

THE LITTLE CRITIC

The Right To Enjoy Oneself*

By LIN YUTANG

(Freely Translated By S.P.C.)

EVERYWHERE one goes, one is bound to come across people who are fond of saying that to enjoy oneself is to lose all ambitions in life (玩物喪志). In the eyes of these self-righteous men, even such innocent pastimes as mountain-climbing, the reading of old books and the writing of familiar essays are to be looked down upon with disfavor, for they are of the opinion that those who cultivate them must have first of all sold their souls to the devil.

Psychoanalytically, it is not difficult to understand of course why some people should be of such a state of mind. There is a Chinese saying that pock-marked people are as a rule very cunning. They have to be, in order to compensate for their disfigurement. Similarly, those who lead sinful lives in private generally turn out to be hypocrites in public, because they too feel that they have defects which must be made up.

In foreign countries, the pursuit of happiness is considered an inalienable right of man. Foreigners, for instance, are not ashamed of walking with their women folk in public. Such a custom has now been adopted in China, and the Chinese too are getting used to it. Had there not been such a custom in the West, the Chinese would undoubtedly have pronounced mixed-walking a most immoral practice. The truth is we are apt to think that whatever the west does is invariably worthy of imitation. Soccer is played in Chinese schools for exactly the same reason. If soccer had been a Chinese invention, the people would, most likely, have objected to it on the ground that it would make the players lose all their ambitions in life.

Chinese of old did not play soccer; they chose for their objects of enjoyment mountains, streams, flowers, and birds. They would probably find it amusing to watch people scramble for a ball on an open field, but they would never consider for a moment such pastimes as worthy of a "princely man" (君子). To listen to the songs of the nightingales, to be drunk with the fragrance of the lotus blossoms, to contemplate the fish in the pond, and to feel the rhythmic motions of the willow trees—these only would be looked upon by them as the pleasures of men, matured not only physically but mentally as well. When the "princely man" takes a walk he never hurries his steps as an Englishman would on one of his country walks. The "princely man" does not delude himself into thinking that walking in the burning sun and afterwards wrapping oneself up in woolly sweaters is the only way to "keep fit." Life is to be enjoyed, but in enjoying it, one must not over-exert oneself. Such a view is shared no less by the meaner people than by the "princely men." Thus it is

not uncommon to see bird cages and flower-pots in front of the mud flats of rich men and Kiang-peh coolies. By cultivating such simple pleasures, their lives are made worth-living. And a crime it would indeed be, if such pleasures should be taken away from them.

People are not wanting nowadays who take it upon themselves to revive the past glories of China. But these are the very people who would see it to it that no one is permitted to enjoy those pleasures which one and one's ancestors have always enjoyed in the past. Soccer-playing, to them, is all right, but not so the reading of old books, the writing of familiar essays, or the enjoyment of nature's beauties. If these people are indeed to be entrusted with the task of China's salvation, then all I can say is that I feel extremely sorry for China!

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電話四一八一二號

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