

LIN YUTANG

BETWEEN TEARS
AND LAUGHTER



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TO
RICHARD J. WALSH
PEARL S. BUCK
IN ABIDING FRIENDSHIP

PREFACE TO MYSELF

THE purpose of this book is to say something that must be said and say it with simplicity.

The age calls for simple statements and restatements of simple truths. The prophets of doom are involved, those who would bring light must be clear.

Our problem is the problem of moral decay and regeneration. From a handful of dust faith must come. There is more hope in a heather rose than in all the tons of Teutonic philosophy.

I do not know how to say these things, but God give me strength to say them.

The shadow of another war already looms before us. We have to think straight and think fast.

LIN YUTANG

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
PREFACE TO MYSELF	vii
I. THE SITUATION	
1. A CONFESSION	I
2. KARMA	10
3. THE EMERGENCE OF ASIA	18
4. THE SUICIDE OF GREECE	23
5. CHURCHILL AND PERICLES	33
6. WORLD WAR III	50
II. THE METHOD	
7. THE "WHITE MAN'S BURDEN"	58
8. GOVERNMENT BY MUSIC	65
9. MATHEMATICS AND PEACE	74
10. DEFENSE OF COURTESY	81
11. EUROPEANIZATION OF THE WORLD	87
12. DEFENSE OF THE MOB	93
13. THE FUTURE OF ASIA	110
III. SYMPTOMS	
14. PEACE BY POWER	121
15. A PHILOSOPHY OF PEACE	127
16. PEACE BY POINT RATIONS	133
17. THE SCIENCE OF THE BLOODY EARTH	146
18. THE INTELLECTUAL'S DILEMMA	159
IV. DIAGNOSIS	
19. THE CHARACTER OF THE MODERN AGE	163
20. ORIGINS OF THE MECHANISTIC MIND	174
21. SCIENCE TO THE RESCUE	186
22. THE SEARCH FOR PRINCIPLES	200
23. THE COMMON STANDARD FOR MEN	206
24. EPILOGUE	214

I. THE SITUATION

1

A CONFESSION

AS I take up my pen to put down the thoughts bursting for expression in my head and my heart, I am troubled by the question of ruthless honesty and whether it is worth while. The question is not whether it is worth while to myself, but to the public. I have decided that it is worth while. For every good book is worth the reader's while when there is a real communion of the spirit, and this is possible only when he feels he is being taken into the author's confidence and the author is willing to reveal to him the innermost searchings of his heart and talk, as it were, in an unbuttoned mood, collar and tie loose, as by a friend's fireside. Nobody is ever misunderstood at a fireside; he may only be disagreed with. Agreement of opinion is the least important thing; disagreement is not only profitable, but necessary to thinking. At the fireside of a friend there is many a heated argument, after which both friends see many things not seen before. The writer who is willing to let go is sure of being understood, and only friendship which can stand occasional plain speaking is worth having.

I may as well make a confession here. For a month or so, I have been living in a daze. My mind, as I look back upon it now, has been a complete blank—I can only remember fuming and lying awake at night, thinking, thinking, thinking of how to break the solid wall of the Washington blockade of supplies for China. And thinking, lying awake at night, over the puzzle that President Roosevelt gave us. "Even now," said the President, "we are flying into China as much Lend-Lease material as ever traversed the Burma Road." That statement contained a joker, and I didn't like it—I didn't like joking and quibbling

about vital supplies for my country at war. I knew the exact tonnage being flown in, which no official has dared to make public. It was the last straw, and broke the camel of easy-paced Chinese patience. It was a slap in the face, and stunned me into a half-daze.

Let me tell you how the Chinese camel broke. I had been slapped in the face before, or rather I felt China had been, successively. My country being pledged to a life-and-death struggle with Japan, these slaps were so personal that I felt as though someone had slapped me bodily. I have heard of prisoners being slapped by the Japanese, and have often wondered what Jesus would say about that. Jesus' injunctions ended with the second smiting on the left cheek; what one should do after turning the right cheek, if there was a third slap, followed by a fourth, the Bible did not tell us. Always it was not the injury, but the abuse, that hurt. What I could not stand was not selfishness—for that I could always understand; what I could not stand was bad manners. It was not so hard to be kicked unintentionally; it was harder to be told that being kicked didn't matter, or that the kicker had just never thought anything about it. I knew as well as any American that America was shipping oil and scrap iron to Tokyo to bomb Chinese women and children. Chinese patience is big enough for that. In a hypothetical case, if China should now declare herself a neutral and send scrap iron to Japan while the United States is fighting her, meanwhile maintaining a friendly relationship with the United States and praising her for her "heroic struggle," I doubt whether there would be as much equanimity in the American press or American diplomatic quarters as China showed before Pearl Harbor. But when President Roosevelt in the summer of 1941 called this policy of shipping iron and oil to Japan a "success," with evident satisfaction, that was the first big slap on my face. Of course all who hurt people with their words hurt through thoughtlessness. It obscured all the pin pricks before—the steady protests of the State Department to

Tokyo on the violation of U. S. property rights in China, on the damage to an American warehouse and three benches at Wuhu or a church building and four cats at Chinkiang, while ignoring the bombing of Chinese women.

The second slap came when the London Government ordered the Burma Road closed a second time. Since Britain, as events clearly demonstrated, neither meant for a moment to hold Burma with her own troops, nor would allow the entrance of Chinese troops, it was, in fact if not in name, an order to close the Burma Road. But then an English general gloated over the fall of Burma and expressed his "satisfaction" at the campaign which "gained three months for strengthening of India's defense."

The confiscation by General Wavell of China's Lend-Lease supplies arriving in India and Burma without previous notification of Chungking was a third slap.

The failure to make some slight effort to relieve the blockade of China by adequate air transport, and the obstructionist and dilly-dallying attitude of certain Washington bureaucrats in this matter, was a fourth big slap.

The shabby treatment accorded the Chinese Military Mission, sent to Washington to provide information and counsel in establishing a common war plan against Japan, was a fifth slap.

The smearing campaign about China's "fascism" and "imperialism" and "hoarding of supplies" as justification for not giving military aid to China—adding insult to injury—was a severe sixth slap.

Naturally, when, on top of all this, President Roosevelt put a joker in his statement about a perfect state of things regarding air transport to China, when it was actually scandalous and unprintable, the Chinese camel broke down. At least, as one Chinese, I did not think it was funny. . . . Further *double entendre* and lies about Stalin objecting to Chiang being invited to Casablanca kept me in that stunned condition for a month.

Then yesterday afternoon I took a walk in the uptown cross-streets, struggling with myself and striving for light to avoid a nervous collapse. I tried to see my own country as Americans would see her. Also I determined to view China's role across the decades. I arrived at two conclusions.

One of these conclusions, which had been slowly forming in my mind in the last month, was that China should travel the road with America and England in the next decades as a friendly nation, under two conditions. The first condition is that under whatever semblance or form of World Federation may be established, China will never, judging from her present experiences during the war, be accorded true equality, because she is Asiatic. She will be deprived of an air force of her own at the time the war stops, if her Allies can help it. She will not be accorded true equality until she is like Japan, twenty years from now, when she can build her own tanks and guns and battleships. When that time comes, there will be no need to argue about equality, such being the standards of the modern age. Meanwhile, acting with the traditional Chinese wisdom of "pretending to be a damn fool," China will be big enough for a few more insults and humiliations. Even Japan had to stand for the 5:5:3—for a time; the profound effect of this on Japanese psychology is deeper than westerners suspect, or can even understand. But there is the enormous patience, the bigness, the reasonableness of China. The second condition is that while acting as a friendly nation, China must learn the important lesson of acting for national self-interest as western nations have done and are doing. Such a friendly status should not prevent China from seeking her own profits and national strength as the only road to equality with the western powers, nor, if similar circumstances arose, should it prevent her from sending scrap iron and oil to the fighting enemies of her "friends," or closing her "friends'" strategic lines, in order to appease another powerful neutral.

I am convinced that this will be the shape of things, and will

be the road China must travel before she will be treated as an equal, all talk of culture and friendship notwithstanding. For China, being newly initiated into the family of nations, is like a boy on his first day in school. His mother has told him to be polite and courteous to everybody so that his parents will not be ashamed of him. But I am the uncle who has been to such a school himself and who knows too well the ways and ethics of such schoolchildren. Seeing his nephew being beaten on his way home, the uncle takes off his coat and teaches the boy to hit back—as the only way to gain the respect of the fellow schoolboys. I would stop the boy from moping. . . . Who can tell me that the uncle's advice is wrong? From this conviction, I gained a certain strength, and I am not going to be upset by further slaps in the face before China reaches equality of arms, because I am expecting them as the natural law of modern world politics.

The second conclusion I arrived at was a mystic one. It was an intuition. I saw China growing strong, and Russia growing strong, and all Asia growing strong. I know that this nation of 450,000,000 people, united and awakened and purged by the war-fire, is coming up; the strength lies in her and nothing the western nations can do can stop her or keep her down.

From these reflections I regained my calm. Now I can be amused by these self-important nations who think they can dominate the world by sheer force, when Hitler has failed. I am no longer angry; only the stupidity of it all is a little boring. These thoughts blew like a whiff of clean air through the tortuous maze in which my will and my mind were imprisoned and paralyzed for a period. I came home, and ransacked the refrigerator, and laughed. My children said that a great change had come over me.

The human mind is a curious thing. It can take just so much and no more. In a recent discussion about bastards, my friends and I went over all the great talented bastards of history—not the "bastards" according to the New York taxi-drivers, which

include all New York pedestrians. We discussed the social handicaps of illegitimate children, and how some succumbed and others by sheer force of character or intellect overcame them. Confucius was one; Ts'in Shih-huang, who built the Great Wall, was another. These became the tougher for what they had gone through. At a point, when the mind is strong enough, it always transcends the personal circumstances. Sometimes, provided the mind has sufficient moral and intellectual strength, it turns futile rage and scorn into a comedy of sparkling tears and laughter.

When such a mind comes into contact with the sordid realities of this world—its pomposities, hypocrisies, and stupidities—the sparks that are set forth produce a beautiful pattern. Now this I hold to be the function of the human mind—to set off sparks. When Dr. J. B. Watson and the host of scientific idiots picture the human mind as consisting merely of a set of reactions to dinner bells, instead of to ideas, idiosyncrasies, and vagaries of this blessed middle state, all you can do is to throw up your hands. . . .

So even in despair, man must laugh. The present world spectacle may be tragic. I share in all the depths of spiritual misery of this tragic decade. I do not believe in an automatic millennium that is going to blossom out of this spiritual desert. I smell too many corpses around. Human souls have smells as well as their bodies. Quite a few souls in a group identified by their love for Otto, Franco, and Hirohito have a smell that is distinctly stuffy. Others smell of the attic closet. This age is tragic, I admit. Is it not tragic, for example, that while in the last World War almost everyone believed it was the war to end all wars and wanted to make it so, now in this Second World War almost no writer that I have read dares even suggest that this is the war to end all wars, or act on that belief? We have lost the courage to hope.

The fonder you are of your ideals, the greater your heart-breaks. When you wish, for instance, that some slight but posi-

tive steps may be taken for the freedom of India, because India stands as the symbol of the issue of freedom for all nations, and that ideal is very dear and real to your heart, and somebody crushes that ideal like a flower, you feel a sort of pain.

But there is never a human tragedy but has its comic elements. There was probably never an age when the practical affairs of men did not look like a madhouse to some sane and perceptive minds, and there was never an age without its buffoons. In this connection I recall an excellent passage by Heinrich Heine in his *Reisebilder*:

Yes, even in the highest pathos of the world tragedy, bits of fun slip in. . . . On this great stage of the world all passes exactly as on our beggarly boards. On it, too, there are tipsy heroes, kings who forget their parts, scenes which obstinately stay up in the air, prompters' voices sounding above everything, *danseuses* who create extraordinary effects with the poetry of their legs, and costumes, which are the main thing. And high in heaven, in the first row of the boxes, sit the dear little angels, and keep their lorgnettes on us comedians here down below, and the blessed Lord Himself sits seriously in His great box, and, perhaps, finds it dull, or calculates that this theater cannot be kept up much longer because this one gets too high a salary, and that one too little, and that they all play much too badly. . . .

Alas, our rulers are not gods, but puny, fallible men, like the kings who constantly forget their parts, and we common men should be their prompters. Sometimes, as on the American scene, while the pyrotechnics of Peyroutonism are going on, the American prompter's voice does seem to sound above everything. At heart, the prompters mean only well. And it is not in America alone that old actors tend to forget their lines; in the four corners of the earth, the play is not going too

smoothly; and there seems to be a great deal of shouting and confusion over this scene in Spain, that scene in North Africa, and another scene in Austria in which the producer and the prompters cannot come to an agreement as to whether Otto of Hapsburg should step out on the boards or not, and still another scene of terrific confusion in India, where men fighting for freedom are fighting men fighting for their freedom.

And do not forget, prompters do help to save a performance. Old actors are forgetful creatures and a little prompting in time may yet help them to come off with a creditable performance. When the play is finished and the curtain rises again and again, the prompter is even willing to join in the applause and bring up the bouquets. But while the performance is going on, the prompter's heart is in his mouth when the actor goes on forgetting for a third and a fourth time, and does not even seem to understand the theme of the whole play. After the performance, the old actor will swear at the prompter in the wing, "You presumptuous, meddling fool! I knew perfectly well what I was doing." It is then up to the prompter to humor him by saying, "Of course you did. You were perfectly magnificent as ever, Horatio!"

So comedy is mixed with tragedy and the play goes on, and we see Eden and Hull rehearsing hurriedly, after the second act has opened, that scene about Russia which properly belonged to the prologue of the play. There are saints and sinners, and democrats and imperialists, and the imperialists are fighting for freedom and the democrats are fighting for empire, which means both are fighting to surrender their proper domains, or pretend to. Gandhi prays and fasts, which is such a curious act that no Christian can understand it, while Lord Halifax remarks that if he, as an Episcopalian, were to go up to the roof of the Viceroy's Palace to pray to God and fast, he would probably be sent to an insane asylum. There is Sir Norman Angell, hotly defending the right to freedom and the right of England in fighting the Indian right to freedom. I

wonder what the dear little angels sitting in their front row boxes and looking down with their lorgnettes would do. I have a feeling that the year 1942 was the year in which the angels in heaven wept over their namesake on earth. If angels have tears. . . .

The time of world tragedy is hardly the time to laugh. But the prompter means well, even though if he shouts out too loud he contributes to the comedy, for there is something intrinsically funny about human mistakes. Every age has its buffoons and the buffoons make you laugh. Great men make great mistakes and small men make small mistakes. Then the great men love to point out the small mistakes of the small men, while they do not wish to have their great mistakes pointed out by the small men. A mistake is something which it is the privilege of the great men to commit and of the small men of this earth to point out after they are dead. Death comes and the buffoonery is over and we take the historical view. Dead men tell no tales and answer no arguments, and dead censors delete no passages from the books of posterity; so let them have the pleasure of deleting them now. We can already smile at the mistakes of Neville Chamberlain, the errors of the then popular national heroes of Versailles and of all the League of Nations officials in the last decade, because now the mistakes are irretrievable and pointing them out indicates a fine historical sense. On the assumption that all our dead ancestors and all the great statesmen of the earth are fools or buffoons except those still controlling our lives, we can go safely. The great thing about the teaching of history is that we must teach history but must not let history teach us.

Everything has its place and time. We men of the nineteen-forties can smile at the mistakes of the nineteen-thirties, and, in turn, the men of the nineteen-fifties will laugh at the mistakes of the nineteen-forties. It is this historical perspective that shall save us. When the war is over, the snails will be on the thorn, and the world will wag on, very much alive, as it always does,

between tears and laughter. Sometimes there are more tears than laughter, and sometimes there is more laughter than tears, and sometimes you feel so choked you can neither weep nor laugh. For tears and laughter there will always be so long as there is human life. When our tear wells have run dry and the voice of laughter is silenced, the world will be truly dead.

2

KARMA

BUT if we take the historical perspective and view the development of human events, we are struck by a paradox which the science of human history so far has not been able to solve and the economic school of historians tend to ignore because they cannot make head or tail of it. That is the so-called "imponderables" of history. The word "ponder," I understand, comes from Latin *pondus* which means "weight," and "imponderable" means to me not so much something which we cannot ponder as something which we cannot measure or weigh. What a sad admission for the "scientists" of history! But there it is, a thing without weight or mass or shape or form.

Yet, while we may be perfectly contented with the facts and figures in contemporary events and policies, such as the number of dive bombers and tanks with which we know we are going to defeat Hitler, we get curiously spiritual when we view human events of the past across a stretch of decades. We run up constantly against these "imponderables," or "spiritual forces" or "psychological factors"—a kind of irreducible residuum which defies further scientific analysis. In other words, we are forced against our wish to accept a spiritual concept of history. But our temper of thinking is such that we hate any-

thing which we cannot conveniently weigh or analyze or put in mathematical formulas. If we could have an electrometer to gauge the voltage of sentiments, we would immediately be able to understand them. As it is, with a sense of concession to an unconquerable enemy, we lay it in a corner of our laboratory, muttering something about not knowing what to do with "that puzzling substance."

So I must speak of "Karma." The Hindus have evolved a perfect theory of the law of moral action, and you can understand this law of moral action only when you take the historical perspective. Briefly, it is the theory that we are responsible for our moral thoughts and actions, that these thoughts and actions have a causal relationship with the past and the future, and that we cannot escape from the chain of causation. It is almost like the law of cause and effect in physical motion, and the law of the indestructibility of matter and energy in the physical universe. We have nothing remotely comparable with it. The very fact that popular Christianity, as well as popular Buddhism, seeks this balance of rewards and punishments in the future life shows that they do not recognize, and are not aware of, the adequate principle of moral causation in this present life.

Reading President Roosevelt's speech on Lincoln's Birthday I found that Lincoln was a Brahmin; in fact anyone who believes in the persistence of the effects of our thoughts and actions is a Brahmin. There was a quotation from Lincoln given at the end of Roosevelt's radio broadcast:

Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and of this administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass will light us, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation.

Abraham Lincoln happened to state the principles of Karma accurately and adequately in this single passage. "*We cannot escape history*": that is Karma. Lincoln might have said in 1862, "The sounds which I am uttering now vanish apparently into thin air, yet they persist into eternity. If we had a scientific apparatus delicate and sensitive enough to catch and record these sound waves, which we don't, we might find that these sounds stretch into the eternity of space. Similarly, with our moral actions." "*We will be remembered in spite of ourselves*": that is inescapability. "*No personal significance or insignificance will spare one or another of us*": even the smallest act has its consequences. "*Light us to the latest generation*": the effect is practically eternal, through effects producing further effects. "*In honor and dishonor*": we bear the dead weight of the past and carry in ourselves its shames and its glories. In other words, the moment we live in is a causal and indissoluble link between yesterday and tomorrow. The word "now" has mathematically no meaning and no boundary: some time elapses between my writing the first letter "n" and the last letter "w." The stream of time is carrying us forward; we live between yesterday and tomorrow.

In the light of this Brahmin theory, the thesis "Let's win the war first and talk of what we are fighting for afterwards" simply does not make sense. Time refuses to be cut up like this. "Win-the-War-First" Churchill's dictum is philosophic nonsense, based on the grip of inertia of the past and fear of the future. It is based on his complete unwillingness to escape from the past and his great desire to escape from the future. One must live in mortal terror of the peace to refuse to think about or discuss the postwar problems. I know and I notice that even W-t-W-F Churchill is forced, as time goes on, to discuss the status of the British colonies and of Polish frontiers before he can see his way to win the war. Meanwhile the time machine, the wheel of Karma, is carrying Churchill forward, as a spring torrent carries a leaf swiftly and surely toward an overflowed

dam. Sooner or later, it will reach that much feared overflowed dam of peace—unless it is left behind by time.

There is a law in physics that “action and reaction are equal.” It has a certain awe-inspiring simplicity, like the law of universal gravitation. It takes some courage to state simple things like that, but back of it are some complicated mathematical equations, probably twenty-seven letters long, that the layman cannot handle and does not even suspect. The similar law that action and reaction are equal in the realm of moral action is equally subtle, but less capable of mathematical proof. The Buddhist doctrine is that Karma is “cumulative,” that it is something that is accumulated day by day and year by year by our little acts and our secret thoughts, almost like physical momentum that one gains or loses by little acts, hesitations, and delays. This Karma carries one along toward a future situation—eventually salvation or death. Buddha himself states it in plain psychological terms when he says in the opening sentences of the Dhammapada:

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage.

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.

This sort of teaching requires a little Hindu imagination which conceives of moral things almost as real as physical things. If we could give our moral self a body, we would find that body consists of ganglions of our thoughts, acting like vaso-motor nerves producing muscular actions. The sum of