

Lin Yutang Looks at an Inferno

BETWEEN TEARS AND LAUGHTER. By Lin Yutang. New York: John Day Company. 1943. 216 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PAUL I. WELLMAN

LIN YUTANG, whose writings have heretofore delighted his generation, turns in his newest book, "Between Tears and Laughter," to international relations insofar as China is concerned in this war.

As a Chinese he naturally is deeply concerned and perturbed by the whole world picture. He has seen China, as he puts it, receive a series of "slaps"—the shipping of scrap iron and oil to Japan, the closing of the Burma Road, the British confiscation of Chinese lend-lease supplies, the failure of adequate air transport to China, the shabby treatment of the Chinese Military Commission to Washington, the "accusations of fascism and imperialism" and of hoarding in China, and finally the non-presence of Chinese representatives at Casablanca.

Aroused thus, he turns with no little fury on the whole fabric of the white man's civilization and gives it a going over, with particular attention to his favorite *bête noir*, the much-hawked "materialism of the West."

The result of all this is a book which in places is almost profound, in places almost ill-natured, and which will leave many a reader unconvinced that the author is as informed on some aspects of world affairs as he is, let us say, on Oriental philosophy.

This book is directed at America. It appeals directly to Americans, and Lin Yutang frequently uses "we" and "us" as if he included himself as an American. Other members of the United Nations front are not treated similarly. He is bitter, for instance, toward Britain, and, though he enters a disclaimer to the charge that he is anti-British, his rancor toward Churchill and his government seems at times almost equal to his rancor toward the Japanese.

Having directed his book at us as Americans, he proceeds to hold up to us the mirror to our faults—a habit of our national guests to which we as Americans are by now well accustomed. Yet, although we are perhaps a nation of literary masochists to whom such criticism appeals, there are in this book some points to which Americans will naturally have answers, and concerning which they will have perhaps some questions of their own to ask.

Buttressing his argument with many a wise Chinese saw, Lin Yutang takes the somewhat extraordinary view that

America is responsible for China's welfare. China, he says, is fighting a "war for freedom," wherefore America long has owed it to China to save her from the Japanese.

He is profoundly critical because we did not, long before we did, take over the burden of destroying Japan and thus rescuing China. The people of America, he contends, are "sound"—which is to say that the American public has consistently been in favor of trouncing Japan—but the leaders



have temporized and failed to carry out the mandate. He goes so far as to accuse these leaders, including President Roosevelt, of nothing short of double-dealing.

All of which is fairly confusing argument, and one which indicates Lin Yutang's sketchy knowledge of the American people. In those years when he apparently believes the public was demanding action, including the halt-

ing of the Japanese trade in oil and iron, there was no such universal demand. A few vocal groups did demand it, but the general public was indifferent through isolationism, or reluctant to do anything that might lead to international difficulties. Instead of the Government's being forced to act by public demand, it is the sober truth that the Roosevelt administration was wrathfully accused of warmongering for doing as much as it did.

We know now that a war with Japan and Germany would have been inevitable under any circumstances. But we also know that it took the Pearl Harbor method to put us into the war. Paralysis of isolationism and pacifism would never have allowed us to move into it of our own volition. Had it not been for the policies of the administration, however, we might have been caught far more poorly prepared than we were by the blow when it came.

The real underlying basis for "Between Tears and Laughter" is, of course, the author's impatience with the American policy of defeating Hitler first and Japan second. Like most whose interests lie primarily in the Pacific, Lin Yutang feels passionately that Japan should be the No. 1 foe. He sees China condemned to four more years of bloodshed (his own estimate) and cries out with indignation that this should be so. Blame for it he places on the traditional Western policy of indifference and exploitation toward Asia and Asiatics.

We must admit sadly his charges that we consider the dark-skinned peoples as "natives" and take toward them an arrogant view are all too true in many cases. Yet things are not as easily simplified as the Chinese philosopher appears to believe. Granted that we may perhaps be a trifle more aware of our own problems than those

On Hearing the Latest Work of a Young American Composer

By Robert Nathan

GOD, give this country music once again.
We have been fed too long on rusty squeaks,
On noise and wonder. Give us simple men
Who love a song because the music speaks
Not to the mind or to the startled glance,
But to the heart, wise enemy of head;
Or give us men who love a country dance,
As good and wholesome as a loaf of bread.
Discord breeds trouble, even in the ear,
And too much wit makes cowards of us all.
Let us have song again, to carry clear
Some April beauty through the mists of fall,
And dignity, not too much mixed with art,
To be the singing measure of the heart.

of China, can he expect anything else?

It might perhaps be remembered that the United States also is fighting for its soul; and a philosopher who possesses a certain universality of concepts ought to understand the nature of humanity—whether American or Chinese—well enough to know that the crisis of events governs first considerations.

America has a profound sympathy for the sufferings and dangers of China. It is the determination of America to destroy the Japanese beast which has fastened on China's jugular. But, before we can spare the strength to deal with this enemy behind, we must first overcome that other enemy in front—Germany.

We must furnish the weapons of war to China, says Lin Yutang, after decrying the materialism that produced those weapons. While we furnish the weapons and fight the foe, we must stop to straighten out the full tangle of international relations as regards India, China, Burma, and all other Asiatic countries. The slogan "Win the war first" he bitterly decries. Meanwhile, he even moves to suggest that we change the philosophy if not the form of our own government, indulging in a very pretty metaphysical outline of the Chinese ideal

of government, but neglecting to give any very satisfactory description of how this ideal worked in the centuries of Chinese imperial dynasties, or why it has failed to keep first the Chinese war lords, and second the Japanese, under control.

That it may be militarily necessary to win our Hitler war before we turn our force on our Asiatic enemies he does not seem to take in consideration, save as a pretty shabby indication that we do not regard the Asiatic peoples highly enough.

So deeply does he feel on this that he even threatens that unless we straighten out our Asiatic relations we may have to fight a "bigger, better war"—with the 450,000,000 people of Asia itself.

All of this is just a little disappointing. As a calm, wise, and witty philosopher, Lin Yutang has his great circle of admirers in this country and elsewhere. It seems too bad that he does not better sense the American effort for war, the patient, potent mustering of power, the honest good intentions toward all peoples friendly to us—if they will only give us the time to accomplish the things toward which we have set our faces, if they will only be patient enough to await our ability to help them.

Howells and Warner although the importance of his comfort may be overrated; no one can pass over the depressing effects of business failure and family loss although the inclination toward nihilism can be clearly detected before either of these things happened.

On the other hand, it is possible to accept, as Mr. Ferguson does, all these facts and factors on their face value and to avoid a denunciation or defense of the barbarous West of Mark Twain's youth, of the feminine domination of much of his life, of the genteel conventions of Hartford, and of the crass materialism of the "Gilded Age." Mark Twain was not a thwarted genius who might have been far greater had he been born in another time and place; nor was he a finished artist. He had in him much of the genius and there was much in his life to thwart him, but there was also much to bring out the best that was in him and it is a reasonable conclusion that he was about as great in his achievements as he was in his potentialities.

Mr. Ferguson has deliberately limited his study to those aspects of Mark Twain's life which have direct bearing on his development as a man of letters. He thus avoids the pitfalls of psychological or sociological analysis, but he also loses much of the color and vitality inherent in his subject. His book is a conscientious weighing of relevant facts in sequence rather than a biography, yet it is too much of a narrative to realize its possibilities as literary criticism. The result is informative rather than entertaining or stimulating.

The Phenomenon of Mark Twain

MARK TWAIN: MAN AND LEGEND.

By DeLancey Ferguson. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1943. 352 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ROBERT E. SPILLER

MARK TWAIN died in the conviction that his public did not understand him because he had discovered truth too awful for its acceptance. He was right in everything but the reason. Understanding him has been a slow process, but with this latest biography it can be said to have been completed. There is no longer reason for thinking of him as a mystery because we recognize him now as a sensitive instrument recording the conflicts and the paradoxes of his times rather than as a simple humorist or a profound philosopher. His greatness lies in his perceptions, his weakness in his lack of organizing power. He was at heart an artist of the folk.

Mr. Ferguson is not the first to interpret him in these terms, and his position is not very different from that of Edward Wagenknecht. But his book was needed because there has been no full-length biography written since the air of controversy began to clear. He corrects A. B. Paine's "authorized" life by following

step-by-step the transition from the happy humorist of "Innocence Abroad" and "Tom Sawyer" to the bitter misanthrope of "What is Man"? and "The Mysterious Stranger." And he resolves the controversy that followed Van Wyck Brooks's charges back in 1920, not by direct attack as did DeVoto and others, but rather by accepting all the verifiable evidence that has been brought forward by both sides and avoiding the conclusions of both. No one can now deny that there is a connection between the mechanistic view of man of Twain's last years and his childhood background in fundamentalist Calvinism; no one can question Livy's influence in toning down his work after his marriage although that influence can be exaggerated and distorted; no one can argue that his naive soul was entirely comfortable and happy in the literary society of



FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT: No. 7

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. The solution to Crypt No. 7 will be found in the next issue.

JOISA OX GNSOZ NFAMRXTA'
RMASXKSA UZWJ AFMGDSZ
RXT TRFUNGSZA AWVSGOVSA
ZFX WPP JOGN GNS MFGDSZ.
MQZWX—TWX BFRX

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 6

IT IS WITH NARROW-SOULED
PEOPLE AS WITH NARROW-
NECKED BOTTLES; THE LESS
THEY HAVE IN THEM THE
MORE NOISE THEY MAKE
POURING OUT.

ALEXANDER POPE—
"THOUGHTS ON VARIOUS
SUBJECTS"