

THE LITTLE DIALOGUE CONCERNING THE VIRTUES

BY LA SE-FE

[In 1904 a collection of Chinese writings was published in Peking under the title: *The Cloister of the Seven Virtues*. The author of the selection from this volume that we print below belongs to a younger group of Chinese writers, who, although profoundly influenced by Western culture, advocate a revival of Chinese ethical and æsthetic canons.]

From *Die Wage*, November 4
(VIENNA LIBERAL PACIFIST BIWEEKLY)

WHEN the jewel-rayed humming birds were flying across the plains of Hin, and the swallows were gathering for their long migration, Ku Lu-ling and his pupils went into the garden of Fu Wu-fang, which the people of the country call the Garden of Radiant Promise.

When they came to the Lake of the Virtues, they seated themselves upon its thrice-terraced banks, and gazed into the calm blue waters across which huge spiders were skipping to and fro, scarcely touching the surface. Notwithstanding this, the water rippled to the very shore of the little lake. Thereupon, Ku Lu-ling spoke and said:—

‘See these spiders. They are like the flitting thoughts of the soul. Nothing is so light and fugitive that it does not thrill the soul from its centre to its farthest boundaries, where it meets fixity and immobility.’

He glanced up and observed that Sin Ga-li, the youngest of the maidens in the party, opened her mouth as if about to speak, but checked her words.

Thereupon Ku Lu-ling said: ‘Tell us, Fluttering Golden Shower, what golden spider is now dancing across the mirror surface of thy many-hued soul?’

Thereupon Sin Ga-li stammered modestly: ‘According to the discipline of the school, the youngest must ask the pupil next older, and that one the

pupil next older still. The teacher is not addressed unless the oldest pupil in the school cannot answer the question. However, Master, since thou askest me, I must answer according to the Eighty-seventh Law of our school, as propriety bids. I do not know, to be sure, whether these laws apply here; for my uncle only brought me to you yesterday.’

Thereupon Ku Lu-ling replied: ‘All laws are valid here. Follow thine and it will be well.’

Thereupon the maiden said: ‘What dost thou mean? Is the soul hemmed in with fixity and immobility? Shall we not then become like steel and marble? Shall we not become as fast in our places as the Mountain of Sing? Will not a wall separate us from whatever is not part of our own soul?’

Ku Lu-ling listened attentively to the maiden and was silent for a long time before he spoke: ‘Fluttering Golden Shower and the rest of you! Listen to me. There are many schools and many doctrines. It is the nature of doctrine to sweep through the heavens like a mass of clouds that every man may see, and in which every man may discern different outlines. A doctrine is one thing for him who teaches it, and another for him who receives it. See, I am drawing near to the end of my days. I can tell you what I have seen,

but you cannot see what I have seen, and we can never understand each other perfectly. Happy he who draws a lesson from a teaching, though it be a different lesson from that which the teacher intended. That is the secret of doctrine. Thus doctrine has always been, is to-day, and ever will be.

‘Therefore I say unto you: There is more than enough that is hard and fixed in the world, but too little love. Some are hard and inflexible because they have no love. Others are hard because their love of the Tao, the Universal Being, makes them hard. Their love for the Tao makes them regard their hardness of heart as a virtue, and inflexibility as a merit. They confuse hardness and strength. But where is the Tao for whose sake they are hard? I know nothing of the Tao. Ming-fu, my great teacher, who revered the Tao out of love for his ancestors, was wont to say: “The Tao dwells in every human heart. To be hard and inflexible toward your fellow men is to be hard and inflexible toward the Tao itself. First learn to know those upon whom you bestow your love; but to seclude from them the many-hued waters of your soul is to seclude these from the Tao itself.” And I say the same unto you, though I know nothing of the Tao.

‘What is virtue? Love is virtue. And again, what is virtue? Again love is virtue. But love has a twin sister, and happy children. The sister of love is kindness, but not that cold and unsympathetic kindness which even they know who force themselves to be kind out of reverence for the Tao. The children of love are happiness, joy, delight, and ecstasy. Mark well — that is virtue.’

Thereupon Mun King-fu, one of the students, said: ‘Master, thou hast often spoken to us of these marvelous things, and though we have not seen the things that thou hast seen, and the

teaching out of thy mouth is not the same teaching that enters our soul, yet all this is our possession. We rejoice in joy, we delight in delights, we love love. Tell us, are they evil who do otherwise?’

Ku Lu-ling replied: ‘I know nothing of the Tao. I know nothing of evil and good. I know only of love, and when I call love virtue I do so merely that our Fluttering Golden Shower may know that I conceive love, goodness, happiness, joy, delight, as she conceives the Tao. And as she is stern toward herself, and toward others for the sake of the Tao, so I am loving to others for the sake of love. I am happy for the sake of happiness, and I rejoice for the sake of joy.’

Ming Fu-ko, who seldom spoke, thereupon observed: ‘Forgive me, Master, if I recall to thee something that perhaps I should not think about. But thou hast taught us to be frank toward thee. See, a brown spider darts across my soul and sets it all a-rippling. I have seen thee angry with Lin-hu and wrathful with Wu-chen. How dost thou explain that?’

When he said this slowly and hesitatingly, a deep silence ensued. One could not even hear the pressing of a guarded footstep on the sand. But Ku Lu-ling smiled gently as ever and replied: —

‘I do not teach you to love where you are hated; I do not teach you to accept insults when you are reviled. Nay, I do not even teach you to endure without protest that others should rob you of love. Defend yourselves against him who would deprive you of love, for he is a worse enemy than the one who treats you without love. Flee the places where those who love not dwell, and seek the places where those dwell who can love you and do love you. Lin-hu was a malicious old man. Is there anything worse? Wu-chen was a man who

thought evil of everyone, and therefore forced me to oppose him. I hardened my heart against both, and because of this hardness I was doubly stern with them. Alas for those who make others hard of heart. I do not teach you to endure evil treatment; I teach you to avoid it. Follow the example of Mun-tsu, who sought the Cloister of Seven-fold Bliss. Happy are they who are permitted to love; happy are they who are loved; happy are they who discover one to whom their hearts go out spontaneously; happy are they who find a friend who draws them to him and fills them with a desire to do kindness; happy are they whose unremitting efforts enable them to escape whatever is hostile to them, and to surround themselves with those influences and conditions that make them gentle and happy and kind and merry and loving and joyous.

'Even did I likewise believe in the Tao, Fluttering Golden Shower, I should consider that virtuous conduct. Where thou canst not find peace and contentment, thou canst not rightly dwell.'

Thereupon Ming Fu-ko spoke again: 'Master, were I to teach thy doctrine, the red barbarians would call it cowardice. Aye, even Hun Guñ-li was in error; for he taught that true virtue is independent of the world.'

By this time it was evening; the blushes of the setting sun were reflected on the bright-gray features of Hin Fu-shan, whose arms enclosed the lily-

embroidered plain; the sound of distant flutes was borne softly over the fields, when Ku Lu-ling gently but seriously replied:—

'When a great poet writes his verses he listens to the whispering of nature. He gazes into the clear depths of the universe. But he flees the noise of the market place and the wrangling of washerwomen at the public fountain. When an artist puts the last delicate polish upon an ivory statue, does he do it seated among garbage heaps? When a swordsmith prepares to forge a noble blade, does he choose common clay for his material? No, the gifted artist or cunning craftsman rejects whatever is not appropriate for his task. He seeks the conditions where he can best perform his service as a poet, an artist, or a swordsmith. Is that cowardice? Dear youths and maidens, the task of each of us is to write the poem of his life, to carve the ivory statue of his existence, as skillfully and as beautifully as Heaven gives him power to do. Is that not a task worthy of as much solicitude and care as the other tasks that I have mentioned?'

The sun had gone to rest; fireflies twinkled like tiny messengers of light through the evening dusk; the plains exhaled their peaceful eventide scents. No one spoke again. As the moon rose over the horizon they turned homeward, each going his or her respective way.

Thus was spoken the little dialogue concerning the virtues.

IASNAIA POLANA

BY ALEXEI DEMIDOV

From *Nakanune*, November 12
(BERLIN RUSSIAN-LIBERAL DAILY)

MORE than eleven years have passed since the death of Leo Tolstoi; but the number of visitors to his grave and to the Tolstoi Museum in *Iasnaia Polana* has not decreased — indeed this influx has assumed the character of an unceasing religious pilgrimage.

We drive through beautiful dense forest and pass the factory *Kosaya Gora* which used to flood the neighborhood with electric light and fill the air with the noise of its machinery. It is hardly alive now. The tall furnaces are dark; everything is still.

They tell me that in former years, when the workers of this factory sometimes 'revolted,' and the revolt was apt to result in injury to the workers themselves, Tolstoi used to appear, a mediator between the workers and the management, and appease the tempest. . . .

We crossed the well-known wide road upon which, in 1910, relatives and friends bore the remains of the great writer from the railroad station to the house, amid a throng of ten thousand people.

There is the garden of his estate, now all fenced in with barbed wire. We appreciate the thoughtfulness of those who have taken this precaution, but we miss the plain, gray wooden fence that used to surround the garden. The barbed wire is an ugly intruder into the idyllic atmosphere of Tolstoi's domicile, the birthplace of so many lofty thoughts. But this was a necessary thing — without the barbed wire the garden might have been invaded, and the trees destroyed. . . .

This is not a regular calling-time for visitors, who are admitted only on certain days and hours. The little square in front of the house is wind-swept and empty. Sadness and stillness reign.

Tatiana Lvovna, the eldest surviving daughter of Tolstoi, was generous enough to forgive our ignorance in coming at a time when visitors are not ordinarily received, and consented to take us through the residence. The old veranda, so often described, is slanting somewhat. But elsewhere about the house there is evidence of recent repairs. An old man walked slowly by — Tolstoi's personal servant for twenty years. His movements were slow and halting, as if his life was rapidly ebbing away. He told us a few things about the old days, and how life goes on now at *Iasnaia Polana*.

The Tolstoi Museum is kept by Alexandra Lvovna, Tolstoi's youngest daughter. The lands that were formerly part of the Tolstoi estate are now managed by the Soviet Government.

Tatiana Lvovna, white-haired and considerably like her father, was very friendly. She showed us Tolstoi's bedroom. There everything is kept exactly as it was left by the great thinker on the evening when he secretly abandoned his manor house to spend the rest of his life the way he always longed to live — earning his bread as peasants do. There is his well-worn dressing robe; a half-burned stearine candle and a medicine bottle still stand upon the little table.