

CHINESE TALENT

Refreshment from the eternal shiboleths and political pabulum served up in the news from various party camps in China, is found when one turns to the wells of real thought which exist in the persons of some cultural leaders in China. Whenever one considers the occasional observations of men like Lin Yu-tang, a literary light of the new age with some soundly-grounded ideas, it is to place some belief in the claims that China has within her manhood a philosophic nucleus for regeneration.

Mr. Lin Yu-tang in an address before the World's Chinese Students' Federation recently, did not attempt to flatter his audience as is the way with the hocus-pocus political magicians, but spoke in such forthright fashion as this:

"I think our Chinese civilization to-day resembles very much a frivolous man of letters who has not yet attained to any depth of thought. Our period may be characterized as a period of decadence of thought and flourishing of belles-lettres. We are living in a period of moral, political and intellectual chaos. We have, politically, long-haired students who are hoping to establish Soviets in China, and can at the same time watch the curious spectacle of a few Manchu ministers who still wear queues by way of showing loyalty to an emperor who has himself cut off his queue, and, as if to add a comic touch to the whole picture, we have still some old scholars on the other side of fifty who swear they are anarchists and yet seem to be the busiest figures in a government whose principles are acknowledged to be those of a social democracy. In the sphere of letters, we have the writers of Foochow Road novels whose principal business seems to be, to detail their often ludicrous attempts in the art of courtship and whose only Muse and inspiration is the courtesan, and at the same time we have a crop of young poets who sing invariably of suicide, fire and brimstone, Marxism and the proletariat. The young Chinese finds himself always faced with dilemmas. He admires the western culture, and yet he is advised not to think too much of this "material civilization"; he sees with his own eyes the rottenness of the older generation, both in their public and private lives, and yet he is told that oriental morals are the highest in the world; he is perhaps a sincere believer in western medicine, and yet he hears stories of miraculous cures effected by famous Chinese physicians like Lu Shung-an, in cases where the western doctors are described as being absolutely helpless; he believes probably in the emancipation of women, and he is told in the next minute that *the best kind of girl to marry is the type "new in ideas but old in morals."* It is only natural, then, that he either perishes in the struggles with such problems, which means he ceases to think at all, or he becomes a deepdyed, patriotic advocate of oriental boxing, oriental dentistry, and oriental morals.

But, as I have said, real thinking and belles-lettres are two different things. As it is with persons, so is it also with nations. Chinese thought has long been paralyzed ever since it became unified in the beginning of Han Dynasty, and nothing in the two thousand years of history shows anything like the freshness and originality of the thinkers of the pre-Tsin days. But, while thought has been lying in abeyance, the art of Chinese belles-lettres has flourished, and is to-day the most prominent feature in Chinese social and political life. I can hardly agree when people tell me that the Chinese civilization is a "spiritual" and "moral" civilization, while the westerners know only of a "material" and "mechanical" civilization, because I see western contributions to Chinese life include the sciences, art, letters, music and ideals of life, while the two great Chinese contributions to the world, chop-suey and mah-jongg, are neither particularly spiritual, nor eminently moral. I believe we better eaters and drinkers and gamblers, and have developed in such things a "flair" for things of the flesh comparable to the scientist

"flair" for the discovery of new truths.

But how shall this new culture be brought about? The answer is clearly through criticism, and herein lies the function of criticism at the present time. The past has always relied on its saints and sages, to solve its mental problems and dictate its rules of moral conduct. That is of course no longer possible. To-day our leaders in thought are our greatest critics, men like Renan and Taine, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, Ibsen and Shaw, Tolstoi and Dostoievski. With this difference, however, that even these critics are not able to lord it over us like the sages of old, and solve all our problems for us, and that the centre of gravity has shifted from these men of intellectual eminence to the intellectual proletariat. The process by which we adopt or discard the opinions of these thinkers is a critical one and it is by criticism alone that we shall, as a nation, bring the forces of our thinking to bear upon the changes in our morals, customs and institutions." *In this article the*

writer gives a beautiful example of "mental chaos."