

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### SIGNS OF SPRING

WHILE war lords fight, betray and circumvent one another, while peaceful countrysides are devastated, cities plundered and the flower of the land's farming population is destroyed in fratricidal conflict, there are spiritual forces at work preparing the minds of the people for the much-desired but as yet faintly imagined conditions which shall form a new realm.

The religious, social and literary renaissance, which is the harbinger of a new spiritual spring, has not come *in spite of* but rather *because of* these internal dissensions.

Difficult times bring the strong men into the front line. Anxiety for the fate of a mighty and beloved fatherland and the fear that an honored ancient culture might be jeopardized have caused creative spirits to leave their daily occupations to prepare the people by literary reform, religious awakening, and social experiment. Particular attention is given to fitting the minds of the young for the expected renaissance of the realm.

Something must be done; that is the feeling which now dominates the intellectual circles of China, and which by its reaction against turmoil and dissolution has set in motion the strong impulses now prevalent in China's spiritual life.

The voices are disputatious and some of them downright harsh. But minds have awakened, the

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old type of writing is defunct, the literary examinations done away with. The young are standing at the gates, looking for new banners under which they can enlist.

A group of these modern spiritual tendencies are of a religious cast. Modern China is not, as many Westerners fancy, a lawless heathen land which has forgotten the old idols and where a band of inspired and self-sacrificing missionaries work to kindle here and there a little candle in the spiritual darkness of four hundred million people.

China is to-day seeking desperately for spiritual support, and this she finds not only in Christian missionary stations.

A contest is raging on the subject of Kung Chiao, the moral teaching of Confucius, supported by a tradition of over two thousand years. A number of modern thinkers proclaim that Confucius with his worship of ancestors, his unlimited devotion to ancestral authority and all his fettering of individual initiative has been largely responsible for the superannuated condition of Chinese culture. In other circles, however, there is an attempt to bring new life into the teachings of Confucius.

During the first years of the republic an attempt was made — unsuccessfully, to be sure — to have Confucianism proclaimed as the Chinese state religion. But neo-Confucianism has not been inactive. The Confucian church at Peking, the plan for a Confucian university, the installation of Confucian priests in the army, and not least General Yen Hsi Shan's

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"Temple of Self-Purification" at Taiyuanfu, where this governor in his isolated and ideal situation himself leads at the Confucian hours of worship, — all these bear witness to the vitality of the ancient national school of morals.

From the renaissance in Confucianism we may properly pass over to neo-Buddhism, the leader of which is the monk Tai Hsü from the monastery of Tien Tong in Chekiang. It is his endeavor to bring Buddhism into contact with modern social movements. This neo-Buddhistic school has got an especially firm foothold in the provinces of Chekiang and Kiangsi. In many cities the people are restoring the old temples or building new ones, Buddhistic temple texts are published in new editions, and there are magazines which expound the meaning of the new movement.

In the summer of 1922 there was a conference of Buddhistic leaders under the presidency of Tai Hsü at Kuling Mountain near the city of Kiukiang in the province of Kiangsi. On this occasion a Norwegian missionary, K. L. Reichelt, was asked to give an address on the relation between Christianity and Buddhism.

Even the lowest, most superstition-bound of the three great Chinese religions, Taoism, shows signs of new spiritual force. In Taoistic circles the Tao Yuan movement has progressed. This is a combination of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam and Christianity.

Besides these great communal beliefs there are in

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China numerous small sects, often formed for some special object: the protection of social ideals, protecting the nation against a decadent dynasty or against the hated foreigners, the prevention of disease, famine and floods. One often finds a very deep religious feeling in these circles, from which many of the best Christian proselytes have come.

In strong contrast to the religious movements is the radicalism, which is now rapidly spreading, especially in student circles.

Ibsen and Nietzsche, with other Western authors of a later date, are read diligently, and Bolshevistic views are much circulated among students. No dogmas are left untouched, every traditional truth is questioned, discussed and revalued. Anti associations of all sorts are much in fashion: anti-capitalism, anti-religion, anti-family tradition, etc.

To put the students in touch with the most advanced Western thought a society was formed at Peking to invite to China the most significant intellectual leaders.

Professor John Dewey, a well-known teacher at Columbia University, spent two years in China and gave lectures in many places before large attentive audiences. Bertrand Russell, the English philosopher and mathematician, lived a year at Peking to develop his radical ideas on social and psychological questions. His visit resulted, among other things, in the formation of a Russell Society to work in the direction which the master had shown. Hans Driesch, the German psychologist, was the third to

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be invited. The most picturesque, however, was the old Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore, as he stood in crowded rooms or faced enthusiastic audiences. His pan-Asiatic message roused the enthusiasm of the students up to the time when physical over-exertion compelled him to break off his lecture tour.

The young students, thirsting for foreign intellectual impulses, yet at the same time roused to national self-consciousness, had in 1919 their first chance to help in freeing their land from foreign usurpers.

In the spring of this year tidings came from Europe that the Peace Conference at Paris had assigned to Japan the possessions which Germany had previously wrested to herself in Shantung. There was then at Peking a pro-Japanese ministry, belonging to the so-called Anfu Party whose members appropriated personal rewards through accepting a state loan from Japan, in return for which many of China's most valuable national resources were pledged as security.

When the resolution adopted at Paris on the Shantung question became known in Peking, it roused a storm of indignation. On the morning of May 4 a parade of fifteen thousand students, representing thirty-three institutions of learning, passed through the streets. When admittance was denied to the Legation Quarter, where they wished to enlist the help of the foreign ministers, they went to the home of the Minister of Communications, Tsao Ju Lin, to have a reckoning with him who was

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considered first among the Anfu-ists as a tool of the Japanese. Tsao was at this moment sitting at table with two other "traitors", the Minister of Finance, Lu Tsung Yu and the Chinese minister at Tokyo, Chang Tsung Hsiang. Tsao and Li succeeded in vanishing by a back door, but the unlucky Chang, the least guilty of the three, was severely handled. Tsao's house was also set on fire.

The government now attempted to punish the students, but a general strike in the schools of Peking was then declared, with the support of the superintendents and teachers. The next procedure of the students was a series of street lectures, at which, by a well-arranged plan, each hundred meters of Peking's streets was assigned to a student, who stood and spoke to the people against the Japanese and the Anfu-ists. The movement now spread rapidly over the whole country, and in city after city the students began similar demonstrations. The street addresses reached such a point that the government decided to arrest the participants, and a thousand were collected in the dormitory of the university, where they were kept under police supervision. But on the following day many thousand students came to the dormitory and asked to share the fate of their comrades who had been arrested. The police tried to get them away, but toward evening they came by the hundreds with their sleeping clothes in bundles on their backs, prepared to sleep on the open square in front of the dormitory. The police, who were completely dumbfounded by the students' behavior, put

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themselves in telephonic communication with the government, and the upshot was that the incarcerated students were released. As a result of this triumphant demonstration, the three ministers who were considered most responsible for the Anfu-ists' actions were forced to resign.

The students thus attained their primary object. But they then went on and won an important ally in the merchant class. Although it involved considerable losses, the shopmen joined in boycotting Japanese goods. The movement spread quickly and became such a threat for Japan's business with China that the former nation found it necessary to make diplomatic representations at Peking. The boycott then took on another significance in that it was turned not against Japanese goods but against goods of "inferior quality."

These combined utterances of the popular will had as their result that China's delegates at the Paris Conference felt they had the moral support they needed in order to refuse to sign the article of peace which secured to Japan the territory in Shantung formerly possessed by Germany. This refusal became in due time the cause of the situation which in 1921 caused Japan at Washington to consent in restoring her conquests in Shantung to China.

The year of 1919, then, showed the Chinese students for the first time their power as a factor in the people's struggle for national independence. Since then the student movement has grown much stronger, and an organization has been formed which assures

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that any action directed against China will almost immediately lead to defensive measures in student circles throughout the land. Foreigners had at last an opportunity to learn this in connection with the incidents described in the chapter "Shanghai and the Thirtieth of May, 1925."

The student movement is certainly far from being beyond criticism. Not infrequently, when in recent years the students have gone into a strike against their rector or some unpopular professor, it would have been better to stay quietly at their studies, and it may well be questioned how far the strong Bolshevik tinge which student opinion has taken in many places really harmonizes with the political, economic and social temperament of the Chinese people. It is very easy to understand that the students, prone to sudden enthusiasms, have in pure despair over their country's misfortunes caught as a last resort at the extreme doctrines which Russian agents offer them; but it seems probable that the Chinese character, naturally so moderate, will find other ways of solving the national problems.

In all their actions the students have become a power in China's struggle to win back her complete national integrity. Despite its excesses and lack of ripened judgment, the student movement is born of idealistic motives, in sharp contrast with the arbitrary conduct of the inspector generals and the intrigues of the professional politicians.

The modern student movement in China is predominantly political in its tendency, with the



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purpose of opposing foreign encroachments and the actions of such national leaders as are considered traitors to the public cause. But scientific studies and social investigations have also set their stamp on this new phenomenon in China's spiritual life. Since 1917 there has arisen an extensive and varied periodical literature, partly as the organ of special societies or other associations. These publications, which are of the most modern type, treat of the most widely differing subjects, but in particular those of a literary, social and scientific nature.

Carried along by an eager wish to strengthen the spiritual resistance of the people at a time of special temptation, the students have turned their energies to the assistance of popular enlightenment, especially toward giving some knowledge of reading and writing to the great mass of the illiterate in the lower strata of society. There is a lively experimentation with various systems of simplified writing, with courses in "the thousand most important writing characters", etc. Students and teachers devote their leisure time to free courses for laborers, rickshaw men and others, who need and desire to learn the foundations of written speech.

This multifarious movement among the students has spread about with the force of an explosion, and its development would be incomprehensible without knowledge of the *literary revolution*, begun in 1917, and its far-reaching influence on the spiritual life of modern China.

Up to very recently, and still extant to-day in official

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circles, there prevailed in China the very peculiar condition that in official writing, scientific treatises, literary work and letters between officials and other educated persons a written language was employed which was a dead speech before the beginning of our era. In 120 B.C. (under the Han dynasty) premier Kung Sun Hung utters the following complaint in a memorial to the emperor: "The imperial edicts and laws no matter how elegantly expressed or how full of wisdom they may be, are incomprehensible to the less educated of the officials, who are therefore unable to explain them to the people."

Thus for two thousand years the official language has remained a stereotyped literary treasure which the learned classes have jealously guarded, hedging it in behind the public literary examinations which made the knowledge of the classics and the use of their speech the only certificate for public promotion.

The first great barrier for the popularization of writing was broken down in September, 1905, when an imperial edict abolished the old system of examinations and laid the foundations of a modern education. But the old language has still been retained as the official medium for writing and printing. It is thus worth noting that my treatise, "An Early Chinese Culture", in which I describe the first investigations of prehistoric China — a modern work on archaeology, therefore — is as regards its Chinese text embodied in a speech which was stereotyped and inaccessible to the average man two thousand years ago. This speech is extraordinarily concise,

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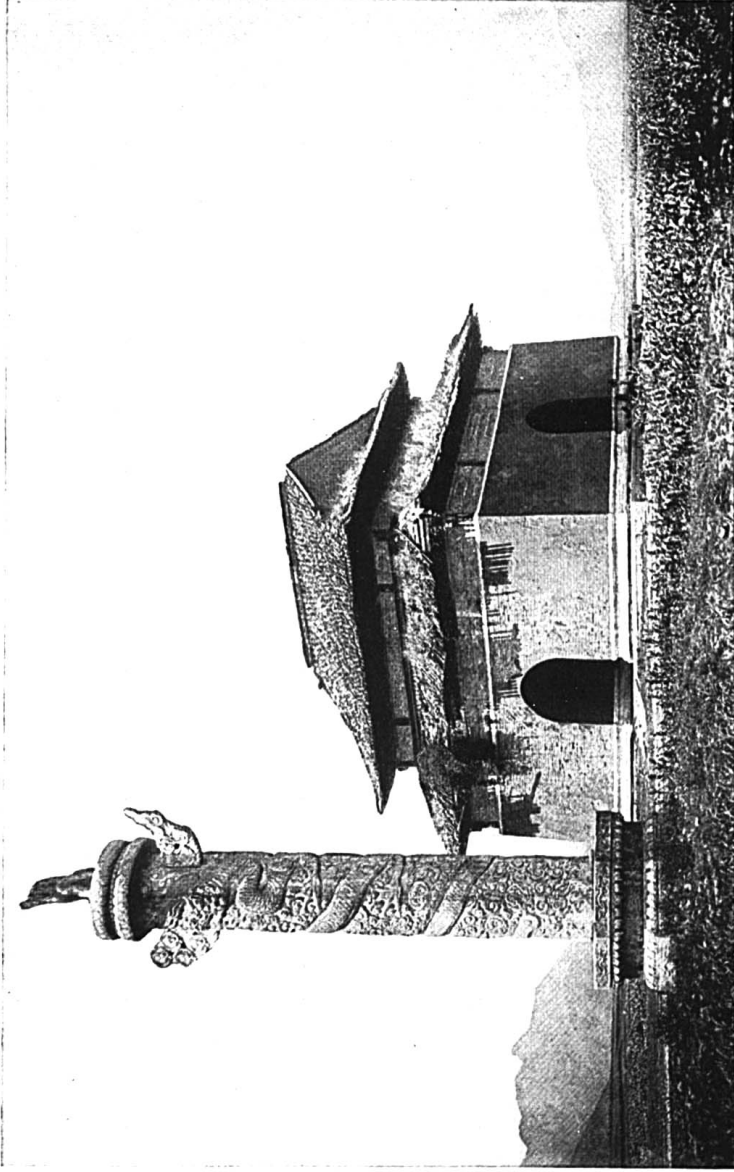
clear and elegant, but it is a dead language. China is therefore in the same peculiar condition as was Europe at the beginning of the renaissance and in some instances much later, namely, that the official and learned world used a language which was effete and inaccessible to the great mass of the people. The only essential difference is that Europe used a dead language, Latin, which was for most countries a borrowed speech, whereas the Chinese use a language which belongs in direct descent to their own culture.

Beside this official Chinese writing, which has become set in its forms long ago, China has had for centuries a vulgar literature, mostly narrative, in the constantly changing language of ordinary speech. One might say that this vulgar literature was an unnoticed stream flowing under the smooth and elegant ice of the literary language.

A little band of thinkers and poets have now boldly cut a big hole in the winter ice and made way for a foaming spring flood in the spiritual life of China.

The leader of this literary revolution is Doctor Hu Shih, professor in the State University of Peking, philosopher and poet. Through his poems, his literary pioneering, and not least through his rich and inspiring personality, he is among the foremost leaders of the new youth.

Some of my finest memories of Peking are connected with Hu Shih. Sometimes at my home, sometimes in his quiet little studio we met a few



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friends to discuss the questions of the day or the scientific problems then rife, and our greatest pleasure then was to hear how Doctor Hu's delicate spiritual interpolations combated with Doctor Ting's, the geologist's, clear-cut scepticism and biting characterization of the leaders in the political game of the moment.

Doctor Hu took the lead in reforming the language through two articles, "Proposal for the Reform of Chinese Literature" and "A Constructive Reform within Chinese Literature", the latter published in the magazine *La Jeunesse* issued at the University of Peking. He proclaimed that the educated Chinese should recognize the language spoken by the majority of the people as "the true national speech and as a flexible instrument for a living literature in all its forms."

The secret of Hu Shih's phenomenal success was partly that he has command of a brilliant style and partly that his arguments convince by their bold self-reliance.

I take from "China's National Language", one of Doctor Hu's articles written for a foreign public, the following picture, which attempts to elucidate the linguistic situation in China when he and his friends began the movement for reform:

Imagine that modern Europe had just come out of the Middle Ages and found itself gathered into a great united empire with Latin as the official literary language. Imagine that this realm persisted undivided for two thousand years with only two or three

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short periods of political dissolution. Imagine further that a uniform system of public examinations, based on the ability to read and write the speech of Caesar, Cicero and Virgil, had been retained without break for a period of twenty centuries. Under those conditions the modern national languages — Italian, French, English and German — would have continued to grow and develop, but would always have been regarded merely as local dialects, and Latin would in all probability have remained the only officially recognized literary language up to to-day.

He goes on to describe the liberation of the national European languages from the domination of Latin: how in Italy the Tuscan dialect became the national literary language through the masterpieces of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio; how in England the Midland dialect became the standard, partly through the popularity which Chaucer and Wiclif won through using this dialect as their medium; and he recalls how the court speech of Paris developed into the literary language of the French.

After a hasty review of the numerous Chinese dialects, he comes out with the declaration that the northern group of the mandarin dialects, in other words the speech of Peking, is that which deserves to be the new literary language of China.

The importance of Peking as the political center for many centuries has also been a great factor in making its speech the most distinguished representative of the northern dialects. The speech of Peking, which of all the dialects has probably absorbed the greatest number of Mongolian elements, quickly

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became a language unequalled in richness and vitality and developed quite differently from the conservative dialects of southeastern China.

I do not know what linguistic scholars, Professor Karlgren, for instance, have to say about Hu Shih's deductions, but at all events they served as a powerful propaganda for reaching the goal he proposed.

Hu Shih now goes on to describe the history of the vulgar literature. He recalls how anonymous songs and ballads from the first six centuries of the Christian era were so full of beauty that they were accepted even by the literary class as a legitimate part of the national literature and became known under the title, "Old Song Collections."

Vulgar prose was developed in the ninth century by the Chuan or Zen schools of Buddhist monks. Its evolution was so astonishingly rapid that in the tenth and eleventh centuries there were already long sermons and letters written in fine and forceful vulgar prose. The style was so well fitted for philosophic exposition that the neo-Confucian philosophers of the Sung and later dynasties adopted it to preserve important utterances and as a medium for philosophic discussion. This helped to give vulgar prose a well-formed style, a notable step in the construction of a prose literature.

Northern China was conquered by the Nuchen Tatars in the twelfth century and later by the Mongols, who in 1279 conquered all China. At that time the center of classical education had shifted to southwestern China. Up in the north the rule of the barbarians was not favorable to the old classic learning. Under the Mongols the literary examinations were

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suspended for a period of nearly eighty years (1237-1313), a violation of the tradition otherwise unbroken for twenty centuries. This temporary weakening of the hold of classical learning on the people gave an excellent opportunity for the popular literature to develop freely and rapidly. Thus arose the great dramas of the Yuan period, which were written especially for the people and in some cases by authors of the lowest social class.

The need of instructing the barbarians and the barbarized Chinese as to the great traditions of the country gave rise to a new class of prose literature called *Yen yi*, or popular history. These stories soon developed into historical novels and then into novels of every sort. The sixteenth century witnessed the appearance of four of China's greatest novels, all by unknown authors and some clearly of very early and primitive origin, from which they were gradually completed by a series of collective and individual revisions. The rise of the drama and in particular the development of the great novels exalted the vulgar literature in the eyes of the literary class. One of the great critics in the middle of the seventh century declared that there was no literary work which could be compared to the novel "Shui Hu Chuan."

It is these novels which have standardized the national speech. Most of them are written in the northern or middle dialects, and it is an interesting fact that many were written by southerners, who got their knowledge of the national language by the study of the great novels.

Doctor Hu's controversial writings aroused a short but bitter conflict. The literati of the old school saw in him a vandal who sought to profane the sanctuaries of national culture. But the young students,



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together with teachers and writers of the more advanced type, embraced the new movement with enthusiasm. The time was full of fermenting material which required form, and a whole literature arose, with the vulgar speech, *pai hua*, as its medium. Thus it is said that more than four hundred magazines in this speech were founded in the year 1919 alone. In the following year the authorities gave a partial recognition to the movement when the Ministry of Education enacted that *pai hua* should be used as a beginning in the elementary schools.

The old official language is still used in government circles, but the vulgar, or "national", speech, as Doctor Hu loves to call it, has become a medium for the dissemination of knowledge outside the special learned class. There is no doubt that the literary revolution of 1919-1920 means much more for the spiritual development of the Chinese than does the political revolution of 1911.

A curious reciprocity prevailed between the student movement and the literary revolution. In 1919 and later the student movement was in want of a medium to reach the great masses of the people, and the learned language was useless for this purpose. But Doctor Hu and his friends had just provided the new medium, *pai hua*, which was admirably fitted for the students' propaganda. When in 1919 the students won their moral victory in the contest with the Anfu party and Japan, *pai hua* had its baptism. The national language did such service to the national cause in a vital question that the new speech

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could at once take its place among the most notable resources of Chinese culture.

China is still in danger. The imperialism of foreign powers still threatens her, the civil war still rages, the time is still full of difficulties and perplexities for the young students who wish to do their share for the salvation of their native land.

But when I see our modern Swedish students, a new generation in elegant clothes who seldom have occasion to think of their country's weal and woe, but who securely divide their time between jazz and examinations, my thoughts go back to the insignificant-looking little Chinese students. And it is then brought home to me that the latter are more spiritually rich, for they live in a time of storm and stress, when chaff is driven before the wind, when the shallow-rooted tree falls and only the strong birds dare to try their wings.