

BOOKS

Light From the East

THE WISDOM OF CHINA. THE WISDOM OF INDIA. Two uniform anthologies of philosophy and literature, compiled and edited by Lin Yutang. Michael Joseph, London.

(Reviewed by James Bertram)

"IT can be proved," Dr. Lin Yutang argues hardily in the introduction to one of these volumes, "that the world has gone to pieces as a direct result of scientific materialism invading our literature and thought." In these two collections from the classical writings of China and India he is out to supply the antidote. Popular rather than scholarly in form and arrangement, divided into sections such as *Chinese Mysticism*, *The Middle Way*, *Sketches of Chinese Life*, *Indian Piety*, *Indian Imagination*, *Indian Humour*, each volume runs to more than 500 close-packed but clearly printed pages. The price for each in England is 12/6—which for value in book production would be hard to beat. And since the contents in each case, though somewhat personally and arbitrarily selected, include large chunks of standard translations not easily obtained outside a very good library (together with some interesting new material) both books may be recommended for the general reader who wishes to have by him a whole oriental reference-shelf in miniature.

So much claptrap has been talked and written in pseudo religious and philosophical circles about the "Wisdom of the East" that one might easily feel natural suspicion of two popular collections with such portentous titles, especially, perhaps, when the editor is concerned to establish a thesis. Dr. Lin is not alone in his view that the West is suffering from a surfeit of facts and a bankruptcy in moral and spiritual values. Nor is he alone in suggesting that Chinese humanism and Indian religious thought may have very much to contribute to the new set of universal values the 20th Century world must establish for itself, or perish. Yet it seems both unfortunate and unnecessary that such a doctrinaire strain should run through so many of his introductions; surely this magnificent material, like Homer and the Bible and Hans Andersen, is able to stand on its own feet?

These, perhaps, are inevitable faults of popularisation; and for better or worse, Dr. Lin is one of the great popularisers of our time. The intelligent reader will make his own reservations on the commentary; for Lin Yutang's work as translator and editor, he may be unreservedly grateful. His new version of the *Tao Teh Ching* is pre-eminently readable, and with Chuangtse—a favourite of his—he is completely at home. For the *Shu Ching* and for Mencius he relies on the standard English work of James Legge, though he has made his own revision of the selections from Confucius; and with Motse, Tsesze and others (just because Lin Yutang is so notable a populariser, one is driven to adopt, under protest, his streamlined rendering of Chinese names!) he uses the renderings of modern Chinese scholars. Verse translations



LIN YUTANG
"One of the great popularisers"

by Helen Waddell, Arthur Waley and Witter Bynner are excellently chosen; and for students of Chinese literature and the amateur alike, one of the really exciting discoveries of this anthology will be the newly-translated "Chinese Tales," especially the *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*—a delightful fragment of autobiography from the early 19th Century.

It was courageous of Dr. Lin to include the Epigrams of Lu Hsun, the great revolutionary writer of modern China, though here his own introduction is most noticeably partisan and unsympathetic—not surprisingly, perhaps, when one of Lu Hsun's epigrams reads: "We have hereafter only two roads to choose; one is to embrace the ancient literature and die, the other is to forsake the ancient literature and live."

The Wisdom of India, as a collection, seems to be much more strictly chosen (with the surprising exception of Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, which finds a place under "Buddhism" one suspects, partly because Dr. Lin could not resist a poem that had once been a best seller). The first section includes Hymns from the Rig-Veda and selections from the Upanishads; the *Bhagavad-Gita* is given in a version by Swami Paramananda, and the Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali also in a modern popular version. The *Ramayana* is given complete in the rhymed translation of Romesh Dutt; the *Mahabharata* is omitted because—the editor suggests—it is easily available in Everyman editions. All this matter was to be looked for; less familiar but—as Dr. Lin reminds us—quite as characteristic of Indian genius, are the tales and fables from the *Panchatantra* and *The Enchanted Parrot* with their remarkable invention and pervasive play of humour. In addition to Sir Edwin Arnold, the section on Buddhism contains a representative group of aphorisms and sutras, many of these—it is an important new development in Buddhist scholarship—being based on Mahayana texts in Chinese translations.

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