

THE LITTLE CRITIC

I Daren't Go To Hangchow

SPRING always gives me a heartache. We have a saying, very popular with the college students, that spring is not the time for study, and I know it is not the time for writing. Writing, writing, writing! What is writing compared with life? I was watching at a corner of my garden and marvelling at the tiny sprouts of salad which, each like two little green eyes, were peeping above the ground, peeping at life itself. And I know they will stretch their little necks and grow in a week so that they can look comfortably at the universe all round. The plot of earth, which hardly two weeks ago was perfectly bare, is now covered with a rich, velvety green carpet of moss, and on it two young frogs are sprawling and enjoying themselves in the beautiful sunshine. And I must come in and write!

I want so much to go to Hangchow again. But I dare not because of the communists. Not the communists who kill with guns, but those that gill with their pens. It is somewhat difficult to understand. Let me tell you how that happens.

In the past year, I have committed three great sins, or rather four. My First Sin was that I introduced humour through the *Analects Fortnightly*, and they say it is a great sin to laugh when the imperialists are so oppressing the Chinese peasants. One great leftist writer said, "You dare not face the reality, you dare not write satire, so you want only humour, and *turn all the darkness and unquities of the imperialists and militarists into a laughter* and be through with it." It was no use for me to convince them that Confucius himself was humorous—in troublous times, too—for Confucius is not worth a bean in the eyes of the "p'ulo" (short for "proletariat writers," which is translated as "p'ulot'aliya" and very fashionable). So the only thing I could do was to point out to them that even Gorky and Dostoevsky and Lampoonisky and Wantonisky all had humour. And they quietly shut up. For I had found a Russian ancestor.

My Second Sin was, I advocated the familiar style through *Jen Chien Shih* ("This Human World"), also a fortnightly. "The familiar style will ruin China," shouted again the communists, who raised such a hallybahoo in the literary supplement of *The Shun Pao*, that my magazine immediately went up to a circulation of 22,000 in the first numbers. For this, I had to thank them. But my opening editorial was torn to pieces. I happened to mention that the familiar style of writing could cover everything in life, "from the big universe to the little flies." "What! you are going to talk about flies! You leisure class!" All this, unbelievable as it seems, when I put it in English, was strictly true, and sounded very nice in Chinese, too. It was no use for me to point out to them that Su Tungp'o and Po Chuyi and T'ao Yuanming all wrote very good familiar essays and they did not ruin China, for according

to the communists, Su Tungp'o was feudalistic, Po Chuyi a leisure-class writer, and T'ao Yuanming a recluse who "dared not face reality." So the only thing I could do was to point out to them that Montaigne did not ruin France and Charles Lamb did not ruin England. I further added that if China can be so easily ruined by this or that, then why not let China go to the dogs? And they quietly shut up. For I had found a French and an English ancestor.

My Third Sin was, that I unearthed and reprinted some old authors of the Ming dynasty, which I loved so much, because it is to me the most interesting period in Chinese literature. "The ghosts of the feudalistic period have come back again," shouted the communists. I merely pointed out that the English, French and Germans love their old books too, and that Shakespeare is being enacted un mutilated in Moscow now. And they were greatly impressed.

Lastly, I had the audacity to go to Hangchow last spring. This time it was the fascists. "Hah! You want to visit famous mountains and be elegant." I did not reply, reasons understood. But I could not help noting, in the same number of that Nanking monthly which denounced my visit to the mountains, a "Note" to the effect that, "owing to the spring season, many of the writers have been away, so that the previously announced special number has to be postponed." "Damn those hypocrites! They want to eat cold Confucian pork." I cursed in my heart. But in writing, I only confessed my sins, and promised like a good boy that when the time came, I would help them to write a manifesto in the old classical manner, denouncing firstly, the China Travel Service, and secondly the Chekiang Public Roads Department for ruining China by encouraging travel, so that young men and girls, clad in green and red, would be seen going up the mountains instead sitting in their rooms and thinking how to fight Japan. I wrote this in December, otherwise the words "thinking how to fight Japan" might have been censored, which shows how fast we are progressing. In that brief sketch of the proposed denunciation, I taught them to point out how even visiting Hangchow was enough to ruin a country, and the danger might be greatly increased by visiting T'ient'ai, Yentang and T'ienmu. I also pointed out that I would say in that famous denunciation of the Chekiang Public Roads Department, "To open a road between Hangchow and Huichow is perfectly justifiable, for it is for the purpose of communication. But the Chekiang Public Roads Department had the immorality to open a branch road from Tsaoch'i directly to the foot of the T'ienmu Mountains, for no other conceivable reason then to weaken the morale of the nation and encourage general depravity, etc." I didn't hear any more from the Nanking editor.

I will merely tell an anecdote, showing how scared I was to be seen by communists travelling in Hangchow when I stealthily went there last winter. I had left Louwailou restaurant after lunch, and asked for the way to the Stork's Tomb (the stork belonging to Lin Hoching, the Sung poet). The waiter told me, "Just go up by the Placid Lake Autumn Moon." I was amazed by the poetry of place names, but I just couldn't tell the waiter he was helping

to ruin China, too, by using such leisure-class expressions. I knew in my heart that for these "p'ulo," who believe that Gorky and Dostoevski are part of their "literary heritage," but not Tu Fu or Li Po, they would infinitely prefer the name "Gorky Avenue" or "Stalin Road" to "Placid Lake Autumn Moon." Before coming to Placid Lake Autumn Moon, I passed the Central Park. A chrysanthemum exhibition was on. Having nothing to do, I went in, but I found I had gone in by the "Exit" entrance, so I came out again, intending to enter by the sign "In." There I met two young men with long hair, long cravats and in foreign dress, smoking Russian cigarettes, and each hugging a volume of some Dummkopfsky under his arm. I was so frightened to be seen enjoying the chrysanthemums that I immediately pulled a long face and knitted my brow, pretending to be thinking energetically of the sorrows of my country. I was *not* enjoying the chrysanthemums, but had merely strayed past the place. But the two young men went in. It was all right for them. And I was left standing there, ashamed of myself, and staring at the carved "scroll" in front of the gate which says,

There are many beautiful days in spring and autumn,
Alas! that the bells and drums should disturb the lake
and hills!

and wondering to myself how such a depraved sentiment could be allowed to be shown in public by the revolutionary Municipal Government of Hangchow!

LIN YUTANG.

交通大學研究所

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BOOK REVIEW

EDITED BY QUENTIN PAN

A Common Faith

By JOHN DEWEY

Pp. 87. New Haven; Yale University Press 1934

THE writer of this volume needs no introduction. Suffice it to say, he is commonly acknowledged to be the most important philosopher that America has ever produced, not only as a subtle logician, but also as a genius of the first rank in the field of metaphysics. In fact, since his retirement, he has been active as ever, and in the course of last year alone, he has written two books: one on esthetics and another on religion, the latter being the volume under review in this column.

Professor Dewey begins by making a distinction between religion and the religious. Religion—or religions—is or are, in his opinion, "charged with beliefs, practices and modes of organization that have accrued to and been loaded upon the religious element in experience by the state of culture in which religions have developed." For this reason, there is always the danger for religion to become dogmatic and institutionalized and to side with the forces which are non-progressive in nature. There is always the tendency, in other words, for a living faith to become in the end an ossified doctrine, and to set itself apart from the common and natural relations of mankind. What is needed is therefore "the emancipation of the religious quality from accretions that have grown up about it and that limit the credibility and the influence of religion," and this can only be accomplished when the use of the adjective "religious" is extended to all activities which are "pursued in behalf of an ideal and against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value."

To be religious means essentially to have faith in ideals, but to enhance the power of such a faith, we have first of all to free ourselves from the conception that "the significance and validity of the ideal are bound up with intellectual assent to the proposition that the ideal is already embodied in some supernatural or metaphysical sense in the very framework of existence." We must cease to think of ideals as fixed, as without power of growth. The ideals are real not in the sense of having an antecedent reality, but in the sense that they exist as forces through human embodiments and endeavors and are capable of being realized actually upon a natural basis as the goods of human association, of art and knowledge. Ideals, in short, are not perfection; they too must be tested and improved upon and even modified to meet the ever changing existent conditions.

We as human beings are enmeshed in a community of causes and consequences, the totality of which is called the universe or nature. "The continuing life of this comprehensive community of beings includes all the significant achievements of men in science and art and all the kindly offices of intercourse and communication. It holds within its content all the material that gives verifiable intellectual support to our ideal faiths. A "creed" founded on this