THOUGH my theme is China, I shall not deal with Manchuria or the Second World War, with the play of power politics or the fratricidal struggle of Kuomintang and communist. My story ends about where the modern tragedy begins. The limits of the field are roughly 1600 and 1800. But why, it may be asked, choose just this period? What difference does it make to us how much or how little Europe knew about China during these centuries? Is this more than the usual academic trick of subdividing a subject? The answer in brief is that early modern Europe, though it may have been misinformed about China, knew more and took a more steady interest than the western world of our own day, and that many were fascinated by the picture of China that they thought they saw. It was, we may say, a mirage; there were those who spoke of the Chinese dream. But mirage or dream may tell us something about the dreamer, may contain a kernel of truth after all.

If I avoid contemporary international problems, I also wish to avoid medieval romance, fascinating though the earlier vision of oriental despotsisms and conquests had been. The medieval European view of China was bound up with the Mongol conquests and the sway of Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan. The spell of the East is in Chaucer's Squire's

*Delivered at the Rice Institute on Sunday afternoons in the autumn of 1947.
Tale, but it is the spell of Tartary rather than China; and the more authentic reports of Marco Polo, the canny Venetian merchant, passed for more romance from a land of wonders. Then came a time when missionaries and adventurers brought no further news. The old Tartar dynasty, the line of Kublai Khan, was overthrown, and the new rulers, the Ming dynasty, forbade foreigners to enter the country. There is a clear gap of about two centuries in the intercourse between China and the West.

But in the fifteenth century overland commerce between Europe and the East was blocked by the conquests of the Turks, or at least became a Venetian monopoly. The Portuguese then succeeded in opening a sea route to the East Indies. After Vasco da Gama’s voyage in 1498 the Portuguese replaced Arab traders in the Indian Ocean and established their colonial capital at Goa, which they hold to this day. Pressing eastward, they leased a trading station at Macao, and not long afterward the Spanish got a base in the Philippines, already claimed for them by Magellan. Following Iberian exploration and expansion came the wave of the Counter-Reformation, hard after the navigator and the trader the Jesuit missionary. China was the goal of St. Francis Xavier, the apostle to the Indies, who died on an island off Canton in 1552—his grave there is still a Catholic shrine. Soon afterward a Jesuit mission established itself at Pekin under the leadership of Mateo Ricci. And at this point Jesuit missionary policy forced an important decision, one which deeply affected the contact of Chinese and European culture. The Jesuit was an intellectual in action, not a mere mystic or devotee. If the odds were against him, he made a practical calculation of what he could actually expect to score under the given circumstances. A mission to China was something quite different from a mission to the Indians of
The Early European View of Old China

Paraguay. Ricci and his successors met the Chinese on a scientific and humanistic level, winning favor largely through their knowledge of mathematics and astronomy, and even by their ingenuity in devising clockwork. The central fact in the life of the Empire was the imperial calendar, and at one time the regulation of the calendar was actually in the hands of the Jesuits. Thus they made as much as they could of the common ground on which Chinese and occidental might meet, and gained an opportunity given hitherto to no other western observers to study the Empire closely and continuously, in terms of daily life and usage. Before the end of the seventeenth century they had given Europe their own version of Chinese life and ideals, simplified, heightened, we may say expurgated, and yet backed by impressive observation and documentation. Though the other religious orders had access to China also, and though there were travel reports by laymen, there was nothing to surpass the Jesuits’. To the acceptance of this report by Europe we must return, for it is perhaps the most significant point in the story of China’s prestige in the West.

But before following this theme further, we must turn to another aspect, the cult of Chinese art objects and styles, conveniently labeled by the French word chinoiserie. Here we have closer physical contact with China. In our time of rapid transport and communication, when Chungking or Canton may soon be brought before us by television, the barriers of an earlier age seem impassible. Few people in western Europe had ever seen a Chinaman. From the late seventeenth century they could perhaps look at some expensive illustrated books on China, and they could read some inadequately translated selections from the Chinese classics, in addition to the Jesuit relations. But China to them would mean for the most part material imports. From
1600 the British East India Company was in direct contact with India, Siam, China, and Japan, and the Dutch East India Company was also important. China came to be identified in the popular mind with the novelties from the East that came to take a larger and larger place in trade. Of course this was partly an old story; certain luxury products had been more or less closely associated with China from time immemorial, silk the most ancient of all, at first the principal export of China to the West, until the secret of the silkworm and the mulberry tree came west to Byzantium in the sixth century of the Christian era. Less directly identifiable as Chinese were paper-making and block-printing, including the stamping of designs on textiles. The sweet orange, brought to Spain from China by the Arabs in the eleventh century, was once known in Germany and Holland as the “Chinese apple,” but to the man on the street the orange was not Chinese, any more than the grapefruit of more recent times, which came to America from China. But the case was different with the new imports of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Pepys wrote in his diary for September 25, 1660: “I did send for a cup of tea (a China drink) of which I never had drank before.” There is no need to enlarge at this point on the importance of tea for the life of modern Britain, but what a turning point was there! The virtuosi of the century wondered at the variety of strange and rich things that came from China, produced by arts unknown to the West. John Evelyn, representative of the best taste of the time, wrote in his diary for June 22, 1664:

One Tomson, a Jesuit, showed me such a collection of rarities, sent from the Jesuits of Japan and China to their Order at Paris, as a present to be reserved in their repository, but brought to London by the East India ships for them, as in my life I had not seen. The chief things were, rhinoceros’ horns; glorious vests, wrought and embroidered on cloth of
The Early European View of Old China

gold, but with such lively colours, that for splendour and vividness we have nothing in Europe that approaches it; a girdle studded with agates and rubies of great value and size; knives, of so keen an edge as one could not touch them, nor was the metal of our colour, but more pale and livid; fans, like those our ladies use, but much larger, and with long handles curiously carved and filled with Chinese characters; a sort of paper very broad, thin, and fine, like abortive parchment, and exquisitely polished, of an amber yellow, exceeding glorious and pretty to look on . . . several other sorts of paper, some written, other printed; prints of landscapes, their idols, saints, pagods, of most ugly serpentine monstrous and hideous shapes, to which they paid devotion; pictures of men and countries, rarely painted on a sort of gummed calico, transparent as glass; flowers, trees, beasts, birds, etc., excellently wrought in a kind of sleeve silk, very natural; divers drugs that our druggists and physicians could make nothing of.

What appears as essentially a list of curiosities in Evelyn was developing into a large-scale luxury trade and an extended artistic cult.

Most important was the true porcelain, the formula for which had been evolved long ago, they say, in the experiments of Chinese alchemists. We call it “china” in English; other western European languages have adopted the strange term “porcelain,” literally “little pig,” the Italian or Portuguese term for the cowrie shell. The West was long mystified by the formula for fine porcelain, and apparently one theory was that these shells were an ingredient. Finally true hard porcelain was produced by Böttger at Meissen, near Dresden, in 1710, a pretty late date. Porcelain works were then established in various European countries; such names as Meissen, Nymphenburg, Sèvres, Worcester, Chelsea mark the spread of the manufacture. National preferences developed, and western forms and styles appeared which of course departed widely from the original Chinese inspiration. Imported Chinese ware was often painted in Europe. Cheap though attractive export porcelain was made in South China,
often decorated with western designs, and used as ballast in the lumbering East India ships.

All this was part of the wider movement in European styles called rococo. Without trying to define the term with precision, we may say that it is intended to denote a bizarre, delicate, playful, and subtle style. In the tones and lines of Chinese porcelain France found the perfect rococo art object, but the style was found also in other media and commodities, in oriental wall papers, lacquered boxes and furniture, and stamped and embroidered fabrics. All these came to have their imitative European industries. The age seemed to wish to compensate for dominant ideas of strictness and severity in classical design by this outbreak of playful and irresponsible decoration. Thus chinoiserie was branded as frivolous. Stores were opened for the sale of oriental goods, called variously in London, "China shops," "India shops," or "toy shops." Ladies were bantered on the subject, as by John Gay in his lines called To a Lady on her Passion for Old China, following the line of badinage which appears in Steele's Lover, No. 10. A blunt tradesman like Defoe remarked that the pretentious China shops betrayed a foolish generation, and Robinson Crusoe takes pains to inform us in the latter part of his travels that the Chinese have been much overrated by the West. We get here a middle class opinion that chinoiserie is aristocratic folly. But it is more than that, for we can find the influence persisting and extending itself in decorative styles through the century—in some of the familiar Chippendale designs, for example. And it may be of particular interest to remember that national independence opened up to American sea-captains and merchants the rich China trade, heretofore the monopoly of the East India Company. The American China trade, carried on at additional advantage because of the speed of the clipper
The Early European View of Old China

ships, brought to the old ports of the eastern seaboard the oriental styles and art objects that had long been the delight of Europe. The romance of this chapter in American trade is written in Joseph Hergesheimer's fine novel Java Head.

The influence of Chinese rococo extended itself from decoration to the larger elements of design. Since the established classical modes were formal and symmetrical, those who consciously or sub-consciously wished to deviate from those modes would welcome, from outside the accepted tradition, any hints or supposed precedents which might help toward an escape from the fixed pattern. The strange fascination and prestige of China helped to give such pretexts. The general effect of the Chinese cult on western art appears in Sir William Temple's essay Of Gardening. To get the full significance of this passage we should remember that it was published in 1685, when the Jesuit accounts of China were still a novelty, and that it anticipates some phases of style that did not develop fully for more than half a century. Temple writes:

What I have said of the best forms of gardens is meant only of such as are in some sort regular; for there may be other forms wholly irregular that may, for aught I know, have more beauty than any of the others; but they must owe it to some extraordinary dispositions of nature in the seat, or some great race of fancy or judgment in the contrivance, which may reduce many disagreeing parts into some figure, which shall yet, upon the whole, be very agreeable. Something of this I have seen in some places, but heard more of it from some others who have lived among the Chineses; a people, whose way of thinking seems to lie as wide of ours in Europe, as their country does. Among us, the beauty of building and planting is placed chiefly in some certain proportions, symmetries, or uniformities; our walks and our trees ranged so as to answer one another, and at exact distances. The Chinese scorn this way of planting, and say, a boy, that can tell an hundred, may plant walks of trees in straight lines, and over-against one another, and to what length and extent he pleases. But their greatest reach of imagination is employed in contriving figures, where the beauty shall be great, and strike the eye, but without any
order or disposition of parts that shall be commonly or easily
observed: and, though we have hardly any notion of this sort
of beauty, yet they have a particular word to express it, and,
where they find it hit the eye at first sight, they say the shara-
wadgi is fine or is admirable, or any such expression of esteem.
And whoever observes the work upon the best India gowns, or
the painting upon their best skreens or purcellans, will find
their beauty is all of this kind (that is) without order.

This account crystallizes the view of the subject at the end
of the seventeenth century and lays down a program for the
eighteenth. A later generation rings the changes upon the
mysterious word sharawadgi. In landscape gardening, a favor-
ite eighteenth century art, the basic contrast was between
the neo-classical or formal layout, as at Versailles, and the
irregular landscape according to nature which was thought
of as the English style. China did not do it all, but the Eng-
lish garden was in some of its aspects a Chinese garden as
well. It should be noticed that when Temple says the Chinese
style is irregular, he does not seem to mean or say precisely
that it follows nature, or to advise a mere return to the nat-
ural terrain; if I read him aright, he is describing something
that we may call "occult balance," something seemingly irre-
gular or disordered which shall nevertheless have a hidden
principle of order. The age loved simple rules, but further-
more it loved, as mankind always does, to discover the simple
in the complex, the planned in the seemingly haphazard, the
purposeful in the casual. Such an appeal was made by the
Chinese or English garden. The essential step was to identify
the beauty without order of Chinese gardens and art ob-
jects with the work of nature, the irregular with the natural.
This was done by the Jesuit Le Comte, author of one of the
most famous of books on China, at the end of the seventeenth
century:

The Chinese, who so little apply themselves to order their
Gardens, and give them real Ornaments, do yet delight in
The Early European View of Old China

them, and are at some cost about them; they make Grotto's in them, raise pretty little Artificial Eminences, transport thither by pieces whole Rocks, which they heap one upon another, without any further design, than to imitate Nature.

Addison expounds similar principles in the Spectator, echoing the passage in Temple; English landscape gardening developed rapidly in the following half century, and then underwent a second wave of Chinese influence, inspired largely by the Jesuit Attiret's description of the imperial pleasure gardens. There was a cult of Rural Architecture in the Chinese Taste, to use Halfpenny's title of 1750. Visitors to Kew Gardens will remember the pagoda built there by Sir William Chambers at the height of the vogue. The whole movement was often derided and put on a par with the taste for Chinese bric-à-brac:

According to the present prevailing whim, every thing is Chinese, or in the Chinese taste, or, as it is sometimes more modestly expressed, partly after the Chinese manner. Chairs, tables, chimney-pieces, frames for looking-glasses, and even our most vulgar utensils, are all reduced to this new-fangled standard, and without-doors so universally has it spread, that every gate to a cow-yard is in T's and Z's, and every hovel for the cows has bells hanging on the corners (World, No. 12, March 22, 1753).

One could find Chinese-English gardens in France and Germany, and Goethe makes fun of the style in his Triumph der Empfindsamkeit.

It would be wrong, however, to dismiss the cult of China in Europe as a mere freak of fashion. The Jesuit Sinophiles labored to better effect than that. It remains to be considered what the Jesuit interpretation of China was, and why the western world accepted it so readily. The irresponsible seeker after the wonders of the East might marvel at the strange novelties and intricacies of the Great Kingdom; the Jesuit, though aware of the exoticism, found within it a known and rational principle and an underlying simplicity.
Public Lectures

He worked in the spirit of Renaissance humanism, which was soon to be transmuted into the Enlightenment or the Age of Reason. From among the three chief religions of China, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, he chose the last as the true, basic, and characteristic Chinese way. He oversimplified here, but his position could be defended. He rejected Buddhism as idolatry, Taoism as impractical fantasy, but Confucius, he found, uttered the basic moral truths to which the heart of man everywhere responds. To this recognition of ancient and eternal truth he sometimes gave a mythical form: when the descendants of Noah had been dispersed on the face of the earth, God’s revelation under the old dispensation had been brought to China and preserved in a comparatively pure form. As Le Comte wrote, “China, happier in its Foundation than any other Nation under the Sun, drew in the chief of the holy Maxims of their antient Religion from the Fountain Head.” Thus China held the true religion for two thousand years of the pre-Christian era, while Europe, to use Le Comte’s words, “wallowed in Error and Corruption.” Now this fable was not generally received, and it is only fair to say that Le Comte’s book was speedily condemned by Roman Catholic authority. But it is worth noting as an example of Jesuit eagerness to find truth in the Chinese worldview and as a key to the famous controversy about the Chinese rites, which agitated the Church for several generations.

The rival orders, the Dominicans and their allies, maintained in opposition to the Jesuits that the Chinese were atheists, and at the same time that the worship of ancestors and the performance of rites in honor of Confucius were idolatrous practices. The Jesuits maintained that the so-called ancestor worship was a social rather than a religious rite, and it may be said that modern students of China agree with them. The papal decisions on this point varied in effect, but
tended to go against the Jesuits, until finally the Bull *Ex Quo Singulari* in 1742 exacted of all Catholic missionaries in China an oath to oppose the rites. This settled the matter for the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, but in our own day the decision has been quietly reversed by a decree of the Propaganda, December 8, 1938, reprinted in the London *Tablet*, January 20, 1940. Catholics are now permitted to be present at ceremonies in honor of Confucius, and gestures of respect to the picture and tablet of the sage are not to be construed as idolatrous. These matters are somewhat technical, but they can hardly be called trivial. The main point is that the Jesuits encouraged Europeans to think of Confucius as a great pagan sage like Plato, Socrates, Pythagoras, and Seneca. As early as 1642 a French freethinker, La Mothe le Vayer, said he was ready to cry, “Sancte Confuci, ora pro nobis.” Universal truth as conceived by the western mind was identified with the ancient wisdom of China.

The original teaching of Confucius had, as with any sage or prophet, been subject to elaborate commentary and interpretation. Historians of Chinese philosophy tell us that the core of Confucianism is a social and political philosophy which, by the time the Jesuits reached China, had been elaborated into a speculative system and even overlaid with Buddhist and Taoist elements. After the revolution of 1644 the neo-Confucians tried to get back to fundamentals, to reach the plain and utilitarian teaching of Confucius. The Jesuit version was in line with this movement; the neo-Confucians and the Jesuits could be described as fundamentalists who sought to return to the simple unadorned teachings of the sage. This movement has continued to the present time. But what was happening in the seventeenth century was not the mere addition of the name of Confucius to the beadroll of western sages. The point was that in China the moral and
Public Lectures

religious system was a social and political system; here, according to the early European interpretation, was a great and ancient empire, rich in culture, in which scholars had real power, imposing their wisdom on the monarch. Here was a state in which, according to Plato's words, philosophers were virtually kings, and helped to make kings philosophers. And far from being a speculative dream, the state ordered on these lines was a great and going concern and had held its own from immemorial antiquity. Though conquered by the Tartars, the mighty kingdom was imposing its established and eminently rational system on the conquerors. Brute force could not prevail against plain basic reason in action.

This utopian vision of China took form with amazing rapidity. Sir William Temple has the scheme entire, and sums up the subject in his essay Of Heroic Virtue:

Upon these foundations and institutions, by such methods and orders, the kingdom of China seems to be framed and policed with the utmost force and reach of human wisdom, reason, and contrivance; and in practice to excel the very speculations of other men, and all those imaginary schemes of the European wits, the institutions of Xenophon, the republic of Plato, the Utopias or Oceanas of our modern writers. And this will perhaps be allowed by any that considers the vastness, the opulence, the populousness of this region, with the ease and facility wherewith 'tis governed, and the length of time this government has run. The last is three times longer than that of the Assyrian Monarchy, which was thirteen hundred years, and the longest period of any government we meet with in story. The numbers of people and of their forces, the treasures and revenues of the Crown, as well as wealth and plenty of the subjects, the magnificence of their public buildings and works, would be incredible, if they were not confirmed by the concurring testimonies of Paulus Venetus, Martinius Kercherus, with several other relations, in Italian, Portuguese, and Dutch; either by missionary Friars, or persons employed thither upon trade, or embassies upon that occasion; yet the whole government is represented, as a thing managed with as much facility, order, and quiet, as a common family; though some writers affirm the number of people in China, before the last Tartar wars, to have been above two hundred millions.
Europe was predisposed at the end of the seventeenth century to accept such a vision. In the West it had been an age of political instability and war—civil war in England and somewhat earlier in France, the Thirty Years' War in central Europe. Even the English thought of themselves as an unstable people, ready for a revolution every few years. "By natural instinct they change their lord." This stimulated an exaggerated respect for stable government; the political treatises of the period are full of praise for enduring states such as Sparta in ancient times and Venice in modern Europe. But such stability, it was felt, was impossible in a democracy, uncertain in a limited monarchy, most probable in a benevolent and enlightened despotism. The Jesuits were witnessing the successful early days of the Manchu dynasty, and were thus seeing absolute monarchy at its best. Power was centralized and controlled by learning. The Chinese, it was thought, had established a permanent brain trust, and had made useful learning the basis on which society and government were organized. "As other nations," wrote Temple, "are usually distinguished into Noble and Plebeian, so that of China may be distinguished into Learned and Illiterate." Moreover, this Chinese learning, according to the western enthusiasts, was essentially applied ethics; Confucius, like Socrates, turned away from sophistry or scholasticism and from the speculative study of nature. What seems to be a weak point in the Chinese system, its lack of interest in natural science, was accepted by some even in Newton's age as a strong point. China fell back on the essential beliefs necessary to make the political and social system work. At the same time, a low standard of living for the masses did not worry earlier political scientists as it worries us now. The age was prepared to accept an elaborate and static code enshrining simple truth.
Public Lectures

For convenience I have been quoting Sir William Temple, but lest he seem to be a somewhat languid and unimportant thinker, let me add that the greatest mind on the Continent was fired by the reports of the Jesuits; in these same years Leibnitz was cherishing his dream of a universal culture in which Orient and Occident should pool their resources, with the Society of Jesus and Peter the Great as the administrative agents of this UNESCO. There might be an exchange of cultural religious embassies, he hoped; China might teach us natural religion and we might teach her revealed religion. The German academic philosopher Wolff, among many others, followed Leibnitz in praising China, but this offended the orthodox, and Wolff lost his professorship at Halle and had to take another post at Marburg.

On the religious side, in spite of the Jesuit sponsorship of the vision of enlightened China, the Sinophiles tended to be deistic. If the best of empires could carry on so long with a simple natural religion, what need of revelation? In fact, some people, like the skeptic Bayle, described the Chinese as a nation of moral and well ordered atheists, traveling without any theological baggage whatever. But the prevailing view may be found in Voltaire, the greatest and most influential of the eighteenth century enthusiasts for China. His views on the subject were frequently expressed and widely circulated. In China he found an ancient and enduring empire. As an historian he professed to find the early records of this empire clear and rational. In the government he discerned a paternalistic despotism which combined the good features of French absolutism and British limited monarchy. In Chinese religion he was delighted to discover a tolerant deism without dogma and without priesthood, with social benevolism as the core of its teaching. He was once reading a book by the English writer Conyers Middleton written in controversy
The Early European View of Old China

with a deist. Middleton said, “There was never a nation in the world, where public Religion was founded upon the Plan of Nature and instituted in the principles of meer Religion,” whereupon Voltaire wrote in English on the margin, “The religion [sic] of Chinese government.” A writer in an English journal, the Independent Whig, says roundly, “In China, all Men of consideration, all of any Eminence for Learning and Dignity, are Deists.” Liberal thinkers of this stripe, like Voltaire himself, were turning the Chinese theme against the very Jesuits who had provided the West with most of its knowledge of the subject. “The Chinese have converted the Jesuits,” the Independent Whig remarks with some glee.

France was the center of Sinophile interest, and Du Halde’s Description de l’Empire de la Chine (1735) became one of the best known books of the period. The dedication of the English translation of 1738 to Frederick, Prince of Wales, echoes French praise of the paternalistic system by which “the most despotic Emperors on Earth govern with the same Mildness as the most limited Monarchs; and Nations as numerous as the Sands of the Sea are restrained within the Bounds of the most perfect Submission.” A new development was the admiration for Chinese agriculture. The standard account had it that the Chinese ranked the social classes in this order: (1) Scholars, (2) Farmers, (3) Artisans, (4) Merchants. The high status given to agriculture aroused the admiration of the school of economic thinkers called the Physiocrats (Turgot, Quesnay). Nothing made a greater impression than the annual spring plowing ceremony by the emperor. Du Halde says, “Every Year in Spring, the Emperor (according to the Custom of the antient Founders of this excellent Monarchy) goes himself in a solemn manner to plough a few Ridges of Land; in order to animate the Husbandman by his own Example, and the Mandarins of every City perform the
Ceremony.” This rite was often described and pictured in eighteenth century literature.

Thus the age had a double picture of China, as the land of the fascinating oddities of *chinoiserie* and as the land of ancient wisdom and sound social ethics. The Chinaman was at the same time a quaint and unfathomable oriental and the incarnation of good sense and right reason. On the exotic side, there was much frivolity and inaccuracy, and the specifically Chinese might easily vanish in the vaguely oriental or pseudo-oriental. Among the oriental tales popular in the fiction of the period, those labeled Chinese hardly differ from those labeled at haphazard Egyptian, Georgian, Siamese, Turkish, Arabian, Persian, Numidian, African, Ethiopian, Algerian, Indian, Tartar, Mongolian, Tonkinese, Japanese, or Javanese. But on the other hand, the Chinaman’s traditional common sense qualified him for an important place in the history of the popular literary type which we may call the oriental letter. This is the familiar device of bringing an outside observer into western society so that he may look with a critical eye on the absurdities of our civilization. There are many examples—the most famous Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* (1721), the most interesting for our discussion Goldsmith’s *Chinese Letters* (1760-61), called *The Citizen of the World* when published in book form. Montesquieu had been skeptical and relativistic; truth in Persia is error in France and *vice versa*. Who can say that one or the other is absolutely right or wrong? It is as naïve to expect absolute truth of an oriental sage as of anyone else. Goldsmith’s plan is different. He uses his Chinaman to illustrate the basic principle that common sense is common sense in any country. Racial and national differences, oddities of costume and custom, are nullified by the uniformity of right reason. Thus Goldsmith is opposed to *chinoiserie* and constantly satirizes it. His Chinese
The Early European View of Old China 17

visitor says contemptuously, "The English have filled their houses with our furniture, their public gardens with our fireworks, and their very ponds with our fish." The Chinese mode is a trivial affair of firecrackers and goldfish. On the other hand, Goldsmith remarks, "If the Chinese have contributed to vitiate our taste, I'll try how far they can help to improve our understanding." In one delightful sketch Goldsmith describes how shocked the English are at finding that their Chinese visitor isn't Chinese enough to come up to their standards. He doesn't use chopsticks, he doesn't admire the fashionable lady's cabinet with its models of "pagods" and other bric-à-brac, and he even talks in plain language, without using the flowery and figurative style which is supposed to be compulsory for orientals. The English are disappointed when he explains calmly, "The unaffected of every country nearly resemble each other, and a page of our Confucius and of your Tillotson have scarce any material difference." Thus Goldsmith in this neglected little masterpiece draws a sharp line between the rational and irrational enthusiasms for China.

On both levels, however, the European cult of China counted for much. Its contribution to the decorative arts and to the whole aesthetic life of the period was important; its political and ethical content had enough relation to the facts to give it weight. The vision of Chinese wisdom was oversimplified, but not completely divorced from reality. Since the late eighteenth century the picture has changed; Europe has judged China in terms of imperialism, commerce, and industry, as a sphere of influence, as a potential market for opium, oil, sewing machines, automobiles. China is now diagnosed and patronized, not idealized. The later error may be the greater. Arnold Toynbee, in his monumental Study of History, points out that eighteenth century Europe was bet-
Public Lectures

The eighteenth-century view of universal history included the Far Eastern field, and to use Toynbee's words, "the materials which had been communicated to Western scholars by the magnificent researches and publications of the Jesuit missionaries in China (1675-1775) have not been appreciably increased or improved from that day to this." Gibbon and Voltaire were more fully conscious of this material than the great historians of the nineteenth century. Yet even now our thoughts and feelings about China are largely colored by infiltration from the earlier period. Vachel Lindsay not long ago rendered the romantic beauty of the Chinese art tradition as seen by the West in his *Chinese Nightingale*, and less successfully in *Shantung, or the Empire of China is Crumbling Down* tried to recover the old feeling for the primordial and enduring kingdom. On the philosophical side, modern reports of the Chinese view of life show the same preference for the Confucian way, and dwell on the affinity of this strain of thought and the ethos of the West. Thus Lowes Dickinson tells us that the Chinese attitude is much closer to modern than to mediaeval Europe, and far closer to Europe than to India. Like the Jesuits of the seventeenth century he pronounces ancestor-worship to be commemorative, not idolatrous, and concludes that "Confucianism, with its rationalism, its skepticism, and its stress on conduct, may easily be translated into terms of western positivism." Last summer *Life* had an article on Gopher Prairie, the scene of Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, in reality the town of Sauk Center, Minnesota. One of the citizens interviewed was a farmer named Hooper, who is quoted by *Life* as saying, "I believe in the consumers' cooperatives and in social Christianity." And then as an afterthought he added, "Confucius is okay too."

Alan Dugald McKillop
A brief list of modern references:


