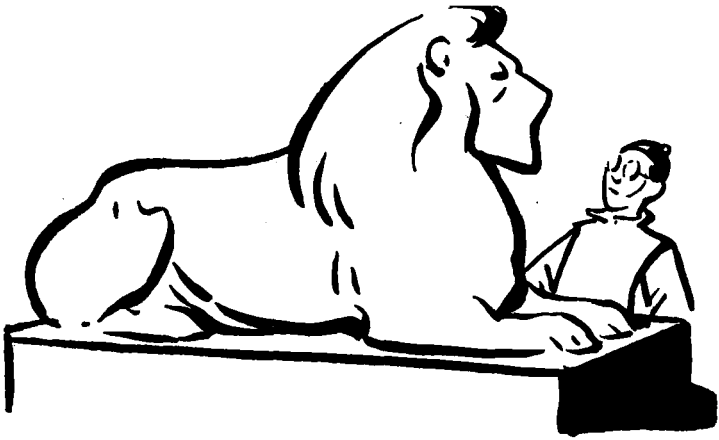
PEARL S. BUCK

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1

THE ENGLISH AND THE CHINESE

ONE is often tempted nowadays to reflect on the white man, because the spectacle of present-day Europe is extremely thought-provoking.

We cannot help asking why Europe is in such a mess, because where human events are in a mess, the human beings must be at fault. We are forced to ask ourselves, "What are the psychological limitations of the European which make peace so difficult in Europe?" What are the peculiarities of the European's mental make-up? And, by mental make-up, I do not mean intelligence or thinking pure and simple but all the psychological reactions to things.

I should never for a moment question the intelligence of the European race. But the sad part of it is that, after all, intelligence has very little to do with the course of human events, which are mostly dictated by our animal passions.

Human history is not the product of the wise direction of human reason, but is shaped by the forces of emotion—our dreams, our pride, our greed, our fears, and our desire for revenge. Europe is still dominated not by intelligence but by the animal passions of fear and revenge. Progress in Europe is the result not of the white man's thinking but of his lack of thinking. If there were a single supreme Human Intelligence today put at the head of Europe and guiding her entire destiny, Europe would not be what she is. Modern Europe is being ruled not by a single supreme Human Intelligence but by three men with big and powerful jaws—Signor Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, and Josef Stalin.

This is not a mere accident. Some faces are like triangles, with the broad base situated below (the dictators and men of action), and some faces are like inverted triangles (the men of intelligence and thinkers, Bertrand Russell, for example). The men of intelligence and the men of action belong to two entirely different types. The German nation can swear allegiance to "God and Hitler," but, if an English Nazi party were to swear allegiance to "God and Bertrand Russell," Bertrand Russell would die of shame. So long as Europe is ruled by these men with big and powerful jaws and so long as she is willing to be ruled by men with big and powerful jaws, Europe must continue along her present lines of development and head for the abyss she is heading for today.

Every nation dreams, and acts more or less completely on her dreams. Human history is the result of the conflict of our ideals and realities, and the adjustment between ideals and reality determines the peculiar development of that nation. The U.S.S.R. is the result of the Russian capacity for dreaming; the French Republic was the result of the French pas-

sion for abstract ideas; the British Empire is the result of the wonderfully robust common sense of the English and their utter freedom from logical reasoning; and the German Nazi regime is the result of the German love for a common front and mass action.

I write of the English character because I think I understand England better than these other countries. I feel that the spirit of the English people is more akin to the spirit of the Chinese people, for both nations are worshipers of realism and common sense. There are many points of similarity between the English and the Chinese in their modes of thinking and even in their modes of speech. Both peoples have a profound distrust of logic and are extremely suspicious of arguments that are too perfect. We believe that when an argument is too logical it cannot be true. And both countries are gifted more at doing the right things than at giving happy reasons for doing them. All Englishmen love a good liar, and so do the Chinese. We love to call a thing by anything except its right name. Of course there are many points of dissimilarity (the Chinese are more emotional, for instance), and the Chinese and English sometimes exasperate each other; but I am digging at the roots of our racial make-up.

Let us analyze the strength of the English character and see how England's glorious career as a nation arises from it. We all know that England has had not only a glorious career but also a positively amazing career. England always had the knack of doing the right thing and calling it by the wrong name, as today, for instance, she calls the English democracy a 'monarchy'. For this reason, it is very difficult to appreciate the quality of English greatness. The English

nation has been misunderstood, and it takes a Chinese to understand the English racial character properly. The English people have been accused of hypocrisy, inconsistency, a genius for "muddling through," and a notorious lack of logic. I am making a defense of English inconsistency and English common sense. The accusation of hypocrisy is unjust and arises from a lack of true understanding and appreciation of the English character. I think, as a Chinese, I can understand the English character better than Englishmen understand themselves.

I am trying here chiefly to give a point of view for a true appreciation of England's greatness. In order to appreciate England one has to have a certain contempt for logic. All this misunderstanding of the English people arises from a perverted idea of the true function of thinking. There is always a danger that we regard abstract thinking as the highest function of the human mind, to be valued over and above simple common sense. Now the first function of nations, as of animals, is to know how to live, and, unless you learn how to live and adjust yourself to changing circumstances, all your thinking is futile and a perversion of the normal function of the human brain.

We all have the perverted idea that the human brain is an organ for thinking. Nothing is further from the truth. That view, I submit, is biologically incorrect and unsound. Lord Balfour has wisely said that "the human brain is as much an organ for seeking food as the pig's snout." After all, the human brain is only an enlarged piece of the spinal column whose first function is to sense danger and preserve life. We were animals before we became thinkers. This so-called logical reasoning is only a very much belated development in the animal world, and even now it is still highly imperfect.

Man is only a half-thinking and half-feeling animal. The type of thinking which helps one to get food and get along in life is a higher, not a lower, type of thinking, because this kind of thinking is always sounder. This type of thinking is usually called common sense.

Now action without thinking may be foolish, but action without common sense is always disastrous. A nation with a robust common sense is not a nation that does no thinking but rather a nation which has subjugated its thinking to its instinct for life and made them harmonious. Thinking of this type profits from the instinct for life but is never against it. Too much thinking will bring about mankind's destruction.

The English people think, too, but never allow themselves to be lost in their own thoughts and logical abstractions. That is the greatness of the English mind and the reason for England's ability always to do the right thing at the right moment. It is also the reason for the English ability to fight the right war on the right side. She has always fought the right war and always given wrong reasons for her choice. That is the reason for England's amazing power and vitality. You may call it "muddling through" and inconsistency and hypocrisy. At the bottom of it all is the robust English common sense and a level-headed instinct for life.

In other words, the first law of nations as of individuals is the law of self-preservation, and, the more a nation is able to adjust itself to changing circumstances, the sounder is her instinct for life, logic or no logic. "Consistency," Cicero says, "is the virtue of small minds." The English capacity for inconsistency is merely a sign of England's greatness.

Take the amazing British Empire, for example, today still