

WEEKLY INTERVIEWS

Mrs. Lin Yutang

Interviewed by LIN YIN-FENG

MRS. Lin Yutang entered the hotel room. Her arms were piled with small parcels of intriguing shapes and brightly printed wrappings. Her three girls dashed eagerly to relieve her of them. She sank gratefully on the bed nearest the fan. "Your last day, and still shopping!" I exclaimed. She nodded. "But now it is all over. These are only some small things I wanted for the children and ourselves."

I watched silently while the eldest girl competently delivered the accumulation of messages which had come during her absence. Small Ah No and Mei Mei were busily engaged exploring the wrappings around the little bundles. Mrs. Lin turned her attention to them.

A large package disgorged five embroidered silk dressing gowns of as many sizes. "Our others are not embroidered. I couldn't resist these." She helped the enraptured Mei Mei admire a big red dragon on the back. Next, her capable fingers disclosed a gay box of trinkets. She revealed three bracelets, daintily moulded with flowers. "The small gold one for Mei Mei. The middle size, tipped

with blue, for Ah No, and the biggest one for you." She handed them to the biggest girl. Chattering happily, they inspected, tried and approved their treasures.

And enamelled cigarette case of delicate craftsmanship was wrought with lovely ladies. "Y. T. will appreciate them," she declared. "There must always be something for him also—And this powder box for myself will just match it."

"These are also mine." A long jade brooch and earrings were handed to me. She stretched out a neat hand. "And this." Lovely green jade set in yellow gold glowed on her finger. "All bargains," she rejoiced. Like all women—especially Chinese women—she cannot resist a bargain. "Y. T. insisted I should have more jade. He thinks nothing is livelier against a woman's skin. So I like to please him."

This is true. We have shopped and discussed clothes extensively together. Whether he is with us or not, his likes and dislikes, his suggestions, and of paramount importance. He likes all women to be well dressed, and has been a pertinent observer of his wife's wardrobe.

"Make sure she has everything she will need for such a long stay away from China," he said one day when we were preparing for an all-day expedition. She twinkled secretly at me. There was no need for further urging. She loves the beautiful herself. There is no danger of her wardrobe being inadequate for any occasion.

Dr. Lin Yutang arrived after a crowded morning. He was weary and steaming. His long white gown clung in

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wet folds. He peeled it off into the waiting hands of his eldest girl. Ah No brought a cup of fresh tea as he sank into the big armchair. (There is always a big chair for him.) Immediately he started telephoning responses to his messages, prompted ably by Mrs. Lin.

Catching sight of the packages on the bed, he came to investigate. "This for you." She indicated the silver box. "Lovely," he traced the lines appreciatively. The children chirped around, describing the merits of each particular article. "Did you get the jade?" He asked suddenly. She displayed her ring proudly. "Fine. You should have had one long ago." "And these," she added, showing the other trinkets.

Mrs. Lin emptied drawers and cupboards methodically, finishing her packing. All the children helped, even Mei Mei, who folded tiny frocks with grave portentousness. Dr. Lin stood directly in front of the fan, describing his morning's adventures minutely. He was soon dry, and helped close the bags. "I'll lock these," he decided, "then they'll be ready for the baggage man." Mrs. Lin produced a clean silk gown. "Put this on, and go down to your friends. It is cool there. We shall all follow quickly," she directed. "After lunch, you can come up and sleep awhile, until it is time to go to the boat." "I need it. It is weeks since I had my sleep," he regretted.

She helped the children don cool white gowns, with gay flowers of red and blue to match their little plaited sandals. "See if all the trunks and bags are locked," she told them. They ran around the twenty pieces quickly, and discovered a bag still unlocked. "I thought so," she remarked, handing duplicate keys to them. They completed the task thoroughly while she changed into a pretty beige silk, with a leaf design heavily outlined in dark brown. "Y.T. wanted me to wear this one. It is one of his favorites," she said.

In the air-cooled dining room, we found him chatting with friends. Mrs. Lin seated the children at an adjoining table, and ordered the meal. "He hates to order," she explained. "I try to make everything as smooth as I can. Then he is free to give all his time and energy to his work. He is able to enjoy his friends better. When we were first married, we studied together. There were many small ways for me to make things easier for him. We had lots of fun."

"You agree admirably," I ventured.

She tucked a napkin in Mei Mei's neck. "We are both fortunate. Sometimes, one is nervous, then the other is patient. Lately we have been busy. Y.T. has had a lot of work to complete. I have had to see to household matters. It is not easy to break up a home. Furniture has been stored. Then it is hard to choose what to take, and what to leave behind. Packing alone has taken weeks.

"And there have been entertainments," she shrugged laughingly. "It is nice to know we are liked. But it is tiring to attend so many parties. We shall be glad to rest on the boat—especially Y.T. But now it is all finished. We are so excited and glad to be going." And she smiled radiantly. When she smiles, her gay contagion is infectious. She is always happy.

The first dishes arrived. She sent Ah No to call her father, and helped Mei Mei kneel on her chair. Whereon,

with the solemnity befitting a young lady, she proceeded to help herself to her favorite dishes. Dr. Lin seated himself between the two youngest girls, and applied his attention with evident enjoyment. "You like that." Mrs. Lin indicated the dish directly before him.

It was apparent the thousand small details of a smoothly run household are her special province. "A busy writer cannot be bothered," she explained. "Trifles can be distracting and a serious hindrance to concentration. It is easier for a woman to mind such matters. Her brain is better fitted to deal with them. I enjoy solving little problems. I like to know I can assist him. We help each other. We understand each other. So we are happy."

And shall remain happy. Mrs. Lin is eminently sane. She is cheerfully practical. She has the rare gift of sympathetic understanding. She is sturdily helpful. No one can know or even meet, her without being warmed and gladdened by her sensible kindness. She radiates content. She has the precious attribute of loving wisely. She believes in her husband, her children, her home and friends, not realising that she herself is largely responsible for all. It is impossible not to try to deserve her serene faith.

This shrewd companionship and management, with her fine inspiring belief, have gone far towards the making of Dr. Lin Yutang's fame. No matter how much fame and praise shall come to him, through her steadying influence, he can never be other than the lovable personality he is.

I compliment his wife.

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