

CHINESE LITERATURE

September-October

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Lo Pin-chi—Father and Daughter

Wang Hsi-yen—Li-ming Goes to
Work on the Land

Lu Hsun—The Historical Development of Chinese Fiction

Wu Wei-yun—The Funny-Men
and Story-Tellers of the
Chinese Variety Theatre

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FOUR NEW STORIES

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

LO PIN-CHI

I

In the days before the course of the Shu River was changed, the people of Yu Village and thereabouts had a hard time of it. Even when no drought came to dry up the crops in the mountainous regions, Yu Village never reaped much of a harvest, for floods plagued the land every year. If people were lucky with their wheat harvest, they were likely to lose their soya-beans later in the summer. Fortunately they had a market every three days, and this was the main shopping centre for the area east of Maling Mountain. So most of the villagers depended on the market for a living. Here they could trade in sea-food, salt, pig-fodder and so on. Many of them owned bean noodle mills. Their noodle was well known and found a market in Hsinhailien to the east and Hsueh to the south. Some of the villagers kept a shop, some dealt in livestock and others were traders, taking whatever prawns or croakers the pedlars of other villages had to offer, selling them in the market and paying afterwards. In a word, everybody had his own means of livelihood and crop-raising was a secondary matter.

On market days, the peasants poured along the big roads and small paths which led to Yu Village from all directions. Some started from their homes with their pigs at the first cockcrow. The fish pedlars had passed the night on the way; at daybreak they still had a mile or two to go before they would reach the market. There were people with baskets on poles, others with wheelbarrows, and cloth pedlars on bicycles piled high with cloth at the back. They were certainly skilled cyclists, the way they hailed their acquaintances as they went. "I didn't see you yesterday at the market in Hsia Village," one would say to another. "I sold my two barrow-loads of fish in no time." There were also pedlars with rubber-tyred barrows. As soon as they reached the market they opened up their boxes and hung coloured ribbons from the framework built on the barrow. But whether they were pink or green,

the ribbons were all faded like the paint in old temples. There were also faded towels, embroidered pillow-cases, scarlet quilt-covers and so forth. At the front was hung an advertisement for 'Two Sisters' Brand hair oil. It was really a fetching arrangement. And in the glass cases on the cart were powder, rouge, hair-nets and pins, buttons, silk thread, mirrors with a yellow crescent moon on the glass, painted combs and what not. . . .

Now let us turn to Hsiang-chieh who had a regular stall at the market which sold bowlfuls of hot beancurd beneath the old locust tree. She came originally from Kuan Village, but she had been married to a man of Yu Village when she was seventeen. In the second year of marriage she bore her husband a son — now a small boy of seven. Her husband died within three years. Her means of support were three *mou* of land she received in the land reform and the beancurd-making outfit her husband had left her which included a grindstone, a donkey, thirty-six black porcelain bowls and three tables with benches under the old locust tree. All she had to buy was beans. The legs of the benches and tables were set in the earth, just logs with boards nailed across them.

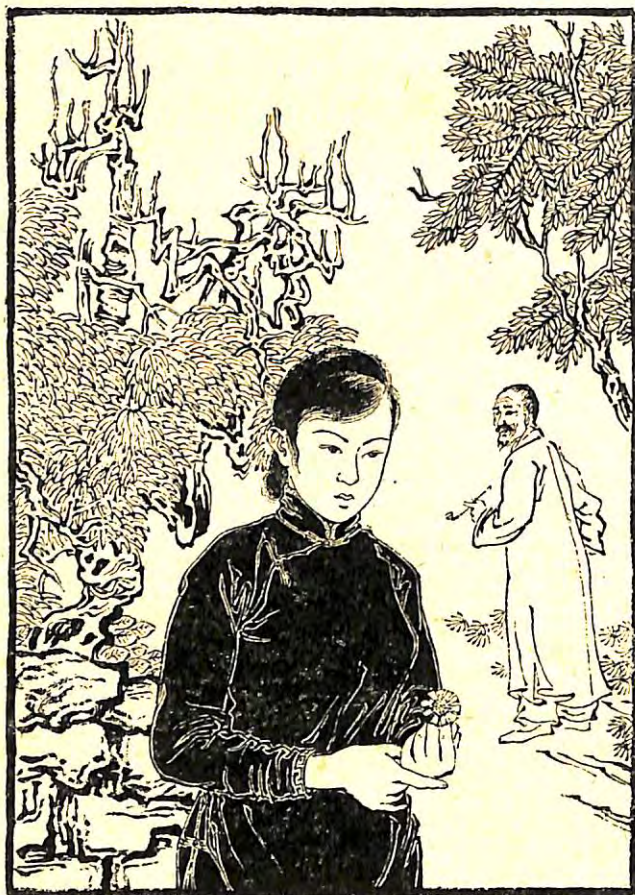
Next to Hsiang-chieh's stall at the market there would always be an old man selling a few vegetables. As soon as his business was done he would gather up his scales and baskets and come over to Hsiang-chieh's booth. Never absent from his hands were his pipe and his black cotton tobacco pouch adorned with a jade pendant. He came to help, he said, but his tongue was busier than his hands. When he saw a bowl emptied, he called, "The customer is paying, Little Stone." If anybody asked for more seasoning he called again, "Pass the jar, Little Stone." Occasionally he might pass the bowls himself, that is to say, holding his pipe in one hand he took the bowl of beancurd from Hsiang-chieh with the other and gave it to Little Stone without leaving his seat. "Mind," he would say, "don't drop it." This was Hsiang-chieh's father, Old Man Hsing from Kuan Village. Sitting there in his long gown, he looked more like a tutor from the village school than a vegetable-grower. What pleased him most was to hear people praise his grandson. If somebody from another village remarked, "What a clever boy! How old is he?" He would reply, "Seven. He's my grandson," fingering his beard and looking very contented. But if anyone remarked that Little Stone's eyes were as beautiful as his mother's, the old man used to turn away and begin a conversation with someone else as though he had not heard. "Has your soldier written home?" he would say. "Is he still serving in the fifth regiment?" In short, he did not like his young widowed daughter to be praised.

Hsiang-chieh was a noticeable person in Yu Village. Though her delicate eyebrows, straight nose and full lips were not in themselves anything out of the ordinary, they set off her dark eyes in such a way

as to give the whole face a very pleasing look. But in the depths of the bright eyes, there was a cool shadow of indifference. Looking directly into them, you found them very distant. Clearly this was not her natural character but something she had developed after long years of widowhood. Usually she dressed in black trousers and a high-collared, tight-sleeved tunic, also black. This way of dressing among the young women of southern Shantung had been the fashion in Peking at the time the old republic was set up about forty years ago. The collar was so high that it hid half of her ears. She wore her hair in a smooth chignon with a lock at one temple brushed softly behind her ear. Her trouser legs, sleeves, and collar were all slightly fringed. She tied her hair and trouser legs with black ribbons and on market days a black apron was added. All this black heightened the effect of her fair skin, and gave her an ethereal look.

She did a brisk trade. Everyone in the market who had any spare money liked to drink a bowl of hot beancurd at her open-air stall in the same way as city folk like to drink coffee or milk in cafes on Sundays. Old men would often make a special trip to the market with their small grandsons for the beancurd, which was so hot that beads of sweat stood on their noses when they were drinking it. The seasoning was red peppers fried in sesame oil, golden and appetizing, and warming to the tongue. As customers left the stalls they used to smack their lips and say, "Good peppers, very hot!" Hsiang-chieh felt very happy, as she watched the departing figures. A small smile would appear on her face as though to say, "Why must you add so much pepper-oil?" Some elderly long-standing customers who liked nothing but a little more salt in their beancurd praised neither the peppers nor Little Stone but Hsiang-chieh instead. "Ten more years, and you'll have seen it through. Your son'll be able to support you then," and "She really is capable," they would say. To these words of encouragement in the feudal tradition which seemed to drug her and bury her youth, she showed no reaction, not even as much as when her peppers were praised, though one could see in her eyes a repressed feeling of pride and contentment. Of course there were also impudent young strangers among her customers who loitered around with empty bags after they had sold their grain, having caught sight of Hsiang-chieh in her black suit as they passed by the big locust tree. They used to whisper to each other and then squeeze into a vacant seat. Staring at Hsiang-chieh's beautiful eyes, they loudly called for beancurd but did not even notice when Little Stone handed them the bowls. Then they would ask about her in lowered tones, yet loud enough for her to hear. When they found the local customers eyeing them angrily they fell into a guilty silence, and finally left in resentment. At times like these Hsiang-chieh would adopt a serious air and keep her eyes averted. It was clear that she held these people in

contempt. In short, she was apparently the ideal woman of feudalism, and was often held up as a model to those women who thought to marry a man of their own choice. These women, mostly active members of the women's association, emerged after liberation with the collapse of the landlord class. They had made a deep impression upon Hsiang-chieh, who in those days often went to their discussion meetings behind her father's back and listened to reports on the part women were playing in production, the struggle for equality between men and women and free choice in marriage. Although she sat silent in the meetings, staring hard, her black eyes sparkled and she laughed so readily that Hsiang-chieh the young girl was brought to life again. It was during these days that Old Man Hsing discovered a tiny yellow flower in her chignon. It did not please him and he wanted to say something but he hesitated to speak. As he was leaving that night he could restrain himself no longer. "Take that bit o' grass out of your hair. Throw it away!" he said, turning back at the door. "Look at yourself! Who is it meant for? I really



don't like to have to raise such a question." Hsiang-chieh seemed suddenly to wither. She stood with downcast eyes, silently fingering the blossom which she had taken from her hair.... The old man left, then returned before he reached the gate.

"What good can it possibly do you to pick up ideas from those women of the young women's corps. They have no sense of reserve in front of men at all. Isn't it shameful?" he added in a kinder tone as if feeling sorry for having scolded her and to show that he was only concerned for her good.

The yellow flower turned quicker and quicker. A tear rolled

down her cheek and dropped onto her finger. . . . Old Man Hsing left feeling satisfied.

After that incident Hsiang-chieh's face resumed its mask of indifference and looked as if she had lost her zest for life. She knew that if she acted according to her own wishes with the support of the women's association, she would be sure to lose the approval of her father and the respect of those around her. If her father should break with her, how was she going to live? A woman was like a vine, she thought, and a vine couldn't live without the support of a tree. If she was to lose the respect people had for her she couldn't stand the slightest breeze. There was Little Stone to be thought of, too. "It would all straighten out when he was grown up. But what a long time it would be?" she often sighed and mused in the small hours of the night.

II

Old Man Hsing, though thin as a ginseng root and very frail in appearance, was strong for his sixty-seven years. He seldom fell ill or needed medicine. His mouth was hidden behind grey whiskers. His eyes were sharp and yet unhappy. He would gaze moodily into the distance and his face would become as expressionless as stone. He did not work as a peasant all the year round. In his youth, he sold rope and persimmons in autumn, cherries in spring, and fruits and other sacrifices for the Weaving Maid in the seventh lunar month. All the money he earned he spent on his mouth. He liked to smoke fine tobacco from southern Shantung, drink green tea and sugar his water-melons. He was very cowardly, too, and was known to have done only one adventurous thing in his life. That was when he joined a group of black-market pedlars in a salt-smuggling expedition. It was a pitch-dark night of the kind that smugglers liked — so dark that you couldn't make out who it was, even though they stood in front of you. When they passed through the customs barrier they had to lie down on the ground and listen to the footsteps of the patrols as they passed. Unfortunately they lost their way. As they were trying to get their bearings they suddenly heard a shot. All the smugglers squatted down as if trained to it except Old Man Hsing who promptly took to his heels. But it was only a shot fired into the air by some peasant who had taken them to be people stealing their maize. After that he was the laughing-stock of the village, and even to this day was regarded with contempt by the younger generation. Besides, he was clumsy with the plough and could not even spread manure properly. The household and farm chores were all done by his wife, Mama Hsing.

Mama Hsing was over sixty. According to herself, she was already buried up to the neck. But she was strong for her age. Although her hair was grey, she had the ruddy complexion of one who works in the open air all the year round. Her jacket was patched at the shoulders and the sleeves were always rolled up to the elbow as if she had just finished salting vegetables and was now going to cut grass. She was respected by everybody in the village. When they received two *mou* of land and a well in the land reform Mama Hsing took to growing vegetables. She grew cabbages, spring onions, cucumbers, egg-plants and whatever was in season. For the climbers she built supports of hemp stalks and for the delicate plants she put up windbreaks on the north. And squatting beside her, handing her hemp or barley stalks was Old Man Hsing. He was only her assistant. When the plants needed water, Mama Hsing would push the waterwheel around while Old Man Hsing made little channels with a shovel for the water to flow through the garden. Sometimes he wasted a lot of water by not making the channels properly. "Why don't you put your tobacco pouch away for a bit," Mama Hsing would say at such times. "Nobody's going to pinch it from you." Sometimes she would add, "What you're going to do when I'm gone, I don't know!"

"What ever makes you talk like that? How can you go before me?" Old Man Hsing retorted.

"Who knows? If it should happen that way how are you going to get on? I'm really worried for you."

"It can't happen that way," he said with a reproachful look. "Enough of such nonsense! You frighten me when you talk like that."

Mama Hsing laughed happily. She looked on him as an old baby, and liked to tease him. There were only themselves and their one daughter. They had no relatives at all in Kuan Village.

Kuan Village was only two *li* from Yu Village and people in one village could hear the cocks crowing and the dogs barking in the other. So Old Man Hsing often visited Hsiang-chieh. He used to come, pipe in hand, on the evenings before market day when Hsiang-chieh was making beancurd. When there were weddings in Kuan Village, and Mama Hsing was given wedding cakes, he wrapped them in a kerchief and thrusting them into the front of his gown to keep them warm took them to his little grandson. They lived so near to each other that on moonlit summer nights Old Man Hsing would come over after dinner to drink tea at his daughter's and chat with the uncle of Hsiang-chieh's late husband and go back when it was time for bed.

Hsiang-chieh's uncle was a fish trader who went under the nickname of Rat. With his narrow face and close-set eyes he really looked like one. He respected Old Man Hsing, and in return, Old Man Hsing respected him. The friendship between them was treasured by Old Man Hsing,

for it was of a type he could not get in Kuan Village. Hsiang-chieh's third guest was eighty-one-year-old Liu Tse-hsing, formerly a livestock dealer and smuggler of salt and opium. He was a big fellow with a head as round as a wine-pot. It was said that all the money he had earned was long since squandered on women in other villages, for he had come back empty-handed. He now sold wine and cooked pork at the market. He often brought along a handful of tea so that Hsiang-chieh could make tea for them. On the days when she made beancurd the three friends would drink a big bowl of hot bean milk. On those days the room was always steamy. A big bag was hung above the stove from which bean milk dripped down into a pot. Old Man Hsing squatted in front of the stove helping to add fuel. As a matter of fact, only his lips were working, asking, "Is the milk all right?" and "Is it time to put the salt in?" or ordering Little Stone to bring him some more maize stalks. He looked busy enough but all the time he was actually waiting for his daughter to say that the bean milk was ready. Then Little Stone would fill the bowls and the three old men would sit around a big ladle by the side of the stone-mill. Then excitement sparkled in Old Man Hsing's cold eyes. This was his happiest and most comfortable time, as if it were his well-earned rest after some very hard work.

As they began to drink and smoke, they would chat about the latest events in the village market. Someone had bought some eggs for his daughter-in-law after the birth of her baby, one said, but the first one he opened was rotten, in the second the yolk couldn't be distinguished from the white, and what do you think the third was like? There was a chicken inside! "Who did he buy them from? Couldn't he get his money back on the next market day?" asked Old Man Hsing.

"But you don't know which village he came from," remarked Hsiang-chieh's uncle, "and I don't suppose he'll have the nerve to come again."

The eighty-one-year-old livestock dealer held a different view. "You can't blame the seller. The buyer should know better. Why must he buy from this pedlar when there are so many others?"

"He must have been after the cheapest price," observed Hsiang-chieh on the side.

"That's right! So how can he blame others?" the livestock dealer reaffirmed. Everybody thought this a wise comment, so they shifted their topic to episodes of people losing large profits by being covetous of petty advantages. Hsiang-chieh's uncle told them that it was easier to trade in Yu Village than in Hsia Village, because the people in Hsia Village were cunning and always took advantage of strangers. Take the man who came there to sell dried shrimps. As soon as he put down his baskets, he was surrounded by a crowd of women and children. One wanted half a catty, another eight ounces. Then they began their game. The shrimps were handed out, and money was handed back. Then the

person who handed him the money began demanding his shrimps. It was then discovered that he had given the shrimps to a woman and received the money from a man!

"Yes, it's very hard to deal with the people of Hsia Village," said Old Man Hsing. "Every time I sold cherries there I knew I'd be bound to lose a few catties no matter how hard I watched. They are dishonest. I think they should be educated, now we've got liberation."

But the livestock dealer again held a different view. "Oh, about the shrimp seller that was his own fault. How can you blame others if you don't charge before giving out the shrimps. You have to be sharp. If money can be earned so easily everyone would go peddling." Once more he was considered right.

Hsiang-chieh took a delight in all this chit-chat but nothing interested her more than their comments on the big annual fair at Chichi Mountain. Whenever the conversation turned to the fair she would remember the actor who played the role of the young lover in *Picking up the Bracelet*. How he had flirted with Sun Yu-chiao with his eyes! Such clever eyes! And how he had twiddled the handle of his fan with his two fingers! The happy times of her girlhood which were gone for ever came back to her and she sighed happily.

The three cronies also gossiped about the village officials and exchanged news of the villagers who were in the army. Now they took a great deal of interest in the recent quarrel between the leader of the peasants' association and his wife.

"Why, no wonder! He was out at meetings till midnight, wasn't he? And she had to get up to answer the door every night. Well, anyone would get fed up with that," commented Hsiang-chieh. But Liu Tse-hsing the eighty-one-year-old former livestock dealer said, "He led the movement of raising the status of women. That's a queer business! Now he can't control his own wife any more. She'd never have dared to quarrel with him before the liberation."

"She certainly wouldn't?" agreed Old Man Hsing. "Her husband would have slapped her across the face before she could answer back." Hsiang-chieh had to admit that all this was true and that there was nothing more to be said.

The three old men, hardly noticing they had drunk the bean milk, smoked and sighed comfortably and contentedly. Any evening when one of them failed to appear, the others would be in low spirits as if something dear to life was missing. They would begin to fuss, and sent Little Stone to look for him. If he happened to be the livestock dealer, Hsiang-chieh would be concerned for his health. She pitied him for having to fetch his own water and carry his own earth for repairing his house. He had seen luxury before. He was just not one to complain, that's all. If it were her husband's uncle she would worry whether he had quarrelled with

his daughter-in-law. She felt sorry for the old man and also for the daughter-in-law who was living alone. Her husband had been conscripted by the Kuomintang, and had been away for six years! During the Huaihai battle they hoped that he would be captured and sent home by the People's Liberation Army. But they had not heard a word of him. Anyway, when there were only two old men, they swallowed the bean milk even more noisily, especially when it was Old Man Hsing's turn for the ladle.

Generally speaking, they were contented. Happiness and the relaxation of peaceful times showed on their faces. War was very far from this area. With the elimination of the landlords, the heavy taxes which had crushed the peasants were done away with for good. Besides, they had received land and this gave them a source of livelihood. So what cause could they have for discontent? What could they complain about? All this showed itself in their cheerful faces and their idle gossips. Of course, we are talking here of how things stood in 1949 before the Shu River changed its course.

III

That spring, at the time of the busy season in the fields, Hsiang-chieh set out one day for the Hsia Village fair ten *li* away. As she put the soya-beans to soak for grinding that morning, she remembered that it would soon be the time for the farmers getting beans in for seed. They had been in short supply at the market lately, and prices would be bound to rise, so she must buy them early. This was in the days before the government had brought in the policy of planned purchase and distribution. Every district had its joint supply and marketing co-op, but this was not enough to keep the food market stable. As a sharp business woman, Hsiang-chieh naturally had foresight. When she went, she left Little Stone in charge of the house and told him if he wanted to go out and collect herbs for the pigs, he should lock the door and leave the key under the piece of rock by the pig pen.

Hsiang-chieh rarely went far from home except to visit her parents during the New Year and on other festivals. When she wanted to buy beans from Hsia Village she usually asked friends to get them for her, that is, if they were not too busy in their fields. This time, she decided to go herself, because she found that those who usually went to the market had already gone, and she feared that prices might rise if she left it any longer.

As she had left in a hurry, she wore the same black cotton jacket and trousers she usually wore at home, with a padded suit underneath. Her trousers were neatly tied at the ankles with two black ribbons. The

only difference was that she wore a pair of black cotton shoes embroidered with red peonies. She carried a sack twisted around her hand and her finger still wore the thimble that she had forgotten to slip off. Was it because she hadn't been anywhere for so long, or was it the south wind bringing the feel of spring and the songs of the lark? Hsiang-chieh had felt flustered when she started out, but as she went along she was struck by the freshness of the air and the beauty of the open spaces outside the village. . . . Suddenly she was reminded of her girlhood when, basket on arm, she had gone to collect wild vegetables. She was filled with a sense of exhilaration, as though it was a holiday.

As she walked along she saw a man at the cross-roads ahead turn in on the road for the Hsia market. From the back, he was tall and broad-shouldered, and he wore a leather strap around his peasant tunic. A black cap sat on his head and he strode along in the manner of a man sure of his dignity. Indeed, it was by his walk that Hsiang-chieh recognized him immediately as Chang Ta, the captain of her village's militia. His tunic and cap merely confirmed her conjecture. There was no other in an area of eight to ten *li* around who had such a bold stride.

Chang Ta was at one time an agricultural labourer who could crack a whip with a flourish and sing splendidly in the Laiwu dialect. In the past, when he met a young woman, he would redden up and become tongue-tied. Since he had joined the Communist Party during the land reform, he wore a habitually serious expression. Because the class struggle was still acute and complex, with the well-to-do peasants still wavering, he had learnt the value of caution. After the militia under his command had taken part in a battle against the Kuomintang troops and been cited for their good fighting, he adopted a martial air. He developed a long stride and a loud voice. Even though he might be talking to only one or two people, he would shout at them as if he were addressing the whole of the militia. Those who didn't know him used to think he was playing the bureaucrat, but others knew that his eardrums had been damaged by blast during battle, and that though he was not completely deaf, he could not catch anything said in a low voice and accordingly thought of others as being like himself. He commanded a high prestige among the militia. His courage and resourcefulness were known far and wide.

This twenty-six-year-old bachelor attracted the general attention of the marriageable young women of Yu and other villages nearby. Some made no secret of their admiration, even in his presence, and openly tried to court his favour. But he gave them no encouragement. In time, those who had once idolized him came to actively dislike him. "Huh! What's all the fuss about?" some of them said publicly. "I can't see that he's anything out of the ordinary!" And if someone said "Ssh! . . . He might hear you," they would retort, "And what if he does? I want him to!"

Undoubtedly Hsiang-chieh, too, was infected with the general atmosphere of hero-worship. So, when she met him now, face to face, she was secretly overjoyed at this unexpected good luck, and hailed him aloud: "What are you hurrying for? Have you got someone waiting for you at the market?"

Chang Ta stopped and turned. "I've only just finished watering my plot, so I'm a bit late," he said. Then he added, "You look happy today. Are you going there too?"

"Why! Can't I go unless I look happy?"

"But I've never seen you at the Hsia market before."

"You wouldn't have seen me even if I'd been there, there are so many people."

"Wouldn't I? I'd always see you, even from far away, if you were there," he said, looking amiable.

"So your eyes are quite different from other people's?" joked Hsiang-chieh.

"I don't think so," said Chang Ta, walking with her shoulder to shoulder but looking straight ahead in a more guarded manner.

"Then how could you spot me from so far?" Hsiang-chieh gazed at him as though to search his heart.

"Why not? I'm sure I could," he parried.

"Have I a distinguishing mark on my face, then?"

Chang Ta's defence collapsed and he guffawed. "How could you?" he said. Can this be the woman who used to be so conservative and backward? He thought to himself. He would never have dreamed she could be so provoking and so quick with her tongue. His thoughts went back to the time when, as a young girl, she had once been his ideal — of course she had known nothing about it; what a pity it was she made no progress politically. After liberation, the distance between them had lengthened more and more. It seemed he had forgotten the existence of such a girl who had once attracted him so greatly.

"Does Little Stone's granddad come to see you often?" he asked, changing the subject.

"He does," said she, lowering her head, apparently still absorbed with their earlier trend of talk. When she raised her head again, she was more tranquil. "If it wasn't for his granddad living near and able to come over often and give a helping hand, I could hardly manage."

"So you think you're able to live like this because of his support?"

"Who else could I depend on, if not on him?"

"Did you have any land before the Communists came? And who does he owe for the easy life he now lives?"

"That's true of course. . . ."

Perhaps Chang Ta did not hear, or perhaps he did not want her to continue, for he kept on: "Could you run a stall in Yu Village market if

the Eighth Route Army were not stationed nearby? You said you depended on him. Did he ever fetch any water for you, or push the grindstone when you were making beancurd? I would say it was he who's done well out of you."

"To say nothing of other things," he continued. "What about the pigs' dung? How much does he make away with in a year!" He said this in such an indignant tone, and with such an air of conviction, that Hsiang-chieh dared not say anything to the contrary.

"Oh yes," she said naively. He is quite observant, she thought. Even the old man making away with a few barrow-loads of pigs' dung had not escaped him.

Chang Ta's interest in her welfare evoked a sense of gratitude in her. She accepted his words not as a reproof, but as the sincere advice of a friend.

"You mustn't let yourself be influenced by the backward elements all the time. There, am I right or not?"

"How do I know if you haven't said it to me?" she murmured blissfully.

Actually, Chang Ta did not quite catch what she said, but he could see that she was happy, and could sense that he had won her full trust. Such trust and submissiveness put him in the position of a protector. He had never felt this way before any other young woman, so strong and upstanding. If I can teach her some politics, he thought, she might join my mutual-aid team and quickly become an activist among the women. He fixed his eyes at her appreciatively.

"Why do you look at me so?" she said. "Don't you recognize me?"

"You seem to me quite different today," said Chang Ta frankly. "You don't look in the least like you did in Yu Village market. What had made you so happy?"

"Nonsense," said Hsiang-chieh, smiling. "How can I look different? I am still myself."

"But it's true!" said Chang Ta seriously. "You don't look at all like you did when I saw you in Yu Village market."

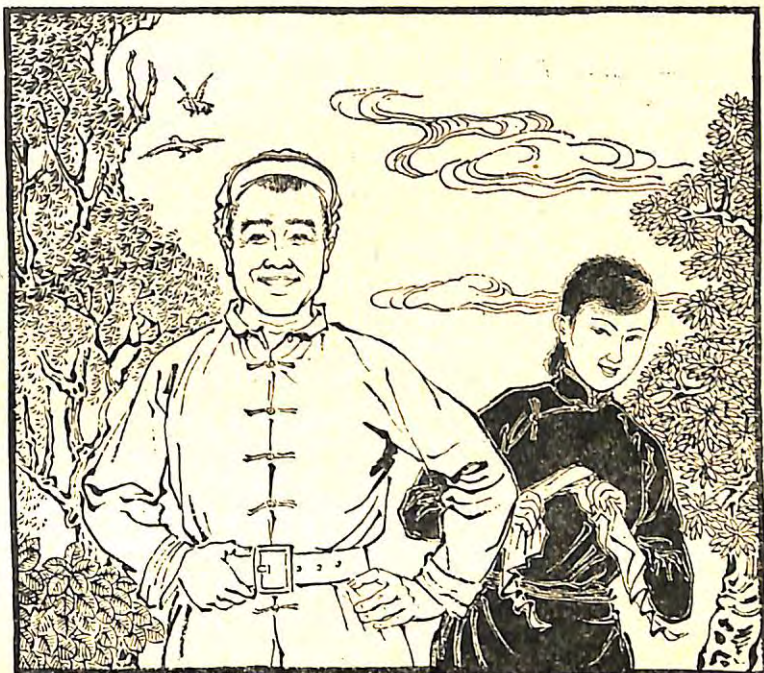
"How do I look, then?"

"You look like —" said Chang Ta ponderingly. "You look like you did when I saw you at the Chichi Mountain fair that year."

"When was that?" pursued Hsiang-chieh, as if something precious hung on their conversation. She looked all attention, her eyes shining as though she was trying to remember. Thereupon, Chang Ta said it was the second year after the Shu River breached its dyke, adding that it was the year he began work as an odd-job man in another village and there was talk of her being married to a man of Yu Village. She had been wearing a red blouse that day, and a pair of silver earrings. She had been standing behind the enclosure of a shop, quite a distance from the stage.

All this he said in a loud voice as if he was addressing the militia. "Could you see what was going on on the stage from that distance?" he asked.

Now there is a saying, "He who always talks is thoughtless, but he who always listens has an object in view." It was applicable



to these two. While Chang Ta took it to be a casual chat, Hsiang-chieh understood it as something quite different. She completely ignored his question as to whether she could see the stage clearly, and turned the conversation to where he was that day.

"Why didn't I see you?" she asked curiously.

"Who was worthy of your attention in those days?" Chang Ta burst out laughing. "Nobody! So why should you have seen me?"

"You make me sound like some sort of a goddess!"

"Well, if you'll have it that way," said Chang Ta, looking at her and laughing.

"But I think you're the only one who thinks that way."

"What did you say?"

"I said — well, nothing!" At this juncture, Hsiang-chieh seemed to rise from a state of drunkenness. "Good heavens!" she exclaimed, stopping short and looking around. "Where are we? Isn't this Wang Family Graveyard we're coming to?"

Chang Ta also halted, turning his head in all directions with arms akimbo, like a commander inspecting the position. "How could we've come here in broad daylight?" he cried aloud.

They had missed their turning. Hsia Village was to the north-east, but they had headed due east.

"Let's go back," said Chang Ta with a wave of his hand, pausing to give a final glance around as if to verify the fact that they really had got to the south side of Hsia Village.

"What sort of leader are you?" Hsiang-chieh broke into a ringing laugh.

"How did it happen!" Chang Ta smiled. "We must have been woolly-brained to have come to these graveyard woods."

Suddenly, for the first time, the two of them felt completely happy and contented. Laughing and out-of-breath, Hsiang-chieh kept teasing him. "What sort of leader are you? Someone must have bewitched you," she complained, as if she herself had kept her wits about her. In fact, Chang Ta had been following her. But he took it all in good part and laughed with her. Hsiang-chieh laughed until the tears came to her eyes. "You looked so baffled standing there with your arms akimbo!" she gasped. "What were you looking for? Ghosts?"

At each new gibe, Chang Ta rocked with laughter. They were like a couple of drunkards, Chang Ta rolling along with an unsteady gait. As soon as they got on to the main road and sighted Hsia Village, they saw people coming towards them from the direction of the market, wine bottles in hand. They quietened down, especially Hsiang-chieh, who composed herself and adjusted her chignon for fear of betraying any sign of impropriety. Chang Ta sensed she had recovered the detached look which she wore in the Yu Village market. But when her eyes met Chang Ta's, a surreptitious joy was still discernible in their depths.

"Now you go ahead!" she said. "And wait for me by the well at the village entrance when you return."

How had they reversed roles? When did she acquire the confidence to issue orders to the militia captain? Without knowing why he accepted them, Chang Ta strode off obediently. And having completed his assignment for the mutual-aid group, he brought with him the yoke, the halters and harnesses and waited for her by the well at the village entrance.

They were not on their own on their way back from the market. There were altogether five people, including Hsiang-chieh's uncle, well known as a trader in the Yu Village market. He had disposed of some remaining bloaters in the Hsia Village market and was now walking along in a leisurely fashion with the two empty baskets slung onto a pole on his shoulder. There was also an old woman who peddled hair-nets and embroidered shoe uppers in the Yu Village market, grumbling all the way for having brought an insufficient quantity of red silk thread, saying that she could easily have sold another three or four ounces! The five fell naturally into two groups as soon as they were out of Hsia Village, Hsiang-chieh and the old woman dropping to the rear. The old woman was carrying a small white cloth bundle, while Hsiang-chieh walked empty-handed. The bagful of beans she had bought had been

taken home earlier by a neighbour who had come from Yu Village with a wheelbarrow. Although Hsiang-chieh was walking slowly, her face was as flushed as if she had been sitting in front of a fire. This aroused the curiosity of the old woman pedlar, who kept looking at her every now and then.

"Do you feel all right? You had a drop to drink in the market, didn't you?" she asked.

"No." Hsiang-chieh instinctively put her hand up to her cheek. "I put on too many clothes this morning. It's hot!"

She walked on with her head down. It was clear she had something on her mind. The people in front were drawing farther away. She had started out at a brisk pace and had only slowed down when the old woman said, "We're going too fast, it's no use trying to keep up with the men." It was late in the afternoon when she reached home.

Hsiang-chieh was very restless that evening. Her ears pricked at the slightest sound—a footfall outside the compound, the noises of the passers-by, a cock crowing and the pigs squealing. At one moment she would run into the courtyard as though to take a look at the pigsty, standing there as if listening for something. The next moment she would grab a pole and run to fetch water, though the jar was more than half full. She felt as though Chang Ta was always about her, that she would run into him at any time and any place. She was tense, and felt that she must see Chang Ta, to confide to him an important secret which, however, did not exist. She only knew that she wanted to meet him again. Not until darkness fell did she come to her senses. She was surprised at herself. How could I be so unsettled? she thought to herself. Was I haunted by a ghost from the Wang Family Graveyard? Had one of them followed me home? With this reflection she began to cool down. But she did not take off her embroidered shoes and continued to sit on the *kang* listlessly.

There was a ring from the doorbell. It was her father paying her his usual visit. His arrival reminded Hsiang-chieh that it was time to harness the donkey for the grinding. For the first time she felt irked by the thought of Old Man Hsing. Why should he come when it was so late? she thought. He always came as soon as it was dark, never giving people a moment of peace.

"What? No one at home?" she heard her father call from the courtyard. Usually it was her custom to hail him from behind the paper-framed windows with "Is that you, Dad?" as soon as she heard the ring at the door and the sound of his tread. This was something the old man liked, for it made him feel that she was there waiting for him. But this time it was different. He had shut the door in the courtyard and stood there for quite a while listening for the sound of his daughter's voice or the stir of the donkey hauling the grindstone. He thought she was

not at home. Then he heard her say, "I'm in the house, come in," in a cold tone, quite unlike her usual one. Perhaps she was tired, he thought, for he had been told by her uncle whom he met as he came into the village that she had been to the market. Or perhaps she was cheated over the beans? When he entered the room, Hsiang-chieh was changing her shoes. After asking a chain of questions: "How many beans did you buy? Was there a good supply? What was the price? Has Little Stone gone to his evening class? Did he collect some pig-fodder today?" He ensconced himself as usual on the wooden block outside the track of the grindstone.

As Hsiang-chieh was harnessing the donkey, the old livestock dealer Liu Tse-hsing came in, stool in hand.

"Now, try this," he offered Old Man Hsing his tobacco pouch.

"Mine's not so bad!"

"Ah, you don't buy the kind of leaves I'm smoking!"

In fact, Liu Tse-hsing knew very well that they both bought their tobacco from the same place, but he still thought his was better. And Old Man Hsing also knew the tobaccos were the same, yet he too thought that Liu's tasted milder. It was altogether inexplicable.

Before long, Hsiang-chieh's uncle, Liu Ssu, turned up with his grandson. He knew the Yu Village market day fell on the morrow, so he could look forward to a bowlful or two of bean milk that evening. He was very proud of his twelve-year-old grandson, saying that his legs were now as round as rafters and inviting Old Man Hsing to feel them. "Just feel his bottom, he's a real fatty! And look at his legs, you know all about it when he kicks you!" Then he asked, "Have you finished up your planting yet?"

"Not yet," replied Old Man Hsing. "I've only got a couple of rows of leek in so far, and I'm paying for them with my legs, already!" Then he added, "Unless you count the couple of rows of tomatoes. . . ."

"What do you want tomatoes for? You like to eat 'em?" asked Liu Ssu, the pedlar. "Who'll you sell 'em to? To my mind, you'd do better to plant more cabbage, they'll fetch you more money."

"Now you talk like that because you're outside of the trade," said Liu Tse-hsing.

Old Man Hsing rapped his pipe on the floor and said, "Do y'know what price they fetched when they were first put on the market last year?" he asked. "I'd planted two rows. When I brought them to market, I cut the price down to 5 *fen* per catty. The district work-team in West Swamp scrambled to buy 'em. I saw I'd been a fool. So I raised the price to 6.5. And I sold the last three or four lots for 8 a catty. Nothing much to speak of in the way of taste, just a sour bagful o' seeds. Not the sort of things a land worker cares for!"

"How much do you expect to make off your land if you depend on the work-team as your sole customers?" asked Liu Ssu.

"There's the people from the district health station, aren't there? And the county inspection team, too; they'll be down during the wheat harvest, won't they? Well, they'll all buy. It's only us who won't!"

"Won't huh?" said the eighty-one-year-old ex-horse-dealer. "It's because we don't know how to prepare 'em, that's why! If you don't know how to go about 'em, not even a sea-slug'll taste good."

"Now the right way to eat tomatoes is with sugar," he continued. "You can't do without sugar. Half a catty of sugar to one catty of tomatoes, and the sour taste's drowned. Well, they eat like water-melon then, sweet and crisp, nothing could be nicer!"

"All right," said Liu Ssu. "When the tomatoes are ready, let's get half a catty of sugar and try 'em out. We'll have a go, too. Hey, what d'you say?" The last sentence was addressed to his grandson whom he dandled high in the air.

"You've got to have the top-grade sugar of the Hsia Village co-op, too," remarked Liu Tse-hsing. "That stuff that hawker Hsiao Wu touts around at the market won't do. What sort of sugar is that anyway, half of it mixed with fried flour. A catty of the co-op's sugar goes twice as far."

"Things are not too good nowadays for the small traders," said Liu Ssu, expanding on the topic. "You know, the co-op came along with half a cartful of dried shrimps in the Hsia Village market today and the price dropped by 2 *fen* a catty."

"I'm afraid when the next fish market comes around," he continued, "the co-op'll have a go at that, too. It'll be like the way they brought their cloth to the market, a couple of baskets on each bicycle. It doesn't give others much of a chance!"

"How many people are there in the co-op?" said Liu Tse-hsing. "Why don't they go to the smaller markets farther away? Still, they can't bring a thousand and one things to the market. If they trade in bloaters, then you can go in for carp. If they sell plates, you can sell pots. There's plenty o' leeway still. Would a man let his way be barred by a bit of a wall?"

All such conversations had constituted an indispensable part of the mental life of Hsiang-chieh, and she used to derive great pleasure from them. It seemed to her that her life was enriched when she listened to these arguments and discussions. But today they sounded quite remote and boring. Moreover, she now drew quite different conclusions from their talk, such as, "If it were not for the co-op, how could we buy cloth, dried shrimps and salted fish so cheaply!" Of course, she kept these thoughts to herself. Then she remembered how Chang Ta had spoken of Old Man Hsing on the road. "Yes," she thought. "These old 'uns are real stick-in-the-muds, fussing all the time about prices falling for this

or that article, and the co-op coming in for a share, as though times are getting worse instead of better. And look at the trousers he used to wear in the winter — rotten old threadbare things." She meant Liu Ssu. In a word, thoughts that never would have entered her head in the past now came walking boldly in. At this juncture, she heard a stentorian voice in the courtyard: "Grinding your beans, eh?" The ladle all but dropped from her hand. Her heart leapt to her mouth, her face reddened, her mouth seemed minus the tongue. "He's come, he's come. . . ."

"Who's that?" she heard Old Man Hsing ask suspiciously. The visitor walked noisily from the courtyard towards the house.

"Good evening all!" said Chang Ta loudly, entering the house. "Oh! There's quite a lot of you."

"Good evening to you," said the old men. There followed the creaking of stools being pushed back as some of them stood up to offer him a seat. Although Old Man Hsing was not on very intimate terms with him, he knew he was the militia captain of the village and a respectable village cadre, and a tinge of respect was discernible in his voice as he said, "You don't come here often. So you're not engaged tonight. No meeting, eh?"

"Had a meeting already?" said Chang Ta, catching the wrong sense like those who are hard of hearing are apt to do. "We meet every day. We depend on meetings to solve our problems." He looked around with a confident air, yet without any tinge of self-importance. Then he added, "Well, how are things with you, eh? I suppose you've finished up all your planting by now?" And, turning to Liu Ssu, "So this is your little grandson from South Swamp, eh?" And to Liu Tse-hsing, "And how are you getting along? All right, I suppose? What were you planting in that plot of yours behind the house this morning, was it millet?"

He noticed Hsiang-chieh smiling at him, from the shady side of the room, a familiar, affectionate smile as distinguished from the bold and tender one she had given him on the way to the market. But he did not speak to her. He settled down on the stool, looking happy and excited, quite unlike his usual stern self.

"The district committee's called upon us to wipe out the locusts," he said. "It's an urgent job. Tomorrow we'll form teams and go down to the marsh. The young 'uns in South Swamp have got their wings. If we don't get a move on, they'll take off after the rain." He wound up by saying that Ping-tse's mother should have come to tell this house of the call, but since she was off visiting relations, he had taken on the job of group leader for the households on the east of the village.

"I'm going to say something you won't like," said the ex-horse-dealer. "So don't get angry, because we're old friends." Then he began formally, "Now the government has started taking a hand in trade and wants to

tell us what to do in the way of field work. I've never heard before of field work needing to be watched, nor did I ever hear that the land used to be mismanaged either. But people grew enough grain to live on."

"Did you ever hear the older generation say that on the day when the grain was in ear, the emperor would take his imperial plough to work his plot of one and a third *mou*? That was a sort of leadership too!" Liu Ssu argued.

"As I see it," said Old Man Hsing, pulling at his pipe and sighing, "in the past when we didn't catch them, there seemed less locusts. Last year when we did, they came in swarms. Even spiders appeared in the wheat fields. Did the older generation ever hear of that before?"

"That's because we didn't try to catch them in the past," Hsiang-chieh found herself arguing against her father, smiling as she did so, so as to mitigate the feeling of antagonism against him. "The insects were there, but who would have bothered about 'em?"

Old Man Hsing was astonished to hear Hsiang-chieh talk in this vein, for she had always been on his side in the past and had said that insects grew of themselves and could never be wiped out. How was it that she had changed so suddenly this evening, taking the side of the village cadre, currying the favour of an outsider against himself?

"That's true!" Chang Ta rose to his feet, looking at once grave and amiable, his thumbs stuck into his belt like a soldier. "We can't stick to our old ideas about raising crops. If we're to get bigger outputs, we've got to fight against natural calamities." Then he added, as if talking to himself, "If we want to go the socialist way, we must listen to what the Party says." One could easily see that he was accustomed to organizing the militia, who were required to observe discipline, and not used to doing propaganda among the peasants. "The task assigned by the Party has got to be fulfilled, because the Party works for the good of the people," he said emphatically.

"If the Party's concerned about the peasants, why doesn't it do something about the Shu River?" said Liu Tse-hsing. "Every year, the beans are swept off by flood. And every family has to go without their bean sauce! That's an important question. Why don't you cadres take it up?"

"You don't have to worry about that!" said Chang Ta in a decisive manner, in face of this back-handed challenge. Again Hsiang-chieh backed him up.

"That's not a simple thing like building a wall or sinking a well," said she. "I should say it would be quite a job if we only have to build embankments along both sides of the river."

Now Chang Ta felt she was definitely on his side, defending him like this while the ex-horse-dealer was trying to embarrass him. He fired a string of questions at Liu Tse-hsing: "You've spent a lot of time knocking about the world, what did you bring back with you when you

came home? Who gave you your land? Who gave you the relief grain for widows and widowers, 120 catties for the two seasons in the year? What did you ever get from the old society? Who built that house for you? Where did the timber come from?" He demanded angrily, fixing his eyes on the old man. Liu Tse-hsing seemed to shrink, like a porcupine flattening its quills. He fell silent. "You're right, I came back without a rag to my name . . ." he muttered after a pause.

"All right, then!" said Chang Ta, changing to a milder tone, just as he had heard a district Party committee member do after severely criticizing him, or he himself had done after criticizing a member of the militia. The critic, perceiving the criticized had realized his mistakes, began to soothe him. "Now, you should really think this question over a bit more carefully!" he said.

Before leaving, he reminded them to bring the tools needed for catching the locusts next morning. He firmly turned down their offer to see him off and said that he would drop in to see them as often as possible. On his way home, he remembered how Hsiang-chieh had spoken up and suddenly felt there was a strong bond of sympathy between them, more intimate than that which he experienced when they lost their way in the Wang Family Graveyard and later when he waited for her by the well of Hsia Village. He cherished this feeling and began to expect certain things of her.

That night, Liu Tse-hsing slunk off like a defeated cock much earlier than usual. But Old Man Hsing stayed, seated outside the grindstone track smoking, long after his cronies were gone. Little Stone, now home from evening school, helped his mother to take the grindstone apart. Old Man Hsing sat on, forgetting that he had two *li* to do to get back to Kuan Village.

"Dad, time for you to go now!" said Hsiang-chieh, after sending Little Stone to bed and placing the last stone on the trough.

"No matter, there's a moon."

"But mum'll be waiting for you!"

Old Man Hsing kept pulling at his pipe. At last he called out in a flat voice: "Hsiang-chieh!"

"What's up?"

"Lay down that broom and come over here. I want to ask you something." He sucked at his pipe again and said quietly, "What did Chang Ta come for this evening?"

"We're going to catch locusts tomorrow morning, aren't we?" said she. "Even if there was nothing on, couldn't he just come in for a chat, once in a while?"

Old Man Hsing rose to his feet, gripping his tobacco pouch.

"It's all right as long as you're on the right track. Don't forget your son's so big now," he said before parting. "I can't keep you company all your life, you see. Now shut the door and go to bed!"

That night Hsiang-chieh lay awake long after the lamp was blown out, her eyes open, thinking. Why should fate decide that she should meet Chang Ta on his way to the market, and that they should lose their way in bright daylight. Then she thought of her hilarious laughter, and of her agitation as dusk approached. It was as though she had been some other woman who had known Chang Ta for a long time. As to what Old Man Hsing had said, she had not taken in a single word. Why this was so, she did not understand. One thing she knew, however, was that she had passed a day of great significance to her, and she felt blissful. Something new was beginning to take shape in her. Her father's restraint had suddenly become irksome and she knew she must break away.

IV

After the locust-catching, Hsiang-chieh met the militia captain twice more, on his own, and during the daytime. The first was an accidental meeting by the side of the well behind the village. Hsiang-chieh attached special importance to this, for Chang Ta usually drew water from the well in the south of the village where he lived. But this time he had come to fetch water from the northern well. In doing so, he had to pass by Hsiang-chieh's courtyard. The second meeting took place right outside her courtyard, where she had been waiting specially for the purpose.

They beamed with delight on both occasions. "This well's wonderfully clean," Chang Ta observed in his loud voice, as he drew the water from the well. "I should say so!" replied the other, smiling softly as a cat, and gazing at him with her sweet eyes. Then she made way for him and Chang Ta walked off with his two bucketfuls of water slung from a pole across his shoulder. The second time was at noon, when Chang Ta again passed her house on his water-fetching errand. "Hey! When are we going to the Hsia Village market again?" he called out. "All right," she answered with a smile, her face flushing crimson.

Then for three days she missed him. At first she felt uneasy, and hung around the courtyard the whole day listening to the footsteps and voices as people passed to and fro on their way to fetch water. But Chang Ta did not come by. Hsiang-chieh was downcast. Why didn't he come? she wondered. It was only when she learnt that he had gone to the district Party committee that she calmed down.

Undoubtedly, her uncle Liu Ssu knew what was going on. He had heard the remarks they had exchanged during their second meeting from the adjoining courtyard. "Are you going to the Hsia Village market again?" he asked her that very evening.

"I don't think so. What can you get there, anyway?" she replied, wondering what he was getting at, and feeling all the more sickened with these old cronies and their endless talk about business.

The day after the militia captain left the village, a team of three surveyors from the Water Conservancy Bureau of Shantung Province made their appearance on the land between Yu and Kuan Villages. They had with them all their paraphernalia of red-and-white scales, tripods, levelling instruments, plotting lens, and what have you. At first the peasants did not pay much attention to them. It was only on the third day, when it was announced that these people had come to prepare a new course for the Shu River, that people began to talk about it in earnest.

By this time, there was a group of people on the land between Yu Village in the south and Kuan Village in the north, pouring lime water from long-necked bottles along two parallel tracks set a *li* apart and fixed by marking ropes. Quite a little crowd of people from Kuan Village began to gather along the lime line in the south. Among them were Old Man Hsing clad in his long robe and his wife with her sleeves rolled up to her elbows. There was another crowd from Yu Village, including Hsiang-chieh with an apron tied around her waist, the pedlar Liu Ssu and old Liu Tse-hsing, who now sold spirits and pigs' heads. A buzz of noise arose from among them, like bees on the swarm. People were gesticulating and flashing mutually infecting glances at one another. Fragments of excited, inarticulate utterances could be caught at a short distance: "But the water ghosts. . . !" ". . . Don't strike them!" "Get the cadres!" There was no telling why, but somehow somebody started heading towards a certain goal, and all ran in the same direction. Some, running with ashen faces, asked, "What's the matter?" Children, frightened, started to cry among the human stream which surged forward. The field was littered with discarded cloth shoes.

"Little Stone, Little Stone!" cried Hsiang-chieh in a frightened voice. She was bumped and pushed and borne along by the crowd.

The militia captain, with a rifle slung across his shoulder, suddenly appeared among the crowd. He looked tense, but calm. People began to quiet down. "Quiet, there at the back!" Shouted someone. Chang Ta, one hand on hip, started in his stentorian voice: "The days of the Shu River as a trouble-maker are numbered! In the future, whatever we plant in the marshy land will be sure to give us a return. Nobody'll need to worry about having no beans to make sauce with!"

"Won't the opening of the new course mean separating Kuan Village from Yu Village?" somebody asked loudly. Chang Ta recognized him — a poor peasant of Kuan Village.

"How shall we people from Kuan Village get to the market with the river in between?" Chang Ta saw it was Old Man Hsing who had spoken.

"The Yu Village market'll be shifted to the north. Yu Village'll no longer be the centre. And when we're rid of the floods, we'll be sure to have two crops every year."

"Hurrah!"

"This time our marshy land'll be as good as the best land of Kuan Village!" cried those who depended on the marshy land in Yu Village for a living, in great spirit.

All the pedlars who lived on trading in the Yu Village market, however, darted suspicious glances about them.

"How are we going to make a living if the market is shifted!" they bawled.

"And we'll have to disturb the bones of the dead!" cried those whose ancestral graves lay within the new course.

"How about our wheat fields in the course?"

And there were such comments as: "It seems Chairman Mao doesn't care about us any more! This is inviting the devil to make trouble for us if you ask me! Directing the floods right towards our houses. . . ."

"Well said!" responded the eighty-one-year-old Liu Tse-hsing.

Chang Ta, surrounded by the crowd, listened intently to all these utterances, breaking in time and again to answer questions, saying that "the graves will have to be moved" and "all lands will be compensated." So when he heard someone say "inviting the devil to make trouble," he swung round and swept the crowd with his eyes, noting at the same time the response of Liu Tse-hsing.

"Who was it said that Chairman Mao doesn't care for the people around here?" he demanded sternly.

All quieted down. "Who was it, do you know?" some murmured. Others pretended to have heard nothing, and kept silent. When Chang Ta cast his eyes around again and repeated his question, Hsiang-chieh pointed across the crowd and said loudly, "There, that bald-headed one, in the white vest — what are you prodding me for?" The last was addressed to eighty-one-year-old Liu Tse-hsing who, to her surprise, was glaring at her with furious eyes, as though she had betrayed her own people to the enemy. Hsiang-chieh had never known the old man's eyes to look so vicious. In an instant, however, he had turned away from her, shifted his position and was standing with an outwardly unruffled appearance.

"Now, don't you people know the voice of the well-to-do peasant and landlord when you hear it?" asked Chang Ta. "Don't you recognize him? Maybe some of you still feel sorry for him? Does he have the

right to speak at a meeting like this? The district committee thought there'd be some bad elements spreading rumours and sabotaging in the opening of the new course. And I've guaranteed we have no such people in our village. Looks nice for us, doesn't it? A fellow like that daring to speak in public! Isn't he still under surveillance?"

"Take him away!" he ordered sharply.

Timidly and quietly, people began to disperse.

As Hsiang-chieh was looking right and left for Little Stone, she saw Old Man Hsing coming towards her. Still holding his tobacco pouch and looking very perturbed, he gazed at her in a way quite unlike himself. She felt they had drawn farther apart than ever. It was evidently because she had pointed out Liu Erh-sheng, the man who was supposed to be under surveillance.

"Where's your uncle?" asked Old Man Hsing.

"I haven't seen him," she said calmly and decisively.

"Old brother!" Liu Tse-hsing came up to them. "Now that Yu Village market is going to shift, we're in for it. And we'll pay for it with our legs, too!"

"It's not only the walking, you'll get the cold shoulder, going to an outside market!" Old Man Hsing walked through the crowd with Liu Tse-hsing, talking in a low voice. "How can a cadre not follow the mass line? That's something unheard-of! Can they go ahead with the job in this high-handed way with everyone against it?"

"Didn't you hear what Chang Ta said just now?" said Liu Tse-hsing. "This sort of thing is certainly known to the people above. So you've got to keep a check on your tongue!"

"The project in itself," he continued, "is splendid of course; in the past we looked forward to the course of the Shu River being altered, and it never happened. We never dreamt, though, that when it did change its course it would go through our fields and put an end to our market."

Listening to his old crony, Old Man Hsing turned ashen. He felt as uneasy as one deserted by his companions. He looked at the people around with a diffident baffled expression, like a sentenced prisoner looking at the free, happy people hurrying along in the street. Hsiang-chieh, too, grew pale, for she was now suddenly reminded of her open-air booth she depended on for a living. If the Yu Village market was really moved north, what was she going to do? She decided to consult Chang Ta.

As soon as they entered the village, Liu Tse-hsing walked towards his solitary hut at the rear. Like the old rogue that he was, he knew the father and daughter were going to have it out and preferred to be out of the line of firing.

As soon as Old Man Hsing and his daughter were back at her home, he began to complain. "The old devil!" he muttered. "Just as he's needed to give his opinion, he melts away, as though he's a stranger."

Hsiang-chieh was silent, thinking.

"If the river is going to pass between the two villages," said Old Man Hsing, looking at his daughter, "I won't be able to come and see you. How are you going to fend for yourself and your son?"

He expected to hear her pour forth her grief, tell of her helplessness without his support, and of the sufferings she would have to endure. He would be infinitely comforted and satisfied if she said, "Oh, Dad, you must come, even if you have to make a detour of twenty li!" But, to his surprise, she said with an absent-minded air, "You don't need to worry about that! Even if you can't come, we can make a detour and come to see you."

Old Man Hsing looked at her uncomprehendingly. What could she be thinking of? How placidly she talked! Who was behind her? How could she be so calm at the prospect of doing without him, her father?

"Very well, then!" the old man turned as if going to depart. "I'm glad to know you can get along on your own. I won't bother coming tomorrow."

"The new course isn't opened yet, is it? You'll come in for a bowl of hot bean milk, won't you?" said Hsiang-chieh, smiling to pacify him.

But her words failed to produce the desired effect. The old man suddenly changed colour. "What! . . . What do you mean? . . . Do you think I come in order to drink your bean milk?" he burst out, his lips trembling, as if it were the greatest insult his daughter had hurled at him. Hsiang-chieh fell back a step in fright. Without saying another word he stumped off in high dudgeon. Not knowing what had upset him, Hsiang-chieh's first impulse was to run after him and explain. As she reached the door, however, she thought the better of it. It would, after all, give her a little peace if the old man were to cut down his calls in the future. In fact, it suddenly dawned upon her that the new course would remove the bondage which she had always been held by her parents. A great sense of relief, of freedom from restraint, came over her.

"That's exactly what I have been wanting!" she thought. She would now say goodbye to the listless days that had been her lot. She was weary of the scruffy appearance of her uncle, and wished she would never again see the hypocritical face and vicious eyes of old Liu Tse-hsing. Thinking along these lines cheered her up. When Chang Ta came to see her a little later and praised her, she gained even more confidence. She knew she must break with these old people.

"You did right today. You've made a big stride politically," he said. "I'll come again when I have time."

"But tell me," she said softly. "How about my beancurd booth after the market moves north?"

"What? Are you still thinking of depending on the market for a living?" Chang Ta cried aloud. "But we're going to make a great suc-

cess of agriculture here. Aren't you planning to join a mutual-aid team?"

"All right," she said submissively. "I'll have to depend on you cadres to fix it up for me."

"Don't worry, I'll fix it, I promise you," he said firmly. "I'll pop in again!"

That evening, Hsiang-chieh's uncle came along as usual with his stool, and old Liu Tse-hsing too, with a handful of tea. They all wondered why Old Man Hsing hadn't turned up.

"My dad won't be coming tonight. Boil the water yourselves if you want tea," said Hsiang-chieh coldly. Adding a few ladlefuls of water to the pot, she left the visitors to themselves and set out to see an army dependant and find out how she got along with Chang Ta's mutual-aid team.

The two old men did not stay long. "Maybe she's had a tiff with her father," said the ex-horse-dealer as they were leaving. "I'm afraid the old man's losing control over his daughter."

"How do you mean?"

"Don't you know who pointed out Liu Erh-sheng today? Weren't you there?"

"Huh! We'll see how she gets along if she sets herself against her father!"

V

The next evening Hsiang-chieh was due to grind the beans, but the old man was squatting on the *kang* smoking, when his wife came home after a meeting.

"What! Aren't you going to Yu Village?" she asked. Then she told him that in the meeting it was decided that a subsidy for removal would be paid to those whose ancestral graves lay within the new river course, that the owners of lands within the course would suggest how much compensation they should get, that this would be discussed and fixed collectively by the price-appraising group, and that an additional eighty catties of millet would be paid to the owner of every *mou* of wheat field. The old woman seemed quite satisfied, although they had neither ancestral graves nor land lying within the new course.

But the old man did not seem to hear her at all. "The good fortune of the land of Yu Village is done for!" he muttered, heaving a sigh. "We are old," he turned to his wife, "if something happens to us, and word is sent to Yu Village, they'll have to go round by the Laohokou ferry. It's twenty *li* one way and forty there and back. She'll never be able to get here in time to see us in our last moments!"

"To my mind, the harvest is the big thing. If the river gives no more trouble, Hsiang-chieh can take two crops a year off her plot, she'll

do all right, and that's all I ask for. If she can come in time to bid us farewell when our time comes, it'll be nice; what does it matter if she can't? We'll be buried underground all the same."

Old Man Hsing did not mention the squabble with his daughter. On the surface, he seemed to make light of it; but appearances are deceptive. When he met her in the Yu Village market, he pretended not to see her. He still set up his vegetable stall in front of her booth. He did not talk to her, but made more fuss of Little Stone than ever, buying him two pomegranates before the market closed. Although Hsiang-chieh saw all this, she did not brood over it. She bustled about happily and talked of the benefits they would get from the change of course of the Shu River even in the presence of Old Man Hsing.

She began to talk more and more enthusiastically about water conservancy. "This is one of the state plans for water conservancy! It's aimed at doing away with floods over fifteen million *mou* of land in the lower reaches of the river!" she said. "It's not as simple as you'd think. All our land here will be irrigated, you know." And again, "Just think how much grain will be harvested every year off fifteen million *mou*. Compared with this, the shifting of the Yu market is nothing." All this she would say to people, simulating the tone of Chang Ta, when she was drawing water from the well, washing clothes by the river, or digging vegetables for the pigs in her private plot, her dark eyes alight with self-confidence. But the moment she saw Chang Ta striding towards her in the presence of all, she would get so red in the face she dared not raise her head. The members of the militia threw significant glances in her direction, and the young women of Yu Village would whisper to one another when they saw her. Chang Ta's sweetheart, they called her. Liu Ying, the army dependant, once asked her softly over her shoulder, "When shall we drink toasts to your happiness?"

As a matter of fact, she and Chang Ta had not talked the matter over yet, but the open secret was corroborated by the looks of the girls who regarded the mutual affection between the two as their own triumph and a serious blow to the upholders of feudal tradition.

"Huh! If Hsiang-chieh is willing, how dare her uncle stand in her way!"

"As soon as the new course is opened, Kuan and Yu Villages will be separated. What can the old man do then? The couple can do whatever they like! He won't be able to come across from the other side."

All this talk came to Liu Ssu's ears, but he had no time to bother about it, for he and all the pedlars of Yu Village were busy finding out what sort of articles they could profitably sell after the work on the new course began. The peasants around Yu Village were making inquiries about who wanted to sell their land. The price of marshy land doubled overnight, yet no seller could be found. . . .

It would take too long to describe the complex class struggle during the process of the project which took three years to complete. We shall therefore return to Old Man Hsing and Hsiang-chieh.

Chang Ta married Hsiang-chieh as early as the spring of 1951 and their second son is now a year old. A farming co-op of seventy households was set up in Yu Village. The market was shifted ten li off, north of the village. The streets of Yu Village are now cleared of the earthen stoves and sticks used to erect the booths on market days. The spot where Hsiang-chieh used to set up her beancurd stall is now a threshing ground. The stakes and bench legs were dislodged from the ground and sent to the co-op where you can still find them to this day lying in the livestock paddock. The yield of the land around Yu Village is three-fold higher than before, for in the course of the project every household along the river stored up piles of beancake fertilizer. From afar, they looked like so many big hay stacks.

Every year Hsiang-chieh pays two visits to Kuan Village with her youngest, and on festival days Mama Hsing comes to see her daughter, making a detour of Laohokou. The two of them, mother and daughter, are on very good terms. Old Man Hsing still keeps aloof. But he is drawn to Little Stone, always asking the routine questions: "When are you going to be through primary school? How's old dad Liu Tse-hsing? Does he ever ask after me?"

The old man is now doing odd-jobs in the co-op of Kuan Village, peeling off corn-cobs with the women or stripping hemp husks. He also cuts grass for the animals and opens irrigation channels for the co-op fields. He checks in over seventy workdays in a year.

"Well, even if he could only earn sixty workdays, it wouldn't be so bad!" Mama Hsing always says. "If I die one of these days, I know I can close my eyes in peace. For after all, the old man's got something to depend on."

Translated by Yu Fan-chin and Chang Tsung-chih
Illustrations by Sa Keng-shih

THE YOUNG COAL-MINER

TA CHUN

I

Father had got his pay the day before. Mother rose early in the morning. Hastily wiping her face with a damp towel instead of having a proper wash, she combed her hair with a decrepit wooden comb, took up an old bag and went out. She was going to the ration office to buy our share of foodstuffs. As she left, she cast a glance at me, maybe imagining that I was asleep. But in fact I wake at the slightest sound, even that of a cat's breathing.

At this time of the year, it was still chilly in the mornings and evenings. When mother put on the jacket I was using as a bed cover, leaving me only a torn piece of blanket, I began to shiver and sneeze, and curled myself up into a ball. She relented, took off the jacket and put it on me again. All she had on now was a ragged old cotton sweater that had been patched time and again.

I felt ill at ease when she was gone, and began to reproach myself. Supposing she caught cold? Springing off the *kang*, I grabbed the jacket and dashed out. The lane was empty. I called at the top of my voice but there was no answer.

The door opposite creaked open and a little girl appeared. Seeing me naked, she stroked her cheek with her finger to shame me, then banged the door shut. It was Chin Niu, the girl who had just come from the village. I was furious. "And what about you, hey?" I muttered, turning down the corners of my mouth. "You're quite a big girl, but you're still wearing split trousers!" I pushed my door to with a bang that was meant for her. Lying down on the *kang*, I covered myself with the jacket. It was then I saw that in banging the door, I had shaken down all my beloved pictures I had collected from cigarette packets from the wall where I had put them. "Damn you, little girl," I grumbled, clenching my fist, "I'll make you cry when I catch you." In fact, I knew

perfectly well that I would not dare to touch her. Her father, Uncle Chin, though getting on in years, and as thin as a twig, could knock me down with a flick of a finger. Besides, the last time she had some sweets she shared them with me. My anger vanished. I yawned sleepily and my eyelids drooped. In a moment I dozed off again.

Mother returned. She was carrying a sack of snowy white flour on her back and a scoop of brown sugar in one hand. "Little Ox," she said, coming towards me. "Get up quickly, I'll make some sweet steamed rolls for you." My mouth began to water, and I licked my lips. . . .

Bang! Bang! "Get up, you lazy little bastard!"

Startled, I opened my eyes. Standing in front of me was not my mother but the foreman, Long Neck Ma from the coal-mine. He was banging on the edge of the *kang* with a wooden stick. I clambered up and shifted to the far side of the *kang*. He raised his stick at my head. Scared, I yelled for mother. But instead of hitting me, he merely picked up the jacket and flung it on the floor. "Get up, quick!" he shouted, spraying my face with saliva as he spoke. "Go out and hang the great Japanese flag! The emperor's army has won another victory and captured a big Chinese city!" Arrogantly he kicked the door open and strode out.

I wiped my face. "Mule's piss!" I swore. "Wipe it away! Above you," I muttered indignantly, "there are the Japs, the head foreman, the second foreman and the third foreman. But who are you? Uncle Chin says there are sets of earthenware pots, I'll bet you're the smallest piss-pot of all!" Probably it was because I had not eaten enough the day before that I felt so depressed. I was dizzy, and yawned again. Just as I was dropping off to sleep I heard footsteps. Opening my eyes, I saw that mother had come back. I jumped up and threw myself into her arms.

She asked me what had happened. I told her about Long Neck's visit and what he had said. As she put her bag down on a table near the *kang* I noticed some hard-looking bulges in it. They reminded me of my dream. Although they may not be sweet rolls, they could be steamed bread. "Mother," I said, going over to the table, "are these steamed bread? Give me a piece, do. I'm so hungry that my stomach is sticking together." In my excitement I tripped over mother's foot and nearly fell.

Without saying a word, she turned away with a rueful smile. I opened the bag. It was full of lumps of mouldy acorn flour. As I took a piece and broke it, a sour stench rose to my nostrils. My tears began to flow. "There, there!" said mother, wiping my eyes with the edge of her sleeve, "when father comes back he'll buy some steamed bread for you." Thereupon she took out a half gourdful of corn flour and mixed it with the rotten acorn flour to make corn bread. "Father's not had enough to eat for days," she said, caressing my head. "If he can't have a good

meal, he won't be able to work." She paused, then spoke again. "Little Ox," she said, "you'd better get that flag up quickly, otherwise that devil will be back again to beat you up." Taking out some money from her pocket, she counted it through. "Winter'll soon be on us," she murmured to herself. "We've got to buy two straw mats to cover up the windows, or we'll all freeze to death on the *kang*."

I fished out a Japanese flag from a bag of rubbish. It was as crumpled as a baby's diaper. Tying it on a sorghum stalk, I hurried out. But I was too short. Even standing on tiptoe on a stone, I could not reach the flag holder. Just as I was getting worried, somebody came up behind my back and kicked the stone, so that I almost fell. Looking round, I saw it was Chin Niu. "Listen," I said angrily. "If you do things like that, I'll give you a good hiding even though you are a girl."

Putting her hands behind her back, she smiled. "What a silly boy you are!" she said.

In my anxiety, I dropped the flag and broke the stalk. Now I was really angry, and felt my cheeks burning and my ears getting red. I was just about to have a big row with her when she showed me what she was holding. A big golden pancake! "Daddy told me to give you one," she said, "I've chosen this big one for you."

I swallowed hard and stared at her, too embarrassed to take it. Stretching out her arm, she stepped forward until the pancake touched my jacket. "Chin Niu," I said, taking it from her, "don't play up like that again! I'm in a state because I can't get the flag up. If you don't believe me just feel my heart. It's beating like a drum." Chin Niu pursed her mouth and said: "Your face is as red as a rooster's!"

After that we played a while on the bank of the Sungari River before going home. Mother had just made the fire and smoke was pouring up round the steamer on the stove. I fetched a stool, sat down beside her and gave her the remaining half of the pancake. "Eat it yourself," she said, patting my cheek. But I insisted on giving it to her. Finally she took it, broke it into halves and sniffed at them. "It's made of pure corn flour," she said, tasting a little. "Put it into the steamer and heat it up for your father. It'll make a grand supper for him."

Then I told her how Chin Niu had carried the pancakes from her grandma's house in the village. She had hidden them inside a pillow and although the police had stopped and searched her several times, they failed to find the pancakes. Chin Niu said that if the police had found them, they would have plucked out every hair of her head, one by one.

"Your father should be back by now," mother began to worry. "The sun's almost off the wall. I'll pop over to the hospital to see if Uncle Chin knows what's up."

No sooner had mother stepped through the threshold, than we heard somebody shouting in the street.

"Terrible accident in No. Two! A roof fall in No. Two!"

"Which pit? Which pit?" gasped mother, sinking down onto the step.

I was stunned. After a while she struggled to her feet and grabbed my arm. "Little Ox," she said, "come into the house, quick!" Trembling all over, she lit some sticks of incense and put them in front of the tablet of the God of the Mountains. Then she dragged me down on my knees and began to pray. "Oh, God of the Mountains, let him come back," she gabbled desperately. "He's a good man! God of the Mountains, I promise that I'll burn the best incense for you. . . ." Gradually she lost her voice.

I wept. What a good father he was to us! Unlike other fathers who often came home drunk and beat the children, my father never drank a drop. Even when he had worries on his mind he never vented his irritation on us. He would only sigh to himself. Sometimes he didn't even sigh but sat lost in hard thought with his brows knitted. Then he would sometimes bring his fist down on the table and mutter: "Think, think, there must be a way out!" One cold day, I huddled in his arms shivering. "Dad," I said, "you dig coal every day, so why can't we have more coal for the fire?"

"Son," he said, "the coal belongs to the Japanese and the foremen." "But mother says that you and I were born under a lucky star," I said angrily. "Why should they be so much better off than us? Some time ago Long Neck dragged some of us youngsters to carry flower pots to Big Swindler's garden. His son was sitting in the shade in the yard with a woman servant fanning him. He was eating a roast chicken but he only ate the breast. . . ."

"Son, you'll understand when you grow up."

"But last time," I said, "you told Uncle Chin and several others that the rich people live on the blood of the poor. . . ."

"Son," father interrupted, "that was only among ourselves. Don't ever say that to anyone else!" Then he whispered into my ear: "Don't wake your mother up!" He yawned and kissed me. "I'm tired out, and I have to get to work in the morning," he said. "Let's go to bed. I'll count and see who falls asleep first." He began to count: "One, two, three. . . ." I could not remember how far he had counted when I fell asleep with my head resting on his arm.

This morning when father woke up, I was also awake. "You were born to be a miner," he said, chucking me under the chin. "You wake with the first ray of light." Then he sat me on his knee and combed my hair. "It's like a bunch of matted straw," he said jokingly. "I'll have to straighten it out." So saying he splashed my hair with water. . . .

But now father was no more.

. . . Mother wept and then collapsed. When Uncle Chin and my own uncle came home from work, they put her onto the *kang*. My own voice

東風和暢人間春，
不要氣彈要的平。

一九五八年 冬 和



The Doves Are Coming by Chiang Chao-ho

was hoarse from crying. Chin Niu, who was trying to comfort me, was also in tears.

The next day there was no smoke from any of the chimneys in our compound. Aunt Li had drowned herself in the river. Before she died, she tied her few-month-old baby onto a table with a note which read: "Whoever brings up the baby may regard him as their son. Should he die of hunger, I beg that some kind-hearted person should throw him in the river so that we may have a family re-union after death!" Aunt Yen, who lived opposite us, hanged herself. . . .

Mother lay in bed in a state of semi-coma for two or three days. Not even a drop of water passed her lips. I clung to my uncle's leg and cried myself out of breath. And my uncle? Since the day of the accident, he sat staring straight ahead, and murmuring over and over again: "Ah! How shall we live from now on!"

II

On the fourth day, mother opened her eyes now and then but as soon as she caught sight of me, she wept again. When she cried, I cried, too. Uncle Chin often dropped in during his spare time to comfort mother and when he was at work, Chin Niu would come to keep us company.

Aunt Li brought us a bowl of corn porridge. Mother opened her swollen eyes, but as soon as she saw it her eyelids drooped again. "Mother," I pleaded, "please eat it! If you won't eat, I won't either. . . ."

She asked me to raise her pillows higher, and I fed her with a spoon. She swallowed each mouthful slowly. Two tears still hung from her eyelashes. Young though I was, I felt like an adult as I wiped them gently away.

"Now, you know," Uncle Chin said to mother, "you must try and pull yourself together. If anything happens to you, who will look after the child? You must make up your mind to get better and bring up the child. Then you can really say that you have done your duty by your husband."

Mother, still shedding tears, nodded. Her hands were trembling. . . .

The next day she got up, although it cost her an effort to do it. She spoke very little and never smiled. She was very strict with me and would not even let me go out of the room. She seemed to want me by her side all the time. At night, she slept in snatches. As soon as she dozed off, she would shudder and wake again, uneasily groping to find if I was still there or not. So as not to hurt her feelings, I tried to become more considerate. It was seldom that I went out to play. Chin Niu often came to sit and chat with her.

According to the regulations of the coal-mine, we were entitled to a pension. "Little Ox," she said to me one day, in such a feeble voice that I could hardly hear her, "when I get the money, I'll send you to school, so you'll never have to go down the fire pit." Then she wept again.

But day after day we waited, until the Sungari River began to freeze. There was no word about the pension. Some time later it was announced that no pensions would be paid until the accident had been investigated.

How could we, mother and son, manage to live? The small sum Uncel Chin and uncle could give us every month was not enough. From dawn to dusk mother washed and sewed for people. But there were not many people in a small town like Fuchin who could afford to have their clothes washed outside. Winter was on us, bringing fresh difficulties with each passing day. Mother worked so hard, and for such long hours, that her eyes became inflamed, her back ached and she developed severe rheumatism in her arms. Her hands were red and chafed. But for all this, she earned less than twenty cents a day. Nevertheless, she would have died rather than beg from others. "When your father was alive," she said to me, "he used to say that though we were poor, we must have some self-respect."

What a gloomy place Fuchin County was under the domination of the Japanese. Almost every day, corpses could be seen floating down the Sungari River which ran along the county wall. Bare-footed beggars, in twos or threes, wandered the streets with straw bags on their backs.

One day before daybreak, mother went out to find some work. The sun rose high, but she did not return. I had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours. My belly was rumbling with hunger. When I straightened myself, I had a pain in the stomach. Chin Niu had gone to the village. Uncle Chin and uncle had been away for several days. Finally I pulled myself together and went out to meet mother. She usually used to come back by the road along the river. Bare-footed, and clad in a ragged shirt, I looked more like a scarecrow than a boy. My face was gaunt and yellow, with two big eyes sunk deep into the sockets. As I trudged along I shivered. The cold became so intense I began to hop and run. By the time I reached the cross-roads, my mouth was dry and stars were floating before my eyes. I leant against a wall, exhausted, but in a moment the cold wind roused me to action. Looking round I saw a garbage bin at the corner of the wall. A big black dog was snuffing at a bunch of chicken feathers. As though in a trance, I moved towards the bin and dipped my hands into it. From among a pile of rotten cabbage leaves I fished out a shred of white stalk and popped it into my mouth.

"Little Ox, Little Ox," somebody called behind my back. Turning round, I saw it was mother. Her hair was covered with white frost and she was hugging her shoulders tightly. She had not found any work. Stealthily I threw away the cabbage and came towards her. Tears filled

her eyes. "Little Ox," she said, "what are you eating?" I hung my head and said nothing. Slowly she lifted my chin and I saw the tears trickle down her cheeks. "Mother," I blurted, "I was so hungry I couldn't last out!"

"Little Ox!" she exclaimed, embracing me. Then she wiped her eyes with the edge of her sleeve and stared at me thoughtfully, as if I were a stranger.

We moved slowly towards home. "Is it Little Ox there?" somebody yelled behind us.

Turning round, we saw Uncle Liu from the coal-mine, carrying a food basket in hand. "Dear me, Mrs. Cheng," he cried when he caught sight of my bare feet, "the child's feet will be frost-bitten." I cast a look at mother.

"Mother says that when we get some money, she'll buy me a pair of straw sandals with leather soles," I said briskly, ignoring my empty stomach.

"The child's as tough as his father!" said Uncle Liu. "Mrs. Cheng," he said again, "I'll get my pay tomorrow, send somebody over. I'll give you a dollar to buy the child a pair of shoes." Having said this, he walked away with his brows knitted but after a few paces he stopped again. As we drew level with him he took out a piece of pancake from the basket and handed it to me. "Uncle Liu," I said, feeling that I should not take it. "What will you eat then?"

"Take it, child," he repeated, "don't be silly! I can live for three days without eating anything besides the north-west wind!" With this, he went away.

Mother did not say a word.

I tore the pancake apart and gave mother half.

"You have half, Mum. Half's enough for me."

"You have only got one, don't share it, eat it yourself!" said mother sternly.

I ate it with a heavy heart.

There seemed no end to the bitter days, when we could hardly keep body and soul together. Mother yearned for the coming spring when there would be wild herbs to eat.

One day before the New Year the head foreman, Big Swindler, sent for mother. We expected that he would give us the pension but the very thought reminded us of father. She set out for the mine with a sad face.

Not until dusk fell did she return. As she came into the room, she threw herself upon the *kang* and remained silent, ignoring all my questions.

Later, when Uncle Chin came in, mother told him that the mine would not give us any pension. They said that it was not an accident. . . .

"Well," said Uncle Chin after a long pause, "they can call it what they like, I suppose." He then told mother what had really happened.

On that day when father and the others were down the pit, one of the Japanese and a foreman came to supervise them with whips in their hands. The men were exhausted for lack of proper food and rest. One of them fell to the ground in a faint. The Japanese went up and kicked him in the chest. The man began to froth at the mouth and his nose began to bleed. He was clearly in a bad way. A wave of fury spread among the men. Throwing down their shovels, they rushed over to his rescue. But the foreman lashed at them with his whip. "Beat them to death," shouted the Japanese, raising an iron shovel and beginning to lay about him. "Fight them to the death!" shouted my father. In a moment the men had settled accounts for good with the Japanese and the foreman. As soon as word reached the Japanese on the surface they took prompt action. Fearing a widespread riot, they dynamited the roof at the entrance to the pit and announced that there had been an explosion of gas. A clamp of secrecy had prevented the truth from leaking out until very recently.

Mother listened to Uncle Chin in silence, staring straight ahead of her. Suddenly she took me in her arms, and pressed her cheek against mine. "Little Ox," she said, "do you care for mother? If you love your mother you must never forget how your father was murdered."

I buried my head in her arms.

She looked at Uncle Chin several times as if to speak, but did not utter a word. I could see there was something she wanted to say, for she looked so unhappy.

When my uncle came back in the evening, she talked with him till midnight. The next morning her eyes were red and swollen.

After breakfast she took me by the hand and we went to my uncle's house next door. As she crossed the threshold she murmured: "You're crossing uncle's threshold. May you be safe from disaster and misfortune. May you live to be over a hundred." She then dragged me down to kowtow to the tablet of the God of the Mountains. I was quite puzzled about all this.

It was the eve of the lunar New Year. A heavy snowstorm was raging. It was so cold, I huddled in mother's arms for warmth. She was especially kind to me that night. Now and then she would kiss and hug me. . . . I imagined that the festival must have reminded her of father. I felt sad, too.

The cold woke me late in the night. The wind was whistling through a hole in the window paper. The roof beams creaked as if they would fall. I felt for mother. She was not there. "Mother," I cried sitting up.

"Little Ox," said somebody, patting my shoulder. "Lie down!"

It was uncle's voice. What had happened to mother? I pulled away from him and clambered down onto the floor. "Where is mother?" I shouted. "I want mother!"

Uncle picked me up and put me back on the *kang*. "There's a good boy," he said, "listen to me! Your mother has gone to the village to get rice for you. From now on you'll live with uncle! . . ." His voice cracked and he said no more.

I burst out crying and wanted to go and look for mother. Uncle stopped me. I bit his shoulder till it bled.

Fire-crackers sounded on the streets. The rich were celebrating the arrival of the God of Wealth.

I cried myself hoarse and finally fell exhausted into my uncle's arms.

III

I had been in bed for a week and had no appetite. I dreamed of mother every night. Sometimes she tucked the quilt around me, and sometimes she hugged me, saying, "Little Ox, Little Ox!" Every time I woke up finding no mother, I would hastily close my eyes again, hoping to get back into my dreams and see her again. But no matter how hard I tried, I could not sleep again. In my dreams, I always forgot to ask her where she had gone and as soon as I woke up, I would cry my eyes out. In the mornings, when I got up and put on her jacket and the socks she had darned for me the night before she left, I shed tears again. . . .

For a whole week uncle locked me in the room every day when he went to work. "Be a good boy," he told me again and again, "and don't try to go out. We poor people have thin skulls, we can't fight them so we'd better hide out of the way."

Uncle was a man who loved his wine more than his rice. But two cups of wine would go to his head. When he came home drunk, his eyes bloodshot and staring, he did not make a noise, but threw himself on the *kang*, tossing and turning and moaning to himself: "The sooner I die the better!"

Every day when he came back home after work, he would peep at me through a hole in the window paper before he unlocked the door. As he stepped into the room, his eyes used to fill with tears. I knew that he had suffered some hard setbacks. The year before, when there was an epidemic in our town, my aunt and two cousins fell ill. One day uncle came back from the pit to find they had all three been taken and buried alive by the Japanese. After that, he became more queer than ever.

In winter, a hole as small as a needle's eye will let in a big gust of wind. On seeing the hole in our window, Uncle Chin pasted it up with a piece of paper. But when my uncle saw this, he stamped his foot and demanded to know who had done it. Later I told him it was Uncle Chin. "He didn't know what he was doing!" sighed uncle, sitting on the edge of the *kang* and giving me a hug.

That night, as I was dropping off to sleep, I heard Uncle Chin came in. He had brought a bottle of wine and a piece of salted cucumber. He and uncle sat at a table facing each other. They had neither cups, nor a knife to cut the cucumber. They were using the miner's way of drinking—from the mouth of the bottle.

After three swigs of wine, my uncle sighed, and began to talk.

"Old Chin," he said, "I say again, the sooner we die, the better. What do we have to live for? Little Ox's parents were good people and look what became of them! Old Chin, you don't know the full story!" Uncle paused and came over to cover me with the jacket. With my eyes fast shut I pretended to be asleep, but my ears were wide awake. Uncle drank another mouthful, smacked his lips, took a bite of cucumber and went on: "When Little Ox's father was killed, his mother didn't get a cent. The foremen even said that his father was the chief culprit in the riot and demanded the back house rent from his mother. They threatened that if she didn't pay the rent they would accuse Little Ox of being a little red bandit and take him away. A child like that who's never hurt a fly in his life, what harm can he do?"

They both lapsed into silence. Uncle Chin struck a match and lit his pipe. He smoked and sipped alternatively.

Uncle continued his story. "Big Swindler said that the wife should pay the husband's debts, and if she couldn't pay them, she must either sell herself or give away Little Ox. Damn it, is there no humanity in the world?" Uncle's voice was shaking.

Hot tears streamed down my cheeks. I felt I was choking. I almost cried out . . . but uncle spoke again.

"Ai, Brother Chin, when they took Little Ox's mother away, they had her bound with ropes. She told me that when they got to Harbin, she'd drown herself in the Sungari, so that her body would float back to Little Ox. . . . Brother Chin, when our father died Little Ox's mother was only nine years old. It was I who brought her up and found her a husband that she liked. But who would ever have expected her to come to an end like this! Before she left, she lingered outside the window, weeping. She tore a small hole in the paper and took a last look at her son while he slept. Whenever I see the hole, I think of my sister. . . ." Uncle was choked by tears.

My own tears were trickling into my ears. Quietly I turned my head on one side.

"Old Chou," said Uncle Chin putting down the wine bottle and emptying the ashes from his pipe. "This is not fate, this is the doing of the Japanese imperialists. Old Cheng died an honourable death, he was a true Chinese. He and the others killed the Japanese and the foreman and set our hearts afire! For the last few months, neither the Japanese nor the foremen have dared to set foot in the pits. The output of coal

has dropped. They've set up more wire fences around the miners' area, but they'll never be able to get the miners to dig more coal for them. . . . Old Chou, if you want to do the right thing by your sister, you must bring Little Ox up and tell him the whole story. He's a bright youngster, he'll not forget what the Japanese have done."

I could not contain myself any longer. I called out "Mother!" and burst out crying.

Uncle did not know why I was crying. He thought I had been dreaming of mother again.

All that night I lay silently weeping. Many ideas heaped up in my mind. I wanted to go to the coal-mine to square things with the Japanese and avenge my parents. I also wanted to find mother even if she had gone to the end of the world.

"Uncle," I said the next morning when I got up, "from now on you don't need to lock the door. I'll listen to whatever you say, and I'll not run out."

Delighted, uncle agreed. In the afternoon Chin Niu returned from the village. She was happy to find me in a peaceful mood. She had brought along a basket of red dates from her grandmother's and gave me as many as I could eat. She had missed me, she said, and was worried for fear I might cry myself ill.

After that, Chin Niu and I went out every day together to pick over spent coal. She hoped to make enough money out of this to send us both to school. If there was not enough for both, she said, that I should go first.

"Chin Niu," I said to her one day when we returned from our outing. "I'd like to be a coal-miner!"

"What! And leave me on my own?" she exclaimed panic-stricken. "Then I won't be able to go out to pick over spent coal. Without you the hooligans and the Japanese children will bully me."

"I'll still come home after work," I argued. "When I earn some money in the coal-mine, I'll be able to afford to send you to school, then you won't have to pick over coal."

"Are you really serious?" Chin Niu was dumbfounded. "Which mine will take you?" she added. "What can you do?"

"I can do everything," I said with a sniff. "I've made up my mind to be a miner, so you'd better mind your own business!"

"Who cares about your business?" Chin Niu sobbed. "I'll go to my grandmother's where I can have everything I want. Who wants to pick over this sort of thing!" As she spoke, she made as if to throw away the coal in her basket. But then she hesitated and carefully selecting two of the smallest pieces, dropped them on the ground by her feet. Suddenly she ground them into the mud with her heel.

"Ah, Chin Niu, Chin Niu, you think I want to be a miner so that I can make money? I want to find my life-enemy. I can never rest until I avenge my father and mother. . . . But you're only a girl, how can I talk over such a matter with you? . . ."

Two days later I asked uncle to let me go into the mines. He said he had already heard something about it from Chin Niu. "Apart from the fact that you're too young now, even when you grow up, I'll not let you go down the mine. Better for you to sell vegetables. Hundreds of men have been buried alive in that stone coffin."

That night I could hardly sleep. There was only one way out—to go to Harbin and find mother. The next morning after I had got up and eaten a piece of bread, I waited for uncle to leave. Then taking good care not to be seen by Chin Niu, who seemed to know what was going on in my mind and constantly kept an eye on me, I picked up the jacket mother had left for me and stealthily jumped out of the back window.

I did not know which way Harbin lay. I only remembered hearing uncle tell Uncle Chin that mother wanted to drown herself in the Sungari River when she reached Harbin . . . then Harbin must be near the Sungari. I began to make my way along the bank of the river. The snow was deep and I sank up to my knees at every step. The wind was piercing. But I had only one wish . . . to see mother. I imagined myself falling into her arms and weeping. I'll tell her that I'll never leave her again, I thought. *If we die, let's die together. . . . Mother, you look much thinner, you must have been missing me. . . .* Then she will give me a big hug and kiss me. . . . As I walked along I was lost in thought and the tears began to fall. Suddenly I tripped over something and fell, and snow got into my mouth, down my collar and up my sleeves. When I picked myself up and collected my wits, it began to dawn on me that I had bitten off more than I could chew. I'll be starved to death before I get there, I thought. Even if I get there, how will I ever find mother? I stood still, nonplussed. The wind whistled past me, freezing my tears into miniature icicles on my face. The snow was now falling heavily and soon I found myself in it up to my waist. Some crows flew overhead cawing loudly. Should I turn back? I thought. I decided against it. Better to die than not find mother. With a great effort, I dragged myself forward. My legs were numb with pain. Suddenly I took a false step and fell headlong into the snow. The flakes came down thick and fast. The black crows flew lower and lower.

. . . I saw mother come and put the jacket over me. I was quite clear-minded and remembered that I must ask her where she had gone. So I grabbed her hand and called: "Mother!"

"Child, are you awake?" somebody said in my ear.

There seemed to be so many things covering me. I thought that probably mother had found me in the snow. I wanted to sit up but



someone pressed me back and said, "Little Ox, there's a good boy! Lie still!" Opening my eyes I found myself on my own *kang* holding Uncle Chin's hand. Chin Niu stood by my side with a cup of water. Her eyes were red from crying. Uncle was pacing the floor wringing his hands.

I was filled with remorse and burst out crying. . . .

IV

I was so skinny and undersized that uncle thought he could safely let me apply for a job in the mine, so that they would turn me down and that would be the end of the matter.

Early one morning, when the streets were thickly carpeted with snow, I put on mother's jacket and secured it with a rope around my waist. It looked neither like a gown nor a jacket, but as long as it kept the wind away, it would have to serve. Along with many others, I climbed up onto a lorry going to the mine. My teeth were chattering with the cold. As the lorry started I saw Chin Niu come running out to the cross-roads. There she stood and wiped her eyes, watching us until we disappeared around a corner.

As soon as we arrived at the mine, Big Swindler herded us into the miners' shed and looked us over. After what seemed like an interminable time, he selected a few of us. My heart sank. Then suddenly Long Neck came to me, grabbed me by the nape of my neck and measured me against an iron shovel standing in the corner. "You little brat," he shouted, "you're not even as tall as the shovel! What can you do, hey? Come along to see what you can pinch, I expect!" So saying he banged my head several times against the handle of the shovel. Stunned with pain, I saw stars before my eyes. I dodged into a corner and stood there glaring. It was all I could do not to hit out at him.

Big Swindler was outraged. "You little rat," he growled, showing his yellow teeth. "Can't take it, eh? Get out of here quick!"

At this moment a moustached Japanese by the name of Niikawa came in, his eyes blinking. "You, all of you may stay and work!" he declared.

Long Neck turned to me.

"Go and find yourself some work to do. You can sweep the floor, wash the bowls, clean the miners' lamps, deliver letters and other things."

But before I could get out of the shed, he called me again. I had imagined that he might be a bit better than the others but I was to find he was just as bad. He ordered me to wash his dirty pants which stank so much I had to hold my nose. Picking up a boot he made a threatening gesture. "Don't like the stink, eh?" he cried. "I'll make you taste it, if you don't look out!" Just then Big Swindler shouted out for me in a stentorian voice: "If you don't come quick, I'll break your legs!" Seizing this opportunity, I threw the dirty pants on the ground and stamped on them.

The others were sent down the pit. I was left on my own like a solitary ghost. I had no heart for work. But neither the Japanese nor the foremen gave me much peace. They complained that I did not do enough and sent me off all over the place on trifling errands. At the end of the day, my legs ached with fatigue. "I came to the mine to avenge my parents, but what can I do? I'm so helpless?" I thought.

However, I decided not to be too rash, but to await my chance.

A few days afterwards the situation changed. The miners were put under stricter watch and two sentries were put on the fort. The electric wire around the miners' shed was turned on during broad daylight.

A group of miners had come from the Fushun Coal-Mine. They were said to be hard to deal with. If one of them was angry with you the rest would back him up and if one of them hit you, said the foremen, the others would set about you and beat you to death. . . . The Japanese were afraid of them and took care to keep them away from the men captured earlier as well as from the miners who lived outside. Thus these men were completely cut off from the outside world.

I went back and forth as usual. One morning after I had returned from delivering a message to Yamamoto, the head of the Security Section, I was starving hungry and found a bowl of left-over rice to eat. Just as I was taking my second mouthful, Niikawa rushed in and snatched the bowl away. He said that he had been looking for me all over the place. I told him where I had been but before I finished he slapped me across the face, knocking my cap off. I stood with my teeth clenched.

After he had gone I sat down and buried my head in my lap. "Are you Little Ox?" somebody suddenly said behind my back. "You live in the same compound as Uncle Chin, the door-keeper of the hospital, don't you?" As he spoke, he laid his hand on my head. I looked up to find Uncle Wang, the cook at the miners' shed, standing in front of me. Wang was known as a good cook, and whenever the foreman, Big Swindler, gave a dinner party for the Japanese he would ask him to cook for them. "I live opposite Uncle Chin," I replied.

"You've been beaten again!" he said when he saw the tear-marks on my cheeks. Wiping my eyes, he gave me some advice. "Learn to be wiser," he said, "and keep your eyes open! When the Japanese are around, look busy, but as soon as they turn their backs, take it easy. Be patient, and remember that sooner or later we poor people will stand up!" He got me a bowl of rice from the kitchen. Crouching down by the door, I ate it hungrily.

Then he sat down on a slab of stone outside the door. Pulling out a copper pipe, he filled it and stuck it in his mouth. But instead of lighting it, he pulled it out again. "Little Ox," he said, stretching out his arms, "come over here!"

I went over to him, puzzled. "Little Thin Ear," he said, putting an arm round me and pulling my ear gently. "How old are you now? You've got a pointed chin and your ears are so thin that I can see through them when you stand in the sun." His eyes misted up but I could not make out why he was talking like this.

When I told him how old I was, he patted my head and murmured to himself: "I've been away from home for exactly nine years! . . . Your ears are really so thin! . . ." He lowered his voice at the last sentence.

He kept on ruffling my hair. I felt something hard on his hand. Looking up, I found it was a heavy silver ring which he wore on his second finger. "Uncle Wang, why do you wear a silver ring?" I asked, twisting it on his finger as I spoke.

He gazed at me for a moment. "I brought it from home!" he said.

"Were you captured by the Japanese?"

"Yes — I was!" He stared at the ground, lost in thought.

"Then where is your home?" I began to chat with him.

"My home? It is far, far away from here!" He looked up at the sky as if trying to find his home there.

"Uncle Wang," I asked him again, "who else do you have at home?" The loving way he tickled my ear reminded me of my father. I clung to him closely.

"Who else do I have?" he raised his voice as if questioning me. "I've got everybody," he muttered, "and I've got nobody. I was digging ginseng on the East Mountains when I was captured. . . ."

"How big were the ginseng you dug?" I asked from curiosity. "People say that a seven-ounce piece is called an 'elixir' while an eight-ounce piece is called a 'treasure.' Is that so?" When I was a child I used to dream of going to the East Mountains to dig ginseng as a means of supporting my parents.

"We've dug many as heavy as a hundred catties each!" he said, gazing straight at me.

"You're not speaking the truth," I said, opening my eyes wide. "Can a piece of ginseng be as big as that?"

"They were living treasures, they were man-eaters. If all of them could be rooted out, we poor people would soon be able to stand up! . . ." At this moment Uncle Wang was summoned by Big Swindler. He stood up and as he walked away, he emptied the tobacco from the pipe into his pouch.

One night he told me that he once had a little boy who would have been my age if he had lived. Now he had nobody and no home.

This is what had happened. After the Japanese invasion of the north-east on September 18, 1931, the army of the local warlord in north-east China was tricked by Chiang Kai-shek into retreating beyond the Shanhaikuan Pass, so that the Japanese took over the north-east without any trouble. They looted, killed, raped and set fire to places everywhere they went.

Uncle Wang then lived in a walled village near the Fengtien-Peiping* Railway line, two *li* from a steel bridge which crossed the river Liao.

When the Japanese took the bridge, they sent raiding parties out to the village. Every day for a fortnight the villagers ran away to hide, returning to the village after dark. During the day, there was not a soul left in the village. But one wet day, thinking that the Japanese would not come, they stayed home, dug up their small hoards of rice from where they had buried them and began to cook.

Just as their food was ready, a shout was heard, "The devils are coming again!" In a minute came the sound of shots mingled with the screams of women and children.

* Fengtien and Peiping are now called Shenyang and Peking.

Uncle Wang's house was one of the first they entered. As he heard the warning shout, the soldiers were already at his door. Hastily he jumped over his back wall and ran away. They fired at him but the bullets flew over his head. His wife, over seven months pregnant and with a three-year-old in her arms, crept into a pile of straw in the yard. There she was soon discovered by the Japanese, who threatened her with a bayonet, demanding food and young girls. She remained where she was on the ground, clasping the toddler. One of the soldiers grabbed the child by the neck and pulled but she would not loosen her grasp. Then they began to kick her hard in the belly. She fainted and before long was writhing in labour. The child fell to the ground, crying. Then the Japanese stabbed her in the back and killed her.

Later they piled up some firewood and set the house on fire. They also threw the child into the fire. When Uncle Wang came back he found his house gutted and his wife lying dead on the ground. He did not shed a single tear but sat in the yard all night, stunned and silent.

Then he buried his wife and went to the East Mountains. . . .

After Uncle Wang had told me this story, he and I became close friends. He used to call me "Little Thin Ear," and whenever I had some free time I used to help him with odd-jobs.

Uncle Wang kept in constant touch with Uncle Chin. I became their messenger. Since I had to deliver letters several times a day for the Japanese I became bold enough to put Uncle Wang's letters in with the same batches. When I came to the guard post, I would hold the letters high and announce, "The great lord's letters!" Thinking to myself, *Don't you dare touch me, I am a confidential messenger!* Every day I grew happier to think that I was at last doing something against the Japanese.

The Japanese were getting more ruthless and on the slightest pretext would arrest miners and send them to the Security Section for interrogation. One day Uncle Wang asked me to keep watch for him. "Little Thin Ear," he said to me, "keep your eyes open! I want to have a talk with Brother Chang from Fushun of the No. 9 Shed and after that I'll see Brother Kang who was wounded yesterday. You mustn't let the Japanese come into the shed and catch me there! Eh?"

I understood. I knew that Uncle Wang was making contact these days with the miners from Fushun. This was a matter of great importance. The Japanese were trying to sow dissension between the miners here and the ones from Fushun. Yesterday the devils forced the old hands to leave the shed so as to make room for the Fushun miners. They said that if they did not move out of their own accord, the Fushun men would throw them out. . . . But later Uncle Chin wrote to us exposing all their tricks. Uncle Wang said that the devils must never be allowed to break the unity of the miners. Unless we were united, he said, the Japanese would swallow us whole.

No sooner had Uncle Wang gone, than Big Swindler had a visitor. Long Neck came to the kitchen to heat some wine. "Where's the old fellow?" he asked staring at me. "Tell him to fry a bowl of bean noodles for me!" "He's gone to Lord Yamamoto," I said. "There's nobody here!" "Aren't you somebody?" his eyes became rounder. I thought to myself that if I told him I couldn't cook, he would not only give me a good hiding but probably dash into the miners' shed to find someone else to do it. I tried to remember how Uncle Wang used to do it. First I soaked the bean noodles in hot water to soften them and then I put some oil in the ladle. The stove was too high for me so I stood on a stool. Just as the noodles were sizzling nicely, Long Neck shouted out, "Still not done? How long do you have to take?" What with the heat of the fire and panic, beads of sweat stood out on my forehead. Then I heard Big Swindler swearing. I poked the fire and the flames roared up. In a minute, it seemed, the noodles were burnt black and yellow. Regardless of all, I carried them over to the foreman. He glanced at them, then without a word picked up his chopsticks and rapped me several times over the head, dragged me outside and flung me to the ground, kicking me as he did so. As I struggled to my feet he continued to shake his fist in my face and growl. At that moment Niikawa came along, smiling broadly at the prospect of a bit of baiting. He made me carry a cup of hot water on my head. I felt rather relieved that it was Niikawa, not Yamamoto, for if it had been, my story about Uncle Wang would have been exposed. My back was painning me so much that my lips were trembling. I glared at them with my eyes full of tears, and thought to myself: "You wait! When I'm strong enough, I'll dash you all to death."

When Uncle Wang came back I did not tell him what had happened. I tried to keep my face turned away, for fear he would see that I had been weeping.

Fortunately he had too many other things on his mind to pay much attention to me. "Little Thin Ear," he said, taking a bowl of gruel from the back of the stove, "you've done your job well. Now do me another favour, take this porridge to Brother Kang in No. 9." I took the bowl and went off. My back was hurting more than ever.

Uncle Kang had been laid up for several days with wounds on his leg and back. He was one of those captured recently from the villages. On his eighth day of work he was injured in a roof fall. His injuries were not too serious, and after ten or fifteen days of rest, he expected to be back on the job. When I entered the No. 9 Shed I found a dozen or so people sitting around a pot of corn meal, eating. After greeting Uncle Chang, whom I knew, I walked over to Uncle Kang and gave him the gruel. "Is there anything you want?" I said. "Is there anything I can get for you?"

"Now what do I want?" he said in a faint voice. "Whatever I want, I can never have. Ai, you're a nice kid. Ever since I had this accident,

you're always coming to see how I'm getting on. When I'm up and well again, I'll be able to pay back your kindness." He tasted the gruel and took a tiny sip. At that moment Yamamoto and Big Swindler came in on their round of inspection. "Hi," they shouted at Uncle Kang when they saw him lying down, "why aren't you at work?"

"I was injured in the back and leg," said Uncle Kang. "I can't work."

"That won't do!" yelled Yamamoto lifting Uncle Kang's worn quilt with his stick. Big Swindler grabbed Uncle Kang by the collar and dragged him onto the ground. "No, no, please don't!" Uncle Kang shouted in pain. "Why not?" said Yamamoto. "If you can't work, you can die!" So saying, he hit him several times with the stick. Uncle Kang was knocked insensible. The miners put down their bowls and glared at Yamamoto and the foreman indignantly. Yamamoto gave Uncle Kang a parting kick and then he went out. The miners all rushed forward and lifted Uncle Kang gently onto the *kang*. Big Swindler, standing by, cast a look at Uncle Kang and said: "He'd better be up and at work tomorrow. Anyone who can't work will be beaten to death." "Does a dead man have to work too?" Uncle Chang raised his voice. "That's right," echoed the others. "Must a dead man work too?" Big Swindler flinched under the angry eyes of the miners. "All right!" he said with a forced smile. "Let him rest until he's better." He slipped away.

It was several hours before Uncle Kang came to. When he found me sitting by his side, he grasped my arm. "Sonny," he said, "I also have a son. . . . But I don't know whether I'll ever see him again. . . ." The tears came to his deep-sunk eyes.

I was not far from tears myself, but I tried to comfort him. "Didn't you ask Uncle Liu, the door-keeper, to write him? You'll see him again, all right. . . . He'll come here soon."

Uncle Kang sighed wistfully, his eyes bright with hope.

The next morning I fetched a tin of ointment and a feather from Uncle Chin and before I went to dress Uncle Kang's wounds, Uncle Wang prepared the usual bowl of gruel for me to take to him. But when I reached the shed, Uncle Kang had disappeared. It was impossible that he had gone to work. His wounds were far too bad for that.

Then I found Uncle Liu, the door-keeper. He told me that Uncle Kang was taken away the night before and buried alive in the Ten Thousand Men's Pit. The men had heard him shout: "I want to see my son. . . . I don't want to die!" I went back to the kitchen with the bowl in my hand and leaned against the wall and wept. Uncle Wang stroked my head. "We must always remember this!" he said.

I went to the lamp shed and was just about to clean the lamps when Niikawa dropped in carrying a meal box and a half bottle of beer. My old jar with the green onions growing in it, was standing on the table. Without saying a word, he brought his stick down on it and smashed it

to pieces. I stood there watching. Spring was drawing near and I longed for some green. That was why I had planted the onions. He was still not satisfied, even after smashing the jar. Raising his stick high, he stepped towards me. At this juncture, Big Swindler peeped in through the window. Niikawa ran out. Angrily I opened his meal box and spat inside.

In a minute he returned. "Young idiot!" he said, glaring at me. "Get to work!" Then he picked up his meal box and the bottle and went away.

Big Swindler and Long Neck were strolling to and fro outside the window. "Lord Yamamoto told Niikawa," Big Swindler was saying, "that fellow Kang's wife has come from the village. She's still quite young, they say. So we'll send somebody over to the inn to fetch her with the message that her husband is ill. Once she's here we'll grab her and have her sold."

"I hear she has a child of five or six!" said Long Neck in a low voice.

"Oh, we can soon settle him! Tie a rope around his neck, put him in a bag and throw him in the river through a hole in the ice. But we mustn't let a word of this leak out to the miners. If his wife gets to know that he's dead, she won't come with us."

My first thought was to tell Uncle Wang. I could not stand by and see a woman sent to her ruin.

Uncle Wang told me I should go to the inn and warn her as soon as possible. If I was too late, the devils would get there first, then we could do nothing. He bade me tell the miners about it. Then he gave me a food box so that I could tell the guards I was delivering food for the Japanese.

Just as I was beginning to worry about the chances of getting by the guard post with a box of food, Niikawa handed me a letter for Yamamoto. The very thing I needed! I passed the guard post without being questioned. It was snowing heavily outside. I was wearing a ragged wadded jacket and a pair of old rubber shoes worn through at the heels. I had no cap, so I wrapped my head in an old towel Uncle Wang had given me. Gasping against the wind and snow, I began to run but my legs soon became numb and twinges of pain began shooting through my feet. Nevertheless, I kept on running until I could run no longer. I sat down on a log and rubbed my toes with my swollen hands. Then I ran on. . . . When I reached the inn, it was already dark. I found Mrs. Kang and broke the news to her about her husband's death. Then I told her of the plan to trap her.

Mrs. Kang, holding her little boy in her arms, cried bitterly when she heard the story. "You must get away quickly!" I urged her. "Some day we will get our revenge! . . ."

She embraced me. "You've saved our lives. . . ."

I put my arms around them, and pressed my cheek close to the child's. "The same thing has happened to both of us!" I sighed. When I looked up into Mrs. Kang's thin dark face, my heart ached even more.

Mother and son left the living hell of Fuchin that same night.

V

The Sungari had begun to thaw but a thin layer of ice was still forming here and there during the night. The flow was so swift that it dazzled the eye to watch it.

Every morning an empty freight train pulled out from the working site. Its iron doors were wide open like the mouth of a roaring tiger. Several days previously the Japanese had given each of us a white cloth tab with a number on it to sew on our jackets. Whenever Big Swindler saw us he would say with a false smile: "Well, as soon as your term's up, you'll be going home." But every day when the steam whistle sounded the men were forced down the pit. No one could guess when they might leave, if ever. Someone said as a joke that they should wait on the home-view platform.* But no one could really tell what the Japanese were up to.

I had just got my month's pay. What was left after the deductions for food and various other items was only enough to buy three catties of corn flour and a small bunch of onions. After supper I thought of going home to give the money to uncle.

"Little Ox," Uncle Wang called in a low voice as I was about to leave, "take this letter to Uncle Chin for me." Then he hastily sewed the letter into the lining of my sleeve. "It's no small matter," he said. "It concerns the lives of hundreds of people. You mustn't lose it on any account." So saying, he grasped my hand so tightly that his silver ring hurt my fingers. I wondered why all of a sudden he should call me "Little Ox" today. But it was no time to be asking questions. "That's all right," I said confidently. "I'll not lose the letter, as long as I'm alive."

I knew that the situation in the coal-mine was getting tense. Although every day saw more miners forced down the pit, not much coal was coming up. Since the riot the year before, the miners were more united. No Japanese or foreman dared to set foot down the pit for fear of being killed by the miners. The struggle was sharpening.

Uncle Wang looked so serious I was aware that the letter must be urgent, although he had not said so. As I went out of the shed, I had a premonition that something was going to happen.

*Legends in China have it that the ghosts of the dead go to a home-view platform for a last look at the loved ones they left at home before they depart for the other world.

While I had been with Uncle Wang over the last few months, I had learnt that he and Uncle Chin were sent here by the guerrillas fighting the Japanese in the mountains. They had often told me that it was the Japanese and the traitors who had ruined my family. The guerrillas wanted to drive the Japanese out and take the coal-mine which would then belong to us, the poor people.

As I approached the guard post I pulled myself together and strode forward.

"Hey, there, you bastard!" Two gaunt Japanese came out from the post, their bayonets pointing towards me. "The great Lord Yamamoto sent for me," I said calmly, concealing my agitation.

The guards considered this for a moment. Then one of them ordered me to unbutton my jacket and turn out my trouser pockets. The other came over to examine my jacket but seeing it was so ragged he contented himself with pulling it off me and throwing it on the ground. "Get along! Get along!" he said. My heart leaped, for the letter was in the jacket. "Sir," I shouted, "I have nothing on my back, I'll freeze to death." I tried to jump forward to get my jacket. As I did so, one of them swung his bayonet at my throat. Fortunately my foot slipped and I fell on my back, so his bayonet missed me. "Little Ox," I said to myself, "don't be a fool. You mustn't lose a letter which is worth more than your life." Again I tried to crawl towards the jacket. The first guard brought his boot down on my right hand, and threatened to bayonet me if I moved. "I've no clothes on," I yelled aloud. "I'll be frozen." I tried to stretch out my left hand to get the jacket but the second guard picked it up, and crouched aside to search it. Suddenly he jumped up holding the jacket high. I feared he had found the letter. But without even looking at me he flung the jacket aside. The other, whose eyes were keener than mine, immediately lifted his boot off my hand and rushed over to him. Seizing my chance, I grabbed my jacket and ran down the hill as fast as my legs would carry me. They were now fighting with each other and paying no attention to me. In one breath, I sped to the foot of the hill and felt for the letter. It was still there. I breathed a sigh of relief. But when I groped in my pocket for the money; I found it was gone.

The sky was clouded over. The snow was falling lightly, the flakes melting as soon as they touched my face. A gentle breeze was blowing from the north-west. The snow underfoot had melted during the day but now it was freezing again and creaked underfoot as I walked. My wadded jacket was torn all over. I cursed my hands for their idleness, for I had plucked the cotton out bit by bit as the days got warmer. I never expected it would turn so cold as it was now.

I came to Japan Street where all the Japanese families lived. Their children were real little bullies. Usually I took a roundabout way to avoid them but sometimes, out of bravado, I purposely came this way.

Today my thoughts were so occupied, I had come upon the quarter without realizing it. I summoned my pluck and walked on. Suddenly a group of children dashed upon me. I did not want to deal with them now, so I took to my heels. But as luck would have it, my shoe came off, tripping me so that I fell down. They were on me at once, slapping my face, laughing and tugging at my clothes. I refrained from hitting back, and concentrated on protecting the letter in my sleeve. But time was passing and they did not seem likely to leave me on their own accord. I decided to get rid of them. Catching them unawares, I sprang forward and butted a tall fellow with my head. He fell back, winded, and I dashed away. I comforted myself that one day I would have my revenge.

When I reached home Uncle Chin was out. "Little Ox!" exclaimed Chin Niu. "Your face is all swollen? What has happened?" Hot tears gushed out from my eyes. I told her about my mishaps. She was indignant. "Yes," she said firmly, "we'll get our revenge some day!"

Before I could ask her where Uncle Chin had gone, he came back. As soon as he saw me his face broke into smiles. "Little Ox," he said, "you're here! I've been worrying because we had no one to deliver a message to the miners' shed."

I tore open the lining of my sleeve and gave Uncle Chin the letter from Uncle Wang. I saw that Chin Niu was itching to tell Uncle Chin about how I had been beaten up, but I frowned her into silence.

Uncle Chin read the letter. Then he asked me if I could go back at once. "Such a long way," he murmured, looking me over and frowning. "I'm afraid it'll be too much for you."

I straightened up my shoulders. "Uncle Chin!" I said. "Don't you worry about me, I'm all right. Don't you yourself say we shouldn't fuss over our personal discomforts when we work for the good of all? Besides, I want



to get my own back for my parents." He leaned forward and picked me up. "You really *have* grown up!" he said. Then he whispered into my ear, "The guerrillas will come down from the mountains tonight, and the miners will join them. You must hurry back and tell them to get ready. Old Wang says in his letter that the Japanese will shift a big batch of our miners to another mine during the night. They're going to swop them for some others, so it'll be a good chance for us. But there's one thing they'll never be able to change, and that's our hearts — they're red to the core and they'll stay that way."

"Uncle Chin," I said beside myself with joy, "let me go and fight the Japanese."

"You're already fighting them," he said, running his fingers through my hair. "I tell you what I *will* do. I'll ask them to take you to the mountains."

"Won't they say I'm too small?"

"I don't think so, since you've been doing such a good job!"

"Sew the letter inside my jacket," I said to Chin Niu. She was bringing out an extra jacket for me to wear. I feared it was the same printed one she offered me last time. How could I wear a girl's printed jacket? Besides, it was her one and only! But as she handed it to me I saw she had dyed it a greyish blue colour. So as not to hurt her feelings, I put it on under my own.

Uncle Chin asked me if I would have any trouble getting past the guard post. In point of fact, the guards would have been likely to bayonet anyone trying to pass at that time of night, but I did not mention this. I told him I would not have to go through the guard post, I could easily go round by the back of the Ten Thousand Men's Pit and sneak through the wire fence by the drainage pool. Before I set out he urged me again to be careful and told me that if the letter was not delivered by midnight we would be in trouble. He also warned me to keep indoors if I heard any shooting about one o'clock.

When I left it had stopped snowing. The sky was overcast with dark clouds and there was a fierce north wind blowing. I trudged along, stumbling and falling this way and that, grazing my hands and face. My legs were stiff with the cold. Now I was getting near to the wire fence. The wind was blowing hard, and a half moon shone dimly through the dark clouds. Quietly I crawled forward around the pool. Half way around, I stopped to reconnoitre. There was no one in sight! I was through the fence before I caught sight of a shadow under the tree. It was a Japanese sentry and he was coming towards me. I lay flat on my stomach, but he came nearer and nearer. Hastily I turned and rolled into the pool. It was just deep enough to cover me. I lay on my back leaving only my nose above water. At that moment I was

too afraid of being late for the uprising at one o'clock to feel either cold or frightened of anything else.

The sentry stood by the pool looking round for some time and only left when he had satisfied himself there was nothing there. Quickly I got up and ran off, but before long I found my clothes freezing hard, so that I could scarcely move. I began to crawl. When I reached the miners' shed, I had a hard struggle to stand up. I threw myself through the door, and stiff as a board, crept over to Uncle Wang's bed and tugged at the corner of his quilt. He woke up, astonished, and quickly jumped out of bed and hugged me. My tongue was no longer under control. "Uncle . . . Wang . . ." I faltered hoarsely, "here . . . is . . . a letter . . . for you. . . ." Before I could finish I lost consciousness.

When I came to, I wondered whether it was one o'clock yet. Opening my eyes, I found that I was lying on our *kang* at home with my mother's old jacket over me. Nobody was around except Uncle Liu, an old messenger in his sixties. He was sitting by my side. I tried to get up but he pushed me down. "Don't move," he said. "Tremendous things have been happening. The devils were transporting some miners to another place but the train had hardly passed the guard post when the others blew up the Japanese camp. Many Japanese were killed. I heard Niikawa was among them. The miners all got away to the mountains!"

I wanted to sit up. As I moved, I felt something around my neck. It was a piece of string, with a silver ring attached to it! Uncle Wang's ring! I tried to call for him but I had no voice.

Uncle Liu began to whisper something into my ear. "Uncle Wang stayed behind to cover the others' getaway," he said. "But he was wounded and captured by the Japanese. The soldiers went to search his place but found nothing. Finally they took him off to the Security Section. If he hadn't sent you over here earlier, they would have grabbed you, too. What ever were you thinking of, going into the water at midnight?"

I was stunned at the news. Tears began to flow from my eyes. "Uncle Wang," I said to myself, "you used to always have your wits about you, how could you be so stupid as to fall into Yamamoto's hands?" Grasping the silver ring in my hand, I swore to avenge him. A rush of hot blood came to my face, and drained away as quickly. A pain passed through my head and I fainted away again.

VI

As soon as I was up I went everywhere trying to get some news about Uncle Wang.

Uncle Chin was even more fond of Uncle Wang than I was, but he remained very calm. "Little Ox," he said, when he saw that I was upset, "your Uncle Wang has plenty of courage. They'll never get a word out of him. . . . If the worst comes to the worst, he'll die an honourable death! More than two hundred of us have got away to the mountains. They'll avenge him! There's no need for you to run yourself into trouble. Why not do as I say?"

I was struck silent by his words. How could I disobey him? He was such a good and selfless person that everybody in the coal-mine loved and respected him. He had once been a miner but after he had an accident, he came to the hospital as door-keeper. I had heard the story. One day when the miners were working down in the pit, there was a gas explosion and the pit caught fire. The miners flung down their tools and ran for safety, and the fire-alarm began to blow. At this moment Uncle Chin edged his way through the crowd and stood in front of them. "If we want to live," he shouted, "we must put out the fire!" So saying, he poured a bucket of water over himself and fetched two bags of sand. The others came back to help. . . . Finally they got the fire under control. It was then that they found Uncle Chin lying unconscious. When they carried him out they were enraged to see that the Japanese were in the process of sealing the mine. As soon as they heard the fire was out they moved the barriers away and set the miners free.

If Uncle Chin had not kept his head and taken the lead, more than a hundred miners would have been trapped and buried alive by the Japanese. Uncle Chin lost four fingers of his right hand. They were so badly burnt they had to be amputated. It was said that Uncle Chin's house was considered a place of refuge by the women in the miners' living quarters. When a man had been pushed round all day by the Japanese and the foremen, he would sometimes resort to drink and vent his grievances on his wife. The women used to take refuge in Uncle Chin's house. Once a man with a hoe in hand came chasing his wife right up to Uncle Chin's door. Uncle Chin stood firm. "And just what do you think you're doing?" he asked. At this, the man fell back, laid aside his hoe and apologized to his wife.

After Uncle Wang's arrest I had no heart for work. In spite of Uncle Chin's anxieties about me, I sneaked home every day from the mine to see if there was any news about Uncle Wang. On the fourth day after the break-out I was on my way home, when I had a sudden premonition that something had gone wrong. I hastened onwards, my heart beating fast. On reaching home, I gasped at the sight that confronted

me. Uncle Chin's house was in chaos. The doors and windows were smashed to splinters and things lay strewn all over the floor. My uncle's door was locked. What ever had happened, I wondered. I went next door. The neighbours said that Uncle Chin had been taken away by the Japanese and that Chin Niu had taken refuge somewhere. I felt absolutely defeated. My knees shook, and I leaned against the wall for support. . . . Later, when I went to fetch Chin Niu, she flung herself into my arms and wept.

It appeared that when Uncle Chin came home from work, a man came to the door wearing a workman's jacket over a pair of Western-style trousers. Uncle Chin quickly handed his tobacco pipe to Chin Niu and told her to go into the other room. Standing at the door with his hands on his hips, the man looked round arrogantly. "Are you the rice seller?" he asked Uncle Chin. By then Uncle Chin had spotted a car standing outside and bodyguards lurking in the background. "No, I'm not," he answered coldly. "We don't even have husks, let alone rice." "Damn your cheek," cried the man. "Who are you to talk like that? You're against the Manchukuo Government and Japan, eh?" "I'm a miner," said Uncle Chin. "If my ancestors heard you say that, they'd pour their blessings on me." "Oh," roared the fellow, "a Communist, hey?" He grabbed Uncle Chin and took him away.

Chin Niu wept continuously despite my efforts to comfort her. In fact, I was crying myself, so how could I comfort her? Uncle took me aside and told me that during the night of the break-out, one of the miners stole back home instead of going with the others to the mountains. But no sooner had he reached home than he was arrested and sent back to the mine. They flogged him until his flesh was torn, and subjected him to electric shocks. Finally he broke down and told everything he knew. So Uncle Chin was arrested. Clenching my teeth, I swore that I would catch that yellow-bellied fellow and stab him a thousand times. . . .

I had never told Chin Niu what Uncle Chin was doing. "Little Ox," I remembered Uncle Chin saying to me once, "you're so good to Chin Niu. You treat her just as though she was your own sister. If anything ever happens to me, I'll have no worries on her account." That evening I tried to cheer up Chin Niu. "Since Uncle Chin was not the rice seller," I said to her, "they'll be bound to let him go." She turned her face away, as though she knew I was not speaking the truth. In a few moments she lay down on the *kang*, worn out with crying. I watched her till she fell asleep before I dozed off, too.

Suddenly we were awakened by gun shots. Chin Niu sat bolt upright, looking agitated. Then she shook my uncle awake. "Why are they shooting?" she asked. "I don't know," said uncle in a strained voice. "For no good purpose, I'll be bound. Either killing or robbing, I suppose. Little Niu, go to sleep and don't worry!" Chin Niu, tightly grasping uncle's arm, was soon asleep again.

The next morning she awoke before daybreak. She looked apprehensive. Getting up from the *kang*, she went out on her own.

I sprang to my feet and followed her. When she saw me, she clutched my sleeve and broke into tears. "Little Ox," she sobbed, "something must have happened last night. Yamamoto was killing people—probably dad was among them. . . ." She buried her face in her hands and cried. For a long while I could not speak, and my heart ached as though it had been pierced by a knife.

"Little Ox!" said Chin Niu. "Let's go to the back of Yamamoto's house and peep through the cracks in the fence." She started to drag me away.

I knew it would be dangerous but I could not dissuade her. When we came to the cross-roads not far from the riverside, we saw four figures in uniform emerge from Yamamoto's house on the east side of the road, dragging a blood-stained gunny bag towards the river.

"Little Ox," said Chin Niu, her lips trembling, "it may be my father." Then we heard a dog bark in the compound. "Old rascal," someone shouted, "will you speak or not?" I took Chin Niu by the hand and hastened towards the fence. We could hear the dog growling, as though it was worrying something. Crawling forward, we peeped through the cracks in the fence. There stood a tattered blood-stained figure of a man tied to one of the stable posts. It looked as though the dog had been tearing him. "Will you speak or not?" Yamamoto and a special agent shouted in unison.

I looked at the feet of the man. Surely those are Uncle Chin's shoes, I thought. My heart started to flutter. Before I had time to speak, Chin Niu had also recognized them. She burst out crying. Heavens, what were we doing? I covered her mouth and pulled her down into the ditch.

The dog barked in our direction.

"Oh!" we could hear Uncle Chin groan.

"He's passing out, throw cold water over him."

The agents fussed about and paid no attention to us.

Holding hands, we crawled out of the ditch and back to the fence. Chin Niu looked calm and unafraid.

"Oh! Oh!" Uncle Chin was coming to himself again.

"Are you a Communist?" shouted Yamamoto, leather whip in hand.

"Yes, I am!" declared Uncle Chin, glaring at his torturer.

"Will you tell us all you know?"

"I know nothing!" Uncle Chin's voice was loud.

"Speak out, who else is against the Manchukuo Government and Japan?" Big Swindler cut in.

"All Chinese people with a conscience are against the Manchukuo Government and Japan," Uncle Chin said, lifting his head.

Yamamoto's eyes glinted. Turning towards the dog he rapped out an order. The dog leapt upon Uncle Chin. . . .

"The Chinese people . . ." shouted Uncle Chin, "will drive away . . . the Japanese . . . imperialists!" Suddenly he straightened up, waving his hand, then slumped forward. He lay still on the ground, silent. In vain they poured cold water over him. He lay motionless.

"Throw him into the river!" Yamamoto ordered. "Seize his folks and kill them all." He threw away the whip and wiped his bloody hand on his leather boot.

Several of the men began to put the corpse into a gunny bag.

"Sir Yamamoto," said Big Swindler, cocking his head with a flattering smile, "he has a little girl at home." As he spoke he pointed at Uncle Chin's corpse.

"Sir," interrupted Long Neck, "he's also got a godson — the boy who delivers your letters."

"Eh, what's that?" At the prospect of a new victim, Yamamoto picked up his whip again.

"The dead man Chin's godson," explained Long Neck once more, "is the boy who delivers your messages. . . ."

"Fetch him quick!" Yamamoto broke in before he had time to finish.

The special agents immediately set out in a car.

I pulled Chin Niu down into the ditch. She was deathly pale, and before long she had fainted. Flinging her on my back, I set off, intending to follow the river. But where could we go? Like a puff of smoke, the car sped in the direction of our living quarters. If they can't find us there, I thought, they will search everywhere. Where can we hide? The more I worried, the more exhausted I became, and with Chin Niu on my back I could hardly make any headway at all.

Suddenly a man came up from behind us. He was wearing a straw hat, and had a rope tied round his waist with a copper pipe stuck in it. He looked like a peasant. In his hand he was carrying a basket with several fish in it. "What a coincidence," he said, patting me on the shoulder. "Aren't you Little Ox and Chin Niu?"

I stopped short but did not dare to answer. Then he tilted back his hat, and I recognized him as a man who had often called on Uncle Chin. I had never known his name. He lifted Chin Niu off my back and put her on his own. I followed him carrying the basket. "Uncle," I said after we had walked a while, "where are we going?"

"Up to the mountains, son."

"To fight against the Japanese?"

"Uh-huh!"

"How do we get there?"

"Just follow me!"

When we had gone about two *li*, Chin Niu sighed but did not open her eyes. Two more turns brought us to a quiet cove on the river. He stopped and laid Chin Niu on the ground. Then he rolled up his trousers and pulled out from among the rushes a small boat with a fishing net over it.

He put Chin Niu in the boat and I sat beside her. As he pushed off from the bank, he turned to us. "If anybody asks who you are," he said, "just say your name is Liu, and that you are called Little Ox and Little Niu, my son and daughter." The day began to break, the stars faded and a stretch of white mist covered the surface of the river.

Our boat was drifting with the current. Now and then as I dipped my hand into the water I wondered where the bodies of Uncle Chin and Uncle Wang had drifted to by now. They might even have floated out to sea. . . . Mother also drowned herself in the river. Turning my head, I saw that Chin Niu's face was smeared with mud. I tore a strip of cloth from my jacket, soaked it in water and wiped her cheek.

She woke up and gazed at me but said nothing. Perhaps she could not remember what had happened. "We're going up to the mountains to fight against the Japanese," I whispered in her ear. "We'll be able to avenge Uncle Chin and my parents!"

Still she said nothing. Lifting up her head, she looked at the boatman and her eyes fell upon his pipe. I realized then that, strangely enough, his pipe was the same as Uncle Wang's. Chin Niu at once fumbled in her pocket and drew out another like it. She handed it to the boatman. The boatman pulled out the tobacco holder and extracted a note from inside the pipe. I guessed that it must be about where we should go in the future. The boatman, having read it, chewed it up and spat it into the river. Despite myself, I felt a little indignant. What a girl! Why had she never told me anything about it? And I had done so much more than she had. But as I saw her lean against the side of the boat, her eyes filled with glittering tears, I simply could not blame her.

The sun rose. It shone upon the river, turning the water flaming red.

Translated by Chang Su-chu
Illustrations by Hou Yi-min

LI-MING GOES TO WORK ON THE LAND

WANG HSI-YEN

It was nearly noon by the time Shih Hsiao-ming and his parents got home from the station. They had been to see off his brother Li-ming, "the young biologist" as Professor Lo called him. Professor Lo taught in the same university as father, and Li-ming was one of the assistants in his department. Today the young biologist had left to work in the country.

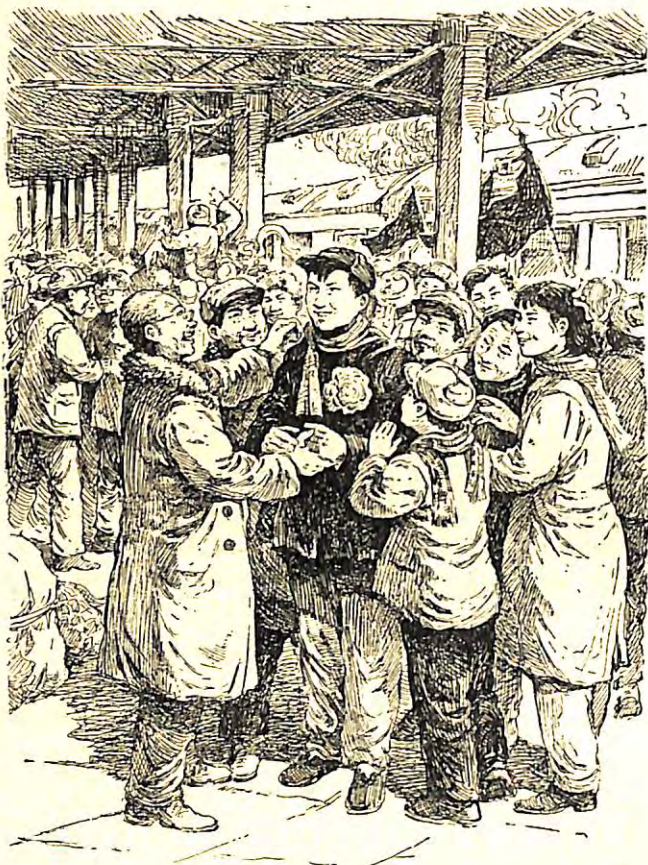
"We'll ask leave for Hsiao-ming so that he can send his brother off," mother had said.

So he had gone with father and mother to the station. On the platform they found Li-ming the centre of a noisy, jolly crowd. He was one of a large group from the university going down to the country, and all of them had smiles on their faces, and on their coats big red paper flowers presented by their colleagues or students. With his cap on the back of his head, Li-ming stood out from the crowd on account of his height and the gestures he made as he talked. The delegation which had come to see them off had brought red banners right on to the platform. Only drums and gongs were missing. This station was always fairly busy, but with Li-ming and his friends, not to mention those who had come to say goodbye—including Hsiao-ming and his parents—it was much more lively than usual. You could hardly hear your own voice above the greetings and laughter. While still near the entrance to the platform, Hsiao-ming caught sight of Professor Lo's silver head. And a few yards further on, a broad red ribbon in her hair, was Lin.

"Lin! Lin!" he called eagerly.

She had seen them too. Waving a hand in a red woollen glove, she ran over.

Lin was Li-ming's special friend, and the Nursing College where she taught was very close to their home. Though she and Li-ming were not formally engaged yet, the family considered her as one of them. Father and mother liked her, and so did Hsiao-ming. Perhaps it was the



crispness in the air that made her plump cheeks so rosy today. Li-ming was being greeted by so many friends at once that he seemed quite distracted. Hsiao-ming squeezed up to his brother, and shook his hand just like a grown-up. Warm-hearted Professor Lo gave Li-ming a tremendous hug and slapped him on the back, roaring with laughter till his glasses nearly fell off. Then he squeezed his way to another group and father followed him, because others were pushing this way. Hsiao-ming naturally paid no attention, but clung to one of Li-ming's hands while

mother kept hold of the other. Since Lin was more polite, she was swept to one side. But very soon father came back, and pulled Hsiao-ming away so that mother and Lin could speak to Li-ming before the train started. Li-ming was smiling broadly, and a lock of hair had fallen over his eyes like a horse's mane. Then father called mother too, but she refused to move. She straightened her son's blue padded jacket, smoothed his scarf, and nestled close to him — she only came up to his shoulder — as if she wanted to keep even Lin away. In fact, Lin was standing back, very still, by a pillar. Li-ming had stopped smiling now and bent his head to catch mother's parting instructions.

"... Write at least once a week." There was no end to the advice mother was giving. "The letter needn't be long, but be sure to write. . . ."

When the train carried Li-ming off, Hsiao-ming and his parents threaded their way through the cheerful crowd out of the station. Mother bumped into several people on the way. She tripped on the station steps too, and would have fallen if Lin hadn't caught her arm. As Lin

had to go back to college she took a tram while Hsiao-ming and the old folk climbed into the university bus which had brought Li-ming and the others. Mother looked quite lost, swaying with the jolting of the bus. She was still smiling, but Hsiao-ming noticed that her eyes were moist.

"She's going to miss Li-ming," he thought sympathetically, and edged a little closer to her. This was mother's way. When she saw father off to a conference in Peking her eyes had been red too, and she had bumped into several people on the platform. Mother would like to keep the whole family at home by her side every minute of the time. But how could she stop father attending conferences or Li-ming going to the country? Why, in a few years Hsiao-ming would be going to conferences in Peking himself, or would be seen off at the station like Li-ming to go to some far-off farm. . . .

Hsiao-ming envied his brother enormously. It was such an honour to go to work on the land like this, with a red paper flower on your coat and so many friends to see you off. Besides, in the country you could herd water buffaloes or drive tractors. But he was too young. Li-ming would never have taken him, and father and mother would never have let him go. In a mood of self-pity, Hsiao-ming reached home.

Once home, the three of them sat down in father's small study. Father took off his coat with the otter collar, and chose his favourite wicker chair by the desk. Mother sat by the stove, still in her outdoor things, and held out her hands to warm them. Hsiao-ming was so hot that he kept wiping his forehead. From the kitchen behind came a smell of smoke and fried fish, the clatter of pans and the sound of a dropped chopstick. Their maid, Liu, was getting lunch. It was nearly noon, and Hsiao-ming discovered that he was ravenous.

But father could not sit idle, though he was just back from the station and lunch would soon be on the table. He went into Li-ming's room. Ranged on the young biologist's shelves were glass bottles and specimen cases which Hsiao-ming was forbidden to touch. At the thought of the bats, butterflies and snails in them, Hsiao-ming ran after his father, whom he found tidying the shelves. Father stacked the books neatly, put the specimen cases in orderly rows, and covered them all with old newspapers. Mother came in too and made the bed, spreading a dust-wrap over it. Then they both tidied his desk.

"Well, will Li-ming be there this time tomorrow?" mother asked.

"He'll be in the provincial capital tomorrow. It may take him another day to reach the village." Father covered the desk with old newspapers too.

"All I mind is the distance."

"What does the distance matter? It's the same whichever part of the country he goes to: he'll be working with the peasants, farming."

"But the farms in the suburbs are so much closer. He could just step on a bus and be home in no time."

"Listen to you! The boy's only just gone, and you're thinking of his home-coming!"

Mother did not answer this, but changed the subject.

"These children don't know what it is to be cold." She looked at Hsiao-ming. "In weather like this we like to sit by the stove, but he's perspiring! Mind you don't take your cap off straight away, or you'll catch cold!"

There was no end to mother's rules of this sort. You must wear a mask to go out, start every meal with soup, warm your bed with a hot-water bottle before getting into it, wipe the knife for peeling apples with alcohol. . . . She was very particular. Although Li-ming was grown up, mother still insisted on warming his bedding every night before he went to bed. And as for the way she tried to coddle Hsiao-ming, it was unbelievable. Father often teased her about this, and Li-ming had threatened to move into the bachelors' hostel, but she felt it was her duty to mother them. Now Li-ming had left by train with a roll of bedding to work on some far-away farm. It was no use worrying about him now. How Hsiao-ming envied him! Mother fussed far too much.

"Just wait!" he thought cheerfully. "A few more years, and I'll go down to the land too!"

As soon as they had finished Li-ming's room, Liu served lunch. And during the meal she asked mother: "Was Miss Lin upset to see Li-ming go?"

"Upset!" Mother sounded indignant. "She looked as pleased as if it had been their wedding!"

"Why shouldn't she have looked pleased?" asked father. "It's certainly something to be pleased about, the university allowing Li-ming to go in the first batch to work with the peasants for a period of time! If his fiancée's pleased, his mother should be too."

"So I am," said mother.

"Still worrying about the distance?"

"It would be better if it weren't so far. You surely learn just as much from work nearby as at a distance. Why should he have to go to a different province?"

"You can't call it a different province — his old home."

"It may be *your* old home, but Li-ming has never been there in his life. He doesn't even know where your family lives — so you can't call it his old home!"

"Isn't that all the more reason for going back to get to know it? In our parts they have a saying: Trees have roots and men have their homes. Everyone should have some corner of the country that is his old home."

Father loved to sing the praises of his village. Whenever a letter came from it or he met someone from that district, he would launch into an enthusiastic description. Hsiao-ming knew that his father's old home was a village of about a hundred households, with the houses in a long row: those at one end were storeyed buildings with white walls and black-tiled roofs, those at the other were thatched cottages. In front of the village was a willow-bordered brook of clear, sweet water, in which you found tiddlers, tiny shrimps, and crabs no bigger than a finger-nail. Behind was an orchard of magnificent date trees where thousands of bees sipped nectar in the summer, and by the time the branches were laden with dates the chirping of cicadas nearly deafened you. He knew, too, that there was an old woodcutter in the village who must be nearly eighty now yet could still carry a full load. When father was small he often galloped through the street on this uncle's shoulders. On the Double Ninth Festival this woodcutter carried him to see the village opera, and he sat on his broad shoulders all through the performance before being carried home again. One of their aunts there had been killed by Japanese soldiers, leaving a lame cousin who was now the swineherd in the agricultural co-operative, and such a good pig-breeder that his name had been in the papers. Hsiao-ming had heard all this time and again, but father never tired of repeating it, and promised that he would take Hsiao-ming back with him some holiday to "have a look at the old place and taste the delicious brook water." But year after year passed, without this promise being kept. They had made a trip to Mogan Mountain one summer, but that was all.

After lunch Hsiao-ming had to rest for a while. Then he shouldered his satchel and went to school. Coming home he ran straight to the study, only to find that father was not back from the university. That meant he would not be home till dusk. Then Hsiao-ming hurried to the sitting-room, where he found Liu standing on a bench cleaning the windows while mother and Mrs. Lo were at the table cutting out characters for slogans. This was for the campaign to wipe out the Four Pests—rats, mosquitoes, flies and sparrows. The snipping of their scissors and the rubbing of the glass made a pleasant sound. Plump Mrs. Lo in her silver-rimmed glasses spoke slowly and was very good-tempered. She was one of mother's best friends and a member of the faculty wives' committee, who bustled about the residential section of the campus, reminding one maid to sweep the road before their gate and another to turn off the tap in their backyard more tightly. She had a hand in everything, and was kindness itself when anyone was in difficulties. The night before she had helped mother do up Li-ming's bedding roll, and now here she was again helping her cut out characters.

"Did you see your brother off this morning, Hsiao-ming?" Mrs. Lo asked slowly, smiling over the top of her glasses.

Hsiao-ming answered briefly, hanging his satchel on a chair.

"Are you sorry he's gone?"

"It's an honour to work on the land — why should I be sorry?"

"In a few years, when you're old enough, will you go to some farm too?" Mrs. Lo put a newly cut character on the table.

Hsiao-ming nodded without speaking. The answer was so obvious, she need not have asked. Not long ago their farm master had taken them over a tractor station. When he grew up he meant to be a tractor driver. He would sit high up in the tractor with both hands on the wheel, and — chug, chug! — would plough acres and acres of land.

"He's his father's son," said mother. "I used to think Li-ming took after me. But even he is growing more and more like his father. He's for ever lecturing me. I'm the only backward one in this family."

"It's not a question of being backward at all," said Mrs. Lo cheerfully. "A mother is always a mother. A father is different."

"The principle of the thing is simple enough. Most intellectuals are bookworms who don't know the first thing about practical work, mistake wheat sprouts for leeks, and can't recognize the staple grains. And then they're so soft, they can't stand wind or frost. They should do some manual labour to toughen themselves and learn what work really means, so as to respect labour and get closer to the working people. Do you think I don't understand that? Of course I do! I'm just sorry he's gone so far. You know, Li-ming's never been away from home, and once he becomes absorbed in his microbes he's blind to the world — he has no idea how to look after himself."

"Yes, if he'd gone to the suburbs he'd have been much closer," agreed Liu.

"But when I say that, his father laughs at me." Mother cut another character crooked. "He accuses me of not supporting this movement whole-heartedly. But who's he to talk? He's not much better himself. When Li-ming volunteered to go he consulted his father, and I can tell you my husband was in two minds about it. Then the university authorities agreed to let our boy go in the first group, and Li-ming came home walking on air to announce the good news. Though his father said all the correct things, he didn't sleep that night. I laughed up my sleeve at him, thinking: 'So you worry about your son too!'"

"Yes." Liu turned round to confirm this. "Professor Shih gave us money to prepare better meals, didn't he?"

"As there's no one else here, I may as well tell you the truth." Mother suddenly became confidential. "He bought half a dozen bottles of cod-liver oil capsules. Just slipped out that day and bought them. But he wanted *me* to give them to Li-ming. Said the boy might accept them from his mother. Li-ming absolutely refused though. Those

capsules are now in a drawer in the cabinet. Hsiao-ming will have to eat them."

"I won't!" protested Hsiao-ming.

"Then your father will have to eat them himself. That may teach him not to laugh at other people!" For a moment mother actually smiled.

"But you know, you really don't have to worry," said Mrs. Lo, holding up another character she had cut out. "Look at our third boy. Just after liberation he ran off to join the army. He went south to fight Chiang Kai-shek, and then joined the volunteers and went to Korea. You should hear the tales he tells. The temperature was thirty degrees below zero, they lived in some sort of tunnel in the hillside, and day and night they were strafed by American planes or under bombardment from their heavy artillery—imagine it! But he stayed there nearly three years, and you saw him when he came back. He'd grown taller and put on weight. His face was ruddy, his cheeks had filled out, and there was a spring in his step. His health had improved out of all recognition! When I saw him I realized I'd been worrying for nothing. The old proverb still holds true: 'You bear the child, but you can't keep him.' The world belongs to the young today, doesn't it?"

"That's right," put in Liu. "When the fledgelings' wings have grown, they leave the nest."

"If he'd waited till the spring it would have been better—warmer. But winter came late this year—it's only just started."

"You know the saying: 'Summer and winter are testing times.' Winter is a bracing season. It's no use being afraid of the cold. Work out of doors improves your circulation so that you don't feel the cold. If you don't believe me, wait till Li-ming has farmed for a year and see if he isn't much fitter than he is now. Young people adapt so easily."

While Mrs. Lo and mother were talking, Hsiao-ming conjured up a picture of "the young biologist" with his ungainly hands and feet and his thin neck, who kept his nose buried in books or his eyes glued to a microscope all day. He was glad to know that going down to the country would make Li-ming stronger. He picked up an extra pair of scissors and started cutting up odd scraps of paper. His mother's scissors seemed to be playing tricks on her—they kept cutting crooked.

Liu finished cleaning the windows and carried the dirty water back to the kitchen. Dusk was falling outside. Some way off—it might have been by the university gate—a truck passed with gonging and drumming. Mother wiped her eyes and put down her scissors. She turned on the light, and the room became bright and cheerful. Mother urged Mrs. Lo to go home, because it was time to get supper. But Mrs. Lo was still there and the room was still full of paper snippings when father came back with his shabby black brief-case.

At supper father talked as much as ever. Not just about Li-ming, but about the young lecturers and assistants in his department too. Hsiao-ming knew most of them, as they often came to the house.

"The office is covered inside and out with wall-newspapers." Father was in high spirits, and his chopsticks tinkled against the rice bowl. "Only two of my department were allowed to go in the first lot. So now everybody wants to be included in the second. The applications are becoming more and more ingenious. . . . The times have certainly changed. Young people today don't know how lucky they are. When I was a young man there were so many pitfalls ahead of us. One careless step and in you fell, perhaps hurting yourself so badly in the process that you lost heart completely. But today a broad, bright highway stretches before us all if only we have the courage to forge ahead. No one need worry about his future. And what other anxieties can he have? Why, even rabbits can become lion-hearted!"

They were still at the table when Lin arrived, wearing the same red ribbon as at the station. Her cheeks were as rosy as ever, and she was smiling.

"Have you had supper yet?" asked mother. "Do come and join us. Liu, bring another bowl and chopsticks, will you. It's a very simple meal."

But Lin said she had already eaten. After a slight commotion she took a seat by the table, and joined in the conversation. She gave them the latest news of the Nursing College and the Health Bureau where she had worked before. Her colleagues were all annoyed that their college hadn't got down yet to accepting their application to go to the country. They felt they'd be more use there than other people—they could nurse as well as farm. Applications to go down to the country were pouring in at the bureau—nearly everyone had applied—and the wall-newspapers posted up reached practically to the gate.

Lin was not usually very talkative, but tonight she had plenty to say. And her chatter seemed to help mother find her appetite. Without noticing it she ate her normal amount.

After leaving the table they all went to father's study. Liu was particularly helpful today. Without a word to anyone she had put chairs ready in the study and brewed a pot of the best green tea. The only light in the room was the desk lamp with its green shade, which lit up the middle of the desk but left the rest of the room in semi-darkness. Mother turned the shade back so that the whole room was bright, and they sat round the stove. Hot, fragrant tea steamed in their cups.

"I suppose you'd have signed on too if you'd still been in the Health Bureau," said father, taking up the conversation where they had left off.

Lin nodded.

"Someone like you will probably be allowed to go, eh?"

"They take all factors into consideration. If I'm not allowed to go the first time, I shall go the second."

"Far away?" How mother harped on the distance!

"Wherever I'm sent. Everyone says the suburbs aren't the real thing. It's better to go further."

Hsiao-ming thoroughly agreed. Of course it was better to go further like Li-ming, to travel by train as far as possible. The virgin soil in the north-east or Sinkiang in the north-west would be so much better than the suburbs. He understood what was worrying mother. Still, she actually hadn't contradicted Lin. In fact, mother seemed much less depressed. She had even stopped sighing.

Just then the cheerful voices of Professor and Mrs. Lo rang out by the kitchen. As they lived in the next row of university houses, only separated from the Shihs by a small vegetable garden, they always came in the back way. Professor Lo was a favourite with Hsiao-ming. Though his hair was white he walked briskly, had a booming voice and was forever laughing. Wherever he went you heard that laugh of his.

"Aha, I see we're in luck! Here you all are snug by the fire!" Professor Lo strode in chuckling, and plunged into his subject without waiting to sit down. "Well, this is a fine business, I must say! Those allowed to work on the land have left in high spirits. Those not allowed to go are sulking! Do you know why some people are annoyed, Old Shih? They say: Why was Shih Li-ming able to go when we're not? It must be his father's face. As if going to work on the land were a question of face! Did you ever hear anything so ridiculous!"

"There are people here who think he's gone too far." Father glanced slyly at mother.

But mother turned a deaf ear. She started talking to Mrs. Lo about the best ways to get rid of flies and mosquitoes.

"Do you know Old Sung in our department?" asked Professor Lo, taking a cup from Liu and sipping the tea. "The fellow's fifty-seven, only two years younger than I am, yet he insists on going to work in the country. He's already sent in two letters of application, and run seven or eight times to the Party committee to insist on being sent next time. He's more set on going than the youngsters!"

"I thought those over fifty weren't being considered," put in Lin from her corner.

"But there's reason in what the old ones say. Old Sung argues that the younger generation will have plenty of chances in future. But time won't stand still for us older men, and in a few more years we shan't be any use on the land. So we ought to have priority. Can you refute that argument?"

The small room rang with talk and laughter. It was never quiet wherever Professor Lo was. Liu filled their cups twice, and mother

peeled apples. Someone put a piece of orange peel on the stove, and soon its pungent scent mingled with the smoke Professor Lo and father were puffing out. The room became so smoky that Hsiao-ming's nose tickled.

"I am sure this is the first time in history anything of this sort has been done." Professor Lo's silver hair glinted in the lamplight. "Chairman Mao said: '... The ultimate line of demarcation between the revolutionary intellectuals on the one hand and non-revolutionary and counter-revolutionary intellectuals on the other lies in whether they are willing to, and actually do, become one with the masses of workers and peasants.' Going to work on the land is the way to become one with the workers and peasants, and by doing this we intellectuals can really change our class stand and our ideas and behaviour. It's the way we must go, the lesson we must learn. The rightists claim that intellectuals are born Marxists who understand Marxism by virtue of being literate and have no need to change their bourgeois ways of thinking and feeling through working with the people. But that is utter nonsense! Take my case. I went to Europe in my twenties to study natural science, and ate bread instead of rice till a hard crust formed over my brain. Without some pretty sharp knocks, that crust could never be broken. What's to break it? I know now — honest manual labour with working folk! But it's not an easy thing to take these knocks, because our intellectuals have always looked down on manual labour and therefore on working folk."

"That reminds me of an experience I once had." Father's thin face looked graver than usual. "I was about the same age as Hsiao-ming here, perhaps a couple of years older. One day during harvest I slipped away from my mother — who coddled me even more than Hsiao-ming's mother ever coddled our sons — and went with one of our farmhands to the fields. I had set my heart on helping them bind the paddy sheaves. But do you think the farmhands would let me? They didn't dare. Still, I pleaded and cried till they gave in. But that evening I ran a high fever — a moderate case of sunstroke. And that kind-hearted farmhand got the sack! If you like to call that manual labour, it was my first and last experience."

"Well!" Professor Lo stubbed out a cigarette. "I didn't even have that much experience."

"Knowledge is born of labour," father went on. "Intellectuals of bourgeois origin who never take part in manual labour can't possibly see the collective strength of the workers and grow puffed up, imagining themselves superior to everyone else. And that cuts them off from ordinary folk so that they can't serve the people whole-heartedly. The last few days, since Li-ming's application was accepted, I've been thinking. I always considered myself devoted to the country and my old home. But what did I actually love? The weeping willows by the brook, the date trees behind the village, the morning dew, the sunset —

natural beauty that any outsider could appreciate. Was that all my home meant to me? It ought to have meant that old farmhand who was sacked and all those others who supported us by the sweat of their brow, who have now stood up and are building themselves a better life. If I speak of knowing my village, I should know them, their life in the old days and — even more — today. Home is more than scenery. First and foremost, it is the men who till the soil. . . .”

“Quite right!” Professor Lo had punctuated this speech with approving nods.

“This morning when I said goodbye to Li-ming and saw the train heading towards my village, I thought: ‘Good, he’ll get to know our old home.’ I have only just woken up to the fact that really to know your home you must do as Li-ming is doing, go and live with the villagers, eating and working with them. This sounds simple enough, but it isn’t so easy to be convinced of it. . . .”

Father looked ready to go on talking for hours. This was a way he had. If he was in the mood he would run on and on whether you understood him or not. Hsiao-ming gave a yawn, then another, till his eyes began to water. Unfortunately, these yawns reminded mother that it was his bedtime, and he had to leave the cheerful study to go to his bed in a small room off his parents’ room. He hadn’t even asked Professor Lo how many wall-newspapers asking to go to the country Li-ming had written.

As he lay in bed — the quilt had not been warmed today — Hsiao-ming could hear the buzz of talk from the study, Professor Lo’s voice booming above the rest. But by degrees everything grew less distinct, the sounds seemed to float into the distance and he started dreaming. He dreamed that he and Li-ming were seated on a huge tractor which was being pulled by a water buffalo. His brother’s big hands held the wheel. The buffalo ran so fast that Hsiao-ming was afraid of being thrown off. He caught hold of Li-ming’s shirt and shouted:

“Brother!”

“What’s the matter, Hsiao-ming?”

He opened his eyes and found he was in bed. Mother was calling to him from the next room. The guests had gone and everything was dark. Only through the open door he could see the glow of his father’s cigarette.

He let go of the quilt he was clutching. Rather ashamed of his dream, he lay so still that he heard what his parents were saying.

“So now Li-ming has gone.” Father drew on his cigarette, which glowed more brightly. “Why do parents always worry about their children? Either we’re afraid that our boy won’t be able to stand hardships, or we’re hoping that the work will improve his health, as if we

and our children were the only people in the world. Why can't we take a broader view? Don't laugh at what I'm going to say. The word 'mother' has always been sacred. . . . We ought to set an example for our children. . . ."

Father drew on his cigarette again, and Hsiao-ming fell asleep once more.

At once his dream came back. This time the buffalo pulled the tractor to their house, charged through all the rooms and into his father's study, where it started upsetting everything and ended by bumping Hsiao-ming's head on the lintel. He opened his eyes and discovered that his head was jammed against the rails of the bed. Beyond the door the cigarette was still glowing; but now it was his mother who was talking.

"It's true. Young people have changed. When I was a girl I thought love and marriage the be-all and end-all of life—a tremendous gamble with fate. Remember the first time we were separated, just for a week? Each day seemed like a year. And every evening I cried myself to sleep. . . . The girls today are different. Look at Lin. Such a quiet, conventional girl, who never even raises her voice—but what strength of character. . . ."

Hsiao-ming wanted to hear what mother would say next, but against his will sleep overtook him again. The room became a blur, and mother's soft voice died away in the distance.

Translated by Gladys Yang
Illustration by Hsiao Lin

THE MASTER CARPENTER

WANG WEN-SHIH

I

It was unusually quiet in the fields that morning. The sun was high in the sky yet no one had shown up for work. The villagers were gathered in the village streets or scattered on the main road: some carried baskets over their arms and others sacks on their backs. People walked behind wheelbarrows or rode in two-horse carts and called cheerfully to friends down the line.

It was the day of the big fair in town, and the managing committee of the agricultural co-op decided to make it a holiday. Horses were hitched to ten strong carts to take co-op members to town for a good time.

Since the beginning of summer, life in the co-op had been one busy round. The members had been fully occupied well into the autumn. There had hardly been time to go to the shops to fill the oil jars or buy charcoal. But now, the harvest had been reaped and half of the vegetables were sold. The little hill of newly picked cotton had been sent to the scutcher. This was the time, as the co-op chairman put it, "when the members' pockets were bulging and the chairman's voice was not as pleasing to the ear as that of shop-attendants." To tell the truth, all the villagers had some private business to attend to. Besides, in another few days, it would be time to start winter ploughing and then the co-op members would be so busy once again they wouldn't have a single breathing spell.

Some people went to town for oil or charcoal, others were out to buy cotton cloth, and the opera lovers headed straight for the theatres. Young lovers walked blissfully to the photographers and young suitors went with matchmakers to their chosen one's house to meet their parents-in-law for the first time.

It was a day of well-being and joy and even the most surly housewives, addicted to fault-finding and grumbling, voiced their complaints in a cheerful way.

The carpenter's wife, known as Tao-yeh's Ma, was such a grumbler. Up before dawn, her tongue had been working without rest half the morning and still showed no sign of abating. In fact it seemed to be getting sharper and sharper.

Her daughter Tao-yeh, just turned eighteen, was as pretty as the girls in New-Year pictures. Ma adored her and would not dream of marrying her to just anyone. Three suitors had been mentioned by different matchmakers but Ma was not satisfied with any of them. She stalled, saying the girl was old enough to pick her own husband. Now Tao-yeh had found herself a young man and Ma spent two months asking people all about him. She was finally satisfied with her daughter's choice and gave her approval. This was the day the young man was to come and pay his respects to the family; Tao-yeh's Ma was both delighted and impatient.

According to custom, when a young man comes with engagement presents to the home of his betrothed, the girl's family must entertain him properly. An elegant feast was not necessary but at least a good meal of pancakes was expected and presents for the intended son-in-law were an absolute must.

Tao-yeh's Ma was not one to overlook conventions. Though she herself was a poor man's daughter and had known poverty half her life, she still clung to old custom and would not have people gossip that she did not do things the proper way. What's more, in her eyes the day was a most important one and everything must be done just right. Her husband, the master carpenter, was quite another type. He didn't seem to care at all about the fuss and bustle. On a joyful day like this, instead of lending a helping hand with preparations he didn't even bother to ask how things were going but simply went about as if nothing out of the ordinary were happening. He was absorbed by something else which had captured his interest.

Of course Tao-yeh's Ma must grumble, or she would not have been Tao-yeh's Ma. She felt she was the only one in the family to realize the importance of this day. As for her husband and daughter, they were dreadful, they did not understand its significance and failed to take it seriously enough. Early that morning she vented her ire on Tao-yeh when the girl was helping her wash the vegetables. "Put that down now," she said sharply. "How late it is already and still you don't go and tidy yourself." Tao-yeh smiled shyly and slipped away.

However, Tao-yeh hadn't been gone a minute before Ma was calling, "Tao-yeh, wherever are our bean noodlés?" In the meantime her hands were busy searching the closet and the bamboo baskets in the kitchen.

"We finished the last lot long ago, Ma." Tao-yeh came in smiling. "Have you forgotten? The other week the school-teacher was eating with us and you used them all up."

Ma spread out her hands in exasperation. "Why didn't you say so earlier? Ai, at the critical moment no one in this family is of any use. As if it's all *my* affair! If you'd reminded me a bit earlier your father could have got some from town when he went to get the presents. But what can we do now?"

"Father's not gone yet," said Tao-yeh.

"What? Not gone yet?" Ma exclaimed, eyes wide in surprise. "But where is he? Why haven't I seen him around?"

Tao-yeh nodded in the direction of the little shed with half-closed door on the east side. "Father seems to be busy in there."

"Busy!" Ma's anger rose as soon as the shed was indicated. With hurried steps, she made for the target of her rage.

The single room inside the shed was fairly large. No one slept there, though the walls were properly plastered. Saws and planes of different sizes were fitted on a row of hooks half-way up the wall. Higher up there was a wide shelf on which were ranged files, chisels and different kinds of tools. In one corner stood an ax, a fret-saw and a gouge. One look at the room and anyone could tell that it was a carpenter's workshop. But, strangely there was not a single piece of wood work in the room. Instead, there were a number of odd-looking iron tools, a plough with wings, a scythe with wheels attached. . . .

The small window on the north wall was framed by a number of drafts which were stuck to the wall with briar thorns. The squares, circles, triangles and figures were marked with different measurement. On the table under the window were a carpenter's ink pot, a pair of bow-compasses, and a stack of coarse white paper. The master carpenter, owner of the room, was sitting on a bench by the table with one hand on the compasses and the other round an ox-horn pen. His eyes were fixed on the draft before him, and as he scratched his head in concentration he muttered incoherently, "Five and a half inch . . . point seven inch . . . curved, yes, wider . . . five and a half. . . ."

The door banged, but the carpenter did not stir. Head bent in deep thought he went on muttering, "Five and a half inch . . . point seven inch. . . ."

"Gracious, my immortal one! It really looks as if you'll be flying up to heaven soon."

The carpenter did not seem to hear his wife. Still lost in thought, he went on muttering, "Five and a half inch . . . point seven inch. . . ."

"Are you deaf? Didn't you hear me?" Ma asked in exasperation.

"Um?" the carpenter remained where he was, head bent and eyes on his draft.

"Um, um, um?" Tao-yeh's Ma mimicked in anger. But she knew it was useless. No matter how loudly she shouted, her husband simply

would not stir, so she strode firmly towards the strange-looking iron tools by the wall. She had her own way of outwitting him.

The carpenter jumped from the bench as if a spring had been released under him and stood between his wife and his precious iron tools. "Now, now, what do you want? Say it, I'm listening."

"What do I want? Don't you know? As if it is for me; no one seems to care a whit about it."

"Will you come to the point? Don't drag in a lot of other things."

"I drag in other things? I suppose you always come to the point, so much so that you haven't started for town when the sun's reached the doorsteps. If you dawdle a bit longer the fair's going to be closed before you get there."

"I'll start right away," said the carpenter in a conciliatory tone.

"You mustn't dawdle another minute. We have only this daughter and will have only one son-in-law. He's the leader of the Youth's Technical Team, a real fine lad: we simply must treat him well."

"Quite right," said the carpenter. "I'll start in a minute. Just let me get things finished up here." He put one foot back on the bench and resumed his position by the table.

Ma's hand shot out and grabbed his trouser leg and with her second hand she quickly covered the bow-compasses on the table. "You'll start this minute. Don't try to climb back on the table again."

"All right, I'll go," the carpenter said. "You really are stubborn, won't turn back before you get your way. Do you really think I'd miff such a simple task? It's not far to town. I'll make it in no time at all. I'll get the things you want and you'll have them the minute you need them."

"Quit talking and get started," said Ma, knowing that she had won the argument. "By the way, buy half a catty of bean noodles in town, will you?"

"Sure, sure. How can we entertain guests without noodles. Is half a catty quite enough?"

"Oh yes. There'll only be a few people."

"Good. Give me the money."

"What money?"

"Money to buy the bean noodles."

"But I gave you some money this morning."

"Isn't that for buying presents for our son-in-law? A pair of good socks, a cap. . . ."

"Haven't you any money besides that?"

"Really! As if you don't know!" The carpenter retorted with righteous indignation.

Ever since the carpenter took a fancy to those odd-looking iron tools, about two years ago, he was unable to keep a single cent in his pocket.

When Ma discovered that her husband had become a bottomless hole as far as money was concerned, she took over the family funds. She was like an iron safe with eighteen locks and the carpenter found it difficult indeed to get even ten cents out of her. At this moment, though, she knew her husband had no money to spare, but still she went on nagging.

"Always grumbling about money, where has all your money gone to?" Her eyes were on the iron tools in the room. "You've spent enough money to paper the riverside with notes but what have you bought? A pile of junk. They're neither hoe nor pick though they're nice enough. Your tools reap wheat, loosen the soil round the maize and help one person do the work of ten. You've put in plenty of time and money but where are your work-points? At the end of the year, you haven't earned much, not even as much as my Tao-yeh. And you certainly can't compare with me."

The carpenter listened patiently and made no reply. It was only when she had counted the money three times and placed it hesitantly in his hands that he tightened his belt, took up a large rattan basket and lifted the big padlock from the table.

"Come, do you really think anyone would steal that junk of yours?"

The carpenter ignored her and got ready to lock the door. He considered the shed his private corner where even his wife and daughter were not allowed to touch a thing. However, in the confusion he couldn't find the key and his wife was urging him to hurry, so he sighed and left the door closed but unlocked. "You watch the shed and don't let anyone come in and touch anything here," he told his wife sternly. His wife was actually very understanding about his work. She bowed to his masculine authority and her eyes shone with admiration. In her heart she was well aware that her husband would let her have her way in everything but if she meddled with his tools she was going too far and asking for trouble. "Run along and don't worry," she said with a tender smile. "Come back as soon as you can, though."

II

The village streets were silent and the countryside was peaceful and serene. The road leading to town was quiet; everyone had gone to the fair. Only then did the carpenter realize how late it was. No wonder Tao-yeh's Ma had shouted and fussed so impatiently.

During the past month he had been working at the head of the co-op's carpentry team and had been very busy. He spent every spare minute in his workshop. For more than thirty days he hadn't been anywhere and was completely unaware of the changes in the countryside.

It was late autumn and the fields appeared broad and expansive. The locust and plane trees swayed gently and the willows glittered in the

golden sunlight. A fiery persimmon grove by the road appeared like a scarlet cloud at sunset. Rows of straight poplars had begun to shed their foliage. Brown curly leaves fluttered down like flocks of swallows, swirling and gliding in the wind. The shoots of winter wheat showed their heads and a light green tinged the expanse of brown earth. The bare cotton stalks had not been removed and they stood in geometric designs amidst the light green carpet of wheat.

The carpenter devoured the scene with his eyes and breathed the fresh smell of the young, green wheat plants. He loved this land where he had lived for forty-five years and which was so rapidly changing its appearance. A feeling of joy and vigour rose in his heart, but when he caught sight of the bare cotton stalks sticking out of the ground, he immediately forgot everything else.

Those dried brown stalks were really eyesores. They stood doggedly in the fields as if intent on occupying large tracts of land and preventing the peasants from doing their winter ploughing. The soil was hard and dry and the tenacious cotton stalks had deep roots. It took a powerful hand to get them out one by one, yet unless they were uprooted it was not possible to turn the soil properly. Such a waste of time.

The carpenter had set his mind on designing a simple tool to uproot the cotton stalks easily. He meant to attach it to a wooden plough which would turn the soil as the tool uprooted the cotton stalks. He was extremely fond of new-style farm tools and was a kind of inventor in his spare time. Ever since he joined the agricultural mutual-aid team, this had been his hobby. He was inspired by the new tools turned out by the agricultural machinery factories. He drew on his experience as a carpenter and began designing simple farm tools. He did this by remodelling conventional farm implements, adding a small part here and there to make them do more work and save man-power. He called his inventions "small gadgets." The tool to uproot cotton stalks would be his sixth. Once or twice friendly neighbours had sent his gadgets to an agricultural machinery shop, but they had not been accepted. However, this did not discourage him. "My small gadgets are things for the village smiths, they don't require the handling of big machines. Why, if big machines are used to make this sort of thing, we might as well ask the factories to make oil wicks for us."

Whenever he happened on a blacksmith making his gadget for the neighbourhood peasants or when he saw co-op members using them in the fields, his heart would fill with sheer joy. He could stand and watch by the hour, more fascinated than an opera fan in the theatre.

At this moment, as he made his way to town, he worked his arms vigorously, now bringing them together before his chest, now spreading out his hands on both sides. He wriggled one hand, put it on top of the other, suddenly crooked one finger, paused for the effect and then

straightened it again. A picture of how his gadget should operate appeared in his mind's eye. He visualized a strong ox pulling the wooden plough. As the plough sank into the earth the attached gadget clasped a bare cotton stalk and bent it. In a flash the stalk was uprooted and swept aside by an iron rod. At the same time the plough was turning up the soil and making deep furrows. Alternately knitting his brows and smiling to himself, the carpenter muttered, "Five and a half inch . . . point seven inch . . . no, one inch. . . ."

When the carpenter reached the town fair, it was at its jolliest. A sea of human faces met his eyes and the white cloth awnings over the stalls bobbed like the sails of boats ready to put out to sea. Juicy green vegetables were piled up in little mounds. Bolts of rainbow-coloured cloth and the printed head-scarves of the women made splashes of colour. The loud hubbub of human voices rumbled like the waves at night as the carpenter rubbed shoulders and jostled along through the crowd of people.

He should have headed for the corner where clothing and foot-wear were sold, but his feet, working like an old horse who knew its way in the dark, took him down a more familiar lane. There the stalls were one streak of black and grey. There were iron pots and fire tongs, spades and scythes, heaps of hoes and miscellaneous tools, small cogs for the waterwheels, and countless nuts and bolts . . . they formed a black wave, engulfing him. He spotted familiar faces and his ears rang with cheerful greetings. Neighbours asked about his health and made friendly jokes. To the carpenter this was the nicest place in the world and the familiar noises round the stalls were the sweetest music.

"I say, Roving Wang!" Someone was calling him by the nickname his master had given him during his apprentice days. His master was often annoyed with him for being too active and footloose and too full of imagination. The carpenter had not been addressed as Roving Wang for years and he wondered who could be calling him now.

Looking around he saw Li Shuan, an old, old friend. Li had also been apprenticed as a carpenter, but he failed to master the trade and turned to masonry which he never learnt either. He then took up the blacksmith's hammer, but couldn't stick it for more than six months. Finally he turned to peddling and was gone from the villages for many years. The carpenter had not known that he was back.

"Have you returned to your old trade?" asked the carpenter, hurrying over to his friend who was sipping tea by a big ironware stall.

"Take another look," smiled Li amiably. "Does a blacksmith sell this kind of thing?" He pointed to the iron rods lying near him.

"Ho, ho, you've become a retailer."

"Yes, and sinking lower and lower, from provincial capital to a town fair. I suppose my old pals will look down on me now."

"Nothing of the sort," the carpenter answered offhandedly, as he sat down on the stool his friend offered him. His eyes were caught by the iron rods. "Oh good, you've got this stuff at last. Did it come from Shansi?"

"Yes, it's still in short supply. Usually as soon as it comes in we send batches of it to the various blacksmiths' co-ops. This time I made a point of keeping some for the fair. We have to think of our agricultural co-op customers, you know. This stuff goes real fast. I put it out only a short while ago and there are only these few left. The agricultural co-ops are terrific. I've been doing business for years but I've never seen customers like them — buy up goods in a flash, don't even pause to ask the price."

"What's the price?"

"Look at the price tag, pal," answered Li Shuan indicating the figure with a gesture of his hand.

"The marketing co-op sure has our interest in mind, this kind of stuff gets cheaper and cheaper," said the carpenter and hurriedly reached for the money in his pocket. Counting out the sum he banged it on the stall as if afraid someone else would get the goods before him. "Here's enough for four catties," he said.

"What do you want this stuff for?" Li Shuan asked curiously. Picking out a section of about four catties he weighed it and gave it to the carpenter. Taking the money, he said casually, "We work for the state now and can't consider personal feelings, otherwise I wouldn't bother with this measly four catties. I'd have let you take eight or ten catties without payment. I suppose you are buying it for your co-op. By the small amount you are buying, I imagine your co-op isn't very rich."

The carpenter shook his head. "I'm getting this for myself."

"Have you changed your trade then?"

The carpenter shook his head again and grinned.

"Oh yes, I remember now. What a stupid ass I am. Here we have your inventions right before us. How could I have forgotten all about it." He picked up a tool for digging radishes. "This is your handiwork, isn't it? We sell them like hot-cakes; customers clamour for them everywhere. With this, a man does the work of twenty in one day."

"You've exaggerated the efficiency by hundred per cent. It can barely do the work of ten." The carpenter became serious. "You mustn't exaggerate to your customers."

"I was thinking of the members of a shock brigade who'd be digging both day and night, you see," joked Li Shuan as he handed the carpenter a cup of hot tea. Then he offered his guest a cigarette.

The carpenter didn't refuse either and lit the cigarette leisurely. There is something about old friends which makes one want to linger.

Li Shuan was delighted to find the master carpenter as amiable and simple as in the old days when, as young men, they had been pals and shared a bunk.

"I say, old man, you are a somebody now," said Li Shuan, slapping him on the back. "A big man and known everywhere. Last month at the county conference on marketing and supply, the county head mentioned your name in his report. Let me tell you, that is something. Who knows, one of these days you may be asked to go to Peking."

"You're talking nonsense. I've only made some small gadgets and don't deserve all your praise."

"Believe it or not, your name was mentioned by the county head. Yes, mentioned . . ." he blinked, trying hard to remember, "three times. I'm not talking through my hat. Really three times."

The carpenter laughed and said nothing.

"See, you know all this yourself. I'm sure the county head must have visited you in person and praised you for your inventions. Did he?"

"What if he didn't praise me, pal?" said the carpenter.

"That couldn't be. No, no," said Li Shuan seriously. "This is your contribution to the country. If I could be like you and have such deeds to my credit I wouldn't need to stand at small fairs like this and expose myself to the elements." There was a pause before he asked with interest, "How many new farm tools have you invented?"

"Five," said the carpenter.

"Five! Five!" Li Shuan's eyes popped and for a while he was so impressed he could only shake his head admiringly. "Oh, five. You've bought some iron today. I suppose you're going to make another one."

The carpenter nodded. "I'm trying to work out a tool to uproot the cotton stalks in the fields."

"That'll make six. That's no simple job, I must say." Li Shuan was lost in admiration. "You must be an important client of the bank, you have a big account, eh?" he asked with a mysterious air, his eyes gleaming with envy.

"What client?" The term was unknown to the carpenter.

"An important client," said Li Shuan with the same mysterious air. "I mean you must have a big account."

"What big account?" the carpenter was still wide-eyed and puzzled.

He's pretending naiveté, Li Shuan thought, but nevertheless said, "It simply means that you have a lot of money deposited in the bank."

At last the carpenter understood. "Nothing of the sort," he said grinning. "The money my wife earns for her share of work in the co-op is mostly spent by me on this," and he indicated the iron rod in his hands.

"Of course. You need capital for anything you do, even though it may be only for peddling candied apples." Li Shuan nodded approvingly. "How much does the government give you for each tool you make?"

"How much what?" asked the carpenter rather mystified.

"Money. Award money."

"Never gave any."

"Then it's the blacksmiths' co-op who gives the award?"

"No."

"Hey, Old Roving, I'm calling you by your nickname again. . . . We worked together, remember? I'm no stranger, am I?" Li Shuan looked disappointed and shook his head. "I imagine the award isn't too big, you probably get a few hundred or a thousand yuan for each gadget. But it couldn't be much less than that."

"Honestly, pal, I don't get any awards." The carpenter was getting a little tired of the subject.

"But why do you spend time and money doing it?" Li Shuan smiled discreetly, thinking now he'd put the carpenter on the spot. "What do you get out of it?" he emphasized.

"What would you say?" the carpenter asked him.

"I'm asking you."

"You ask queer questions." The carpenter was getting annoyed.

"Queer? Ha, ha!" Li Shuan laughed craftily. "As the saying goes, 'All minds think alike,' you should know what I mean."

"No," the carpenter corrected him solemnly. "All minds don't necessarily think alike."

Li Shuan was annoyed too because he felt that his old friend was kidding him. "Never mind. I can see you haven't got your old pal in mind any more, I shan't ask questions then. I admire your achievements and just happened to ask, but you sound as if you're afraid I might borrow money of you." He made a face. "Do you really expect me to believe that you do it for nothing?"

The carpenter got so angry, he was fit to burst; he felt insulted beyond endurance. But he restrained himself, knowing that there was no point in losing his temper with a man who thought like that. Li Shuan was still making sarcastic remarks with a cunning smile, chuckling mysteriously and shaking his head unbelievably. Holding himself back with an effort, he picked up the tea-cup and went to a neighbouring stall where he asked for a cup of tea. This he poured into Li Shuan's tea-pot. Then he put out the half-smoked cigarette and replaced it in Li Shuan's pack. Taking up his iron rod, he said, "We don't owe each other anything now," and stalked off hurriedly. Behind him, Li Shuan in embarrassed silence watched him walk away. When he had reached the end of the lane, he heard Li Shuan saying in an awkward tone, "My, but Roving Wang has become more and more pig-headed. He's getting to be a real eccentric."

The lane ended at the next street. Just round the corner was a smithy, one of the work-teams in the blacksmiths' co-op. Chang, the smith, was the leader of the team and the carpenter's faithful collaborator. He greeted the carpenter with a smile and a silent nod, as he put the last few hammer strokes on a spade.

"Got lots of business?" asked the carpenter, drawing near the smoke-enveloped furnace.

"Don't have to worry about work," said Chang, stoking the furnace and eyeing the iron rod in the carpenter's hands. "Got something you want made in a hurry?"

"I'd like to get the gadget for uprooting cotton stalks made."

"Got the whole thing worked out, have you?" Chang went on stoking the fire.

"Yes, I think so."

"Leave your design with me, I'll do it in the evening."

"I forgot to bring it, but I've got the figures in my head. I'll work with you."

Chang did some hurried calculations, counted the number of spades he had finished and glanced at the memo board on the wall. "All right, we might as well get it done now. This thing will be very useful these days. I took a stroll this morning and saw stretches of fields cluttered with bare cotton stalks."

He began to pull vigorously at the bellows and the fire blazed in the furnace. Taking the iron rod out of the carpenter's hands, he stuck it into the furnace and covered it with the lid. The carpenter quickly peeled off his jacket and, in his shirt sleeves, picked up a heavy hammer. Gauging the weight of the hammer, he turned and stood at right angles with one of the young smiths in the team. "Come fellow, give it all you've got."

The bellows hummed dully and smoke and flame spurted out of the furnace and then rained down in a shower of sparks. Ecstasy burned in the master carpenter's heart as glowing as the fire. Iron and fire completely captivated him and for the moment blotted out all thought of his wife at home.

III

Tao-yeh's Ma, her face dark with anger, hurried to the edge of the village. This was her sixth trip. She climbed a little mound and anxiously peered down the road leading to town. The sun had sunk to the level of the woods at the west end of the village. Milky white smoke was rising from every chimney. Flocks of wild-geese circled over the fields and now and again the hunters' shotguns roared with a low thud.

The fair had long since closed and all the villagers who had gone to market had returned. Only the attendants of the marketing co-ops could be seen drifting back in twos and threes. They rode bicycles stacked with cotton fabrics, towels and knitted-wear or pushed wheelbarrows piled high with tins of oil packages of salt and sugar, pickles and soap.

"Did you see my carpenter?" asked Tao-yeh's Ma of a man she knew.

"No, Sister. Why? Lost your husband?"

"Who knows where he's burrowed into," said Ma plaintively.

"Don't you worry, Sister. In this society of ours, even if you lost a needle you'll get it back eventually. Why worry about a grown man? I tell you what, put up a poster. Put down the sex, age, and beard or no beard of the person you want to find and the time you lost him. Be sure to state the reward you are willing to give for news or bringing him back. I guarantee in three days. . . ."

"You rascal! How dare you make fun of your aunt! Did you or didn't you see him? Did he come to buy things at your stall?"

"No!"

Group after group of people went by. Soon the road was completely deserted. She couldn't catch a glimpse of a soul, even in the distance.

"What did I do in the other life to deserve a husband like him? If nothing else does it, he's enough to drive me to an early grave." Ma grumbled under her breath as she came down the mound and turned homewards. She couldn't very well leave her guests at home too long. Her daughter's young man and the matchmaker had arrived soon after noon and Tao-yeh, behaving with maidenly reserve, was too shy to talk freely to the guests in the presence of her mother and the neighbour's who crowded in to see the young man. Ma herself was only a woman and the mother-in-law, she couldn't do more than murmur a few conventional sentences about the crops and the weather, after which she could find nothing else to say. It was at moments like this that one felt the need of a man who could entertain the guests and make small talk. But where was that man of hers? She had half a mind to really put up a poster after him every time he went out.

Always proud and correct, Ma was now in a real state. She roused herself when she reached her own gate and paused a few minutes to make sure that her face would not betray her annoyance. Beaming benevolently she stepped into the yard.

Tao-yeh's black plaits flashed as she slipped into the kitchen and there, left all alone in the courtyard, was a young man in his early twenties in a completely new outfit—trousers, shoes, socks and cap—even the handkerchief peeping out of his pocket was new. His open square brown face and candid eyes told people at once that he was a straightforward lad who did things with a will. As soon as Ma came in, he stood up politely and met his mother-in-law's searching look with a frank smile. "Do be seated," Ma urged. "You needn't stand up. I hope you'll feel at home with us. Nowadays we aren't so feudal and you don't have to stand on ceremony with us."

"Aunt, I was just telling Tao-yeh I'll drop in to see you and uncle again some other day. It's getting late, I must be going."

"Oh no, you mustn't go." Ma was in a panic. "How could you go without having dinner?"

From behind the kitchen door, Tao-yeh put in her bit. "He's the leader of the Youth's Technical Team and the managing committee is calling a meeting this evening to discuss winter production. He's got to go."

"Quite right. But it's still early. At any rate you must wait until your uncle comes back. He did so want to meet you. If you go now he'll be ever so disappointed."

"Did he start out very late?"

"Yes, he didn't leave until mid-morning." Ma couldn't resist the temptation to talk about her carpenter. "You live in the next village. You probably know what your uncle's like. He's got all sorts of queer notions in his head. He has such a fancy for those silly implements — those new-style farm tools. You can go and have a look, his workshop's full of them." She nodded in the direction of the shed.

"Yes, our co-op uses the gadgets he invented." The young man's voice rang with reverence.

"This past month he has been quite bewitched. Buried himself in the workshop and talked about making a gadget to uproot the cotton stalks."

"A gadget to uproot cotton stalks?" The young man was all interest now.

"Yes. According to him, this thing would be able to do the work of a hundred men." Having said this Ma had a feeling that she was bragging a bit too much.

"Oh, that's terrific." The young man was very impressed.

"Sit down and make yourself comfortable. Don't go until you have met your uncle." Without giving him a chance to answer, she walked into the kitchen where Tao-yeh was pouting on a stool by the stove.

"We can't let him go home empty-handed," Ma whispered frantically to her daughter. "Go! Try to keep him here. Don't let him leave before your father returns."

"It's none of my business," said Tao-yeh petulantly.

"Go on now. What are you doing here? If he should go home empty-handed. . . ."

"Really Ma, you do fuss so," Tao-yeh said jokingly and half in annoyance. "Don't worry. If I don't give the word, he won't dare go."

The mother raised her eyebrows at Tao-yeh's remark but said nothing. At least now she needn't worry that the young man might go before her husband returned. "What happened to that matchmaker of yours?"

"He went visiting in the village. You made them wait and wait and the poor man was so unsettled he didn't know whether to sit or to stand."

"It's all the doings of your wretched father, he's simply not reliable. . . ."

Ma began to pour out her complaints against the master carpenter. As usual, once she began with her grievances there was no end. While she was grumbling the matchmaker came in, but on learning that the master of the house had not yet returned, he went out again to visit friends in the neighbourhood. Tao-yeh's Ma recounted all the old grievances she held against her husband and poured them out non-stop until the sunlight had left the roof-top and dusk descended on the little kitchen. Ma herself began to feel sleepy from all this talk and sat down by the stove to stare into space. Only then did she hear the slipslop of a familiar footstep coming in through the gate.

"Tao-yeh, stoke the fire, your father's back!" She sprang up from her seat and muttered in a low voice, "Damn him, the old thing, only remembered his family now."

The master carpenter appeared in the doorway. His face, wreathed in smiles, had the look of a victorious old general returning to camp to report his brave deeds. He was covered with soot but pride and joy glowed in his eyes and his little moustache trembled with excitement.

"My goodness, in whose chimney have you been hiding? You're all covered with soot like a blacksmith," Ma exclaimed. "Tao-yeh, hurry and bring your dad a basin of water."

Tao-yeh quickly went to the stove for hot water. Still beaming, the carpenter left his basket in the yard and came into the kitchen.

"Why leave the things outside. Bring them in, we are waiting to soak them in boiling water. Don't you know what time it is?" Ma's brows were knitted.

"Soak what?"

"Soak what! Do you mean to eat the noodles as they come?"

"Oh!" The carpenter's eyes went round and large as winecups. Goodness, now he remembered and he wondered how he was going to tell her.

Ma eyed him suspiciously. "You mean to say you forgot about the noodles? What about the other things, the presents?"

"Er . . . ah . . ." stammered the carpenter and finally said, "I haven't bought them."

"But what were you doing all this time?" Ma went to the door and peered into the basket. When she saw nothing but a "junk" in the basket her knees went weak and she sank down on the doorstep. "Heavens, what shall I do? Should I laugh or weep?" She looked quite ready to burst into tears.

Tao-yeh too was frowning. But, after all, young people nowadays are different; they no longer care much about such things. Tao-yeh didn't blame her father, instead she tried to comfort her mother. "Ma, it doesn't matter much if there's no present for him. If he hadn't brought one for me today I wouldn't have minded in the least. I'm sure he wouldn't care much whether he gets presents or not."

"Our Tao-yeh is a sensible girl," said the carpenter. "Nowadays marriages are not like in the old days when they needed go-betweens and gifts of so much cloth, cotton and silver money. Today, the boy and girl arrange. . . ."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself saying that." In ordinary days Ma would have lost her temper violently but today she limited herself to a gentle remonstrance. She was planning to get her own back later on.

The carpenter, however, didn't know where to stop. Noticing that his wife was unusually mild, he began to feel himself in the right and roared, "What do you mean ashamed of myself? You are talking rot. Nowadays marriages. . . ."

"Goodness, can't you speak without shouting so? Aren't you afraid the lad will hear it and laugh at us?"

"Which lad will laugh?"

"Our son-in-law, he's out there in the yard."

"Really?" The carpenter looked puzzled. "I didn't see anybody just now."

"You've got your eyes on the top of your head, you couldn't see anyone." Ma turned round cautiously and peered into the yard. Suddenly she stood up and went out of the door. "Where is he? He's gone!" she cried in despair.

Tao-yeh rushed out behind her and she too couldn't find the young man.

"It's all your fault, silly old man, you are terrible." Ma glared at her husband and told her daughter, "Go and look for him in the village. See if he isn't visiting somewhere."

"It's just as well that he's gone," said the carpenter with disapproval. "He seems a wild sort of fellow, to slip off without saying a word. Who cares about him?"

Ma disappeared outside the gate without answering him. Turning down the corners of his mouth to show his distaste, the carpenter rolled up his sleeves and washed his face. Flopping down by the table, he poured himself a bowl of water from the thermos. A whole afternoon by the furnace had left him absolutely parched, but while he was helping at the smithy he had not had time to drink. Now, back home, he drank thirstily, blowing on the hot water and sipping with pleasure. When he had emptied the whole thermos he licked his lips in satisfaction and glanced round the kitchen. There was a platter of food on the table and he snatched up a golden, soft pancake which he devoured in two or three mouthfuls. Then he went out and squatted down by his basket to admire his sixth gadget.

The mother and daughter returned despondently. "How you brag," Ma was reproaching her daughter. "If I don't give the word, he won't dare go. . . ! Bah!"

Tao-yeh was pouting and she looked close to tears.

Noticing the clouded look on his wife's face, the carpenter knew that a storm was brewing over his head and snatching up his basket hurried to his workshop. Half-way there he shouted, "Who told you to leave the door of my workshop ajar like that?"

Mother and daughter both looked up and stared at the shed.

Giving his wife a severe look, the carpenter strode angrily into his room. To his surprise he found a young fellow who looked vaguely familiar standing by his table. He had one hand on the compasses and the other held a fountain pen; he was scribbling in an open notebook and glancing at the draft on the table while muttering to himself, "Five and a half inch . . . point seven inch. . ."

"So you think it's point seven, eh? One inch, I tell you, point seven won't do. . . ." The carpenter roared. "How did you come here?"

The young man raised his head and stared at the carpenter a minute before he stammered, "I'm . . . I'm . . . Hsing-wa."

Tao-yeh and her mother had both reached the door.

"Ah, there you are," Ma was both relieved and worried. She was glad the young man wasn't really gone but she was afraid he had overheard her quarrel with the carpenter. How very embarrassing that would be. "Why did you hide yourself here without making a sound?" she asked, trying to find out how much he had overheard. "Didn't you hear us when we were making so much noise just now?"

"Oh, were you?" asked the young man regretfully. "I was looking at uncle's draft of the cotton-stalk remover and was so fascinated I didn't hear him come in." He grinned foolishly and looked very apologetic.

Ma breathed a sigh of relief. He hadn't heard them, but the young man's words left her feeling helpless, she wasn't sure whether she wanted to cry or laugh.

The reaction of the master carpenter was quite different. He was so glad that he completely forgot the dignity of a father-in-law and pumped Hsing-wa's hand joyfully. Slapping him across the shoulder, he exclaimed, "Wonderful kid, good boy! My Tao-yeh knows how to pick the right sort of man."

Tao-yeh smiled shyly, proud and happy. Her mother noticed the complacent look on her face and said half mockingly but with evident pleasure, "What are you standing there for? Go and bring the match-maker back for dinner."

Translated by Tang Sheng

From the Chinese Variety Theatre

ADVENTURE ON THE STREET

A *hsiang-sheng* as performed by Hou Pao-lin based on the text
written collectively by Lang Teh-feng and others

- A. I'm on my way to do a comedy dialogue show.
B. I'm crazy about your performances.
A. Ah. Do you go to my shows a lot?
B. Lately I haven't gone at all.
A. I thought you liked my act.
B. I do. But I can't stand all those restrictions in the theatre.
A. What restrictions?
B. They let you listen, but they don't let you enjoy it.
A. Don't let you enjoy it? Who said so?
B. That's right. The minute you begin to laugh, somebody in the back goes "Shhh!"
A. Of course they shouldn't do that. But they're probably afraid they'll miss the next line.
B. Anyhow it's a restriction. I won't stand for it.
A. You can't call that a restriction.
B. I won't go any place where my freedom is limited.
A. Nowadays nobody's freedom is limited in China.
B. Oh no? I was walking down the street only the other day — a nice, well-paved street. But would they let me? No! A policeman made me get on the sidewalk.
A. You were walking in the middle of the street?
B. Sure.
A. But you can't do that.
B. I can't, eh?
A. The street is for automobiles, pedicabs, and bicycles.
B. Well, I wasn't stopping them.
A. There's a lot of traffic. Suppose one of those cars hit you?
B. I wasn't worried. Who would dare to run me down?
A. Of course no one would do it on purpose. But out in the middle of the road like that — you might be hit accidentally.

- B. Are you trying to tell me that policeman made me get on the sidewalk for my own good?
- A. Of course.
- B. I don't believe it. There are just too many restrictions. Nowadays, unless I have something special to do, I never leave the house. If I do go out, I take a bus. They can't make a bus stick to the sidewalk!
- A. Don't be silly.
- B. You think it's any better on the bus? The way they treat people. I get so mad —
- A. What's wrong with the buses?
- B. Last Tuesday I had to meet a friend at the train station. I decided to go by bus. Just as I'm setting foot in the door, the bus drives away!
- A. Then wait for the next one.
- B. Nothing doing. I chased after it.
- A. What for?
- B. It had my shoe!
- A. Who told you to stick your foot in when they were closing the door?
- B. Stop, stop! You've got my shoe!
- A. And did the bus stop?
- B. No. But the conductor tossed my shoe out.
- A. Lucky for you he did. Otherwise you'd have to go to the Lost and Found Department.
- B. I was furious. I put my shoe on and went back to the bus stop. By then there were eight people in line.
- A. Take your place at the end.
- B. Me be number nine? You mean I chased my shoe for nothing?
- A. Who told you to leave the line in the first place?
- B. I walked straight to the head of the line.
- A. Did the man who was first agree to that?
- B. I explained the whole thing to him.
- A. What was there to explain?
- B. Waiting for the bus? I said. First in line, too. Lucky fellow. You can be the first to get on the bus, because you got here early. As a matter of fact I got here pretty early myself, but I've been off chasing my shoe. So when the bus comes, you ought to let me on ahead of you.
- A. A fine thing!
- B. When I finished my speech, the man smiled pleasantly.
- A. He agreed?
- B. He said I should get in line.
- A. You were wasting your breath.
- B. That sort of fellow has no brotherly feeling. He's antisocial.

- A. What right have you to call him names?
- B. If that's his attitude, then I *will* get in line!
- A. Now you're all right.
- B. No, I'm not.
- A. What?
- B. Everybody else in the line yelled — go to the end!
- A. You had squeezed in behind the first man?
- B. I thought — I won't lower myself by quarrelling with them. All that vulgar shouting!
- A. What's vulgar about it?
- B. I tried explaining to some other people.
- A. Hadn't you done enough explaining?
- B. If I could have softened them up, I might have moved up a few places.
- A. You know more ways of wasting time!
- B. None of them would listen.
- A. Of course not. Why should they let you get on first? You weren't carrying a baby. Go be the ninth in line.
- B. I tried, but that didn't work either.
- A. Why not?
- B. They made me be number thirty-six.
- A. Number thirty-six? How come?
- B. While I was explaining, twenty-seven more people had joined the line!
- A. All your talk went for nothing.
- B. The next bus came, and they all got on except me. Never mind, I thought. I'll be first on the next one.
- A. That's nothing to be proud of.
- B. I won't give an inch to anyone — no matter what kind of story he tells me.
- A. You think everyone's like you?
- B. Before I had smoked half a cigarette, another bus came.
- A. The buses run every few minutes now.
- B. There I was, first in line. But as I started to get on, the conductor stopped me.
- A. Why?
- B. Put your cigarette out, comrade, he says.
- A. No smoking is allowed in the bus.
- B. Luckily I had bought a bag of chestnuts.
- A. You can't throw shells or peels on the bus floor.
- B. I can't eat either? Stop the bus. I'm getting out.
- A. You have to wait till the bus comes to a station.
- B. What am I — under arrest?

- A. What are you talking about!
- B. There's no freedom anywhere, that's the trouble! When we got to the station, the conductor wouldn't let me off till I gave him my ticket.
- A. (*sarcastically*) Really!
- B. It was only five minutes till train time. I began to run.
- A. You shouldn't run across a busy street.
- B. I was in a hurry.
- A. That's no excuse.
- B. Cars were whizzing past left and right, blowing their horns, but that didn't stop me. With a hop, skip and jump, I took a flying leap and —
- A. Got across?
- B. Landed on my face. A car had stopped only a foot away from me. The driver was as white as a sheet.
- A. Who wouldn't be?
- B. He was very polite.
- A. What did he say?
- B. Are you trying to commit suicide!
- A. You can't blame him for being mad.
- B. Look here, I said. Let's have a little civility. Why were you driving so fast? You nearly hit me. . . . Then a policeman came up, and what do you think? He took the side of the driver.
- A. The man was in the right.
- B. What's your hurry? the policeman asked me. That was a close call. You'd better be more careful next time. All right, go along now. . . . How do you like that? He blamed me!
- A. Quite rightly, too.
- B. By the time I got to the station, the friend I was supposed to meet had already gone.
- A. You see.
- B. So I went home. The more I thought about it, the madder I got. There's no freedom when you walk, or when you ride on buses either.
- A. Nobody's restricting your freedom. It's your own fault that you get into trouble.
- B. I made up my mind. I went out and bought a bike for twenty-eight yuan.
- A. A good bike costs over a hundred. What kind of bike could you get at that price?
- B. I bought an old one. I spent a few yuan and had it fixed up.
- A. You know the traffic regulations. Do you have a good loud bell?
- B. The bell is broken, but that doesn't matter.
- A. Doesn't matter?
- B. The rest of the bike rattles so, you can hear me coming a mile away.
- A. The thing must be falling apart! Don't you know it's dangerous to ride a bike like that?

- B. I don't go very fast. It takes me ten minutes from my house to the moving picture theatre at Chienmen.
- A. Where do you live?
- B. Hsiszu Square.
- A. Why that's the other side of town. And there are traffic lights along the way. You can't make it in ten minutes.
- B. I can when there's special reason. Like the other day when I wanted to see the one-thirty show. I left home at one-twenty. When I got to the theatre I looked at my watch.
- A. One-thirty.
- B. Twenty-five minutes to five.
- A. I thought you said it takes you only ten minutes.
- B. I was delayed.
- A. Your bike broke down.
- B. I had an accident.
- A. You hit someone!
- B. Not one — three.
- A. What? You hit three people?
- B. Not all together.
- A. One a time is bad enough!
- B. That last fellow I ran into — I really had to laugh.
- A. You hit someone and you laugh!
- B. It was really very funny.
- A. What happened?
- B. I tried to pass a pedicab on the right just as he was pulling over to stop. He ran me into the curb and my bike climbed the sidewalk, hit an old man and drove him right in through the door of a drug store.
- A. Of all things!
- B. He popped in so fast the salesman nearly jumped out of his skin. What will you have, sir? asked the salesman. Not a thing, said the old man. I was pushed in!
- A. Lucky you hadn't hurt him.
- B. As soon as the old man came out, I rushed up and apologized. I'm terribly sorry, I said, but my father's sick and I'm hurrying to call a doctor. . . . He's the one who needs the doctor, the old man said. Why push *me* into the drug store? It's a good thing my bones aren't brittle or you surely would have broken a couple! . . . Then he stumped away. Wasn't that a scream?
- A. What's so funny? You don't have to kill anyone just to get to a movie.
- B. I was too late anyhow. By the time I got there, the show had already started. So I turned around and headed for home.

- A. There was no need for you to hurry any more.
- B. I took it nice and slow. But that fellow picked on me.
- A. What fellow?
- B. The driver of that car. We were going along all right, when suddenly his tail light turned red and there was a crash.
- A. He hit someone?
- B. I rammed his rear.
- A. How could you have run into him?
- B. He stopped and I kept on going.
- A. You have brakes, don't you?
- B. They don't work.
- A. Whose fault is that?
- B. I fell so hard I couldn't get up. A tram stopped and a man who got off helped me up. I took one look at him and burst out laughing.
- A. In your condition you could laugh?
- B. It was that old man I had hit a while before.
- A. What a coincidence.
- B. Oh, so it's you again, young fellow? he snorted. Trying to push that automobile into a drug store too? Quite a fancy rider, aren't you? . . . My bike was a wreck. I demanded that the driver pay for my damages.
- A. Some nerve.
- B. He was very unreasonable. Said I hit him.
- A. Well, didn't you?
- B. As we were arguing, a policeman came along. What's wrong? he says. Look at what that car did to my bike, I says. Were you in front of him or behind him when the accident happened? he says. I—I was ahead of him. Then how did your front wheel get twisted? he asks. Who knows, I says. Better ask him.
- A. Well!
- B. I don't have to ask him, he says. I saw the whole thing. Now how do you think we ought to settle this thing?
- A. What about it?
- B. Uh, how should we settle it?—Forget it. I'll fix the bike myself!
- A. That's exactly what you ought to do.
- B. I pushed the bike to a repair shop. They worked on it for hours. It was dark by the time they got it fixed.
- A. Oh.
- B. Then, as I started pedalling home, another policeman stopped me.
- A. Going too fast again?
- B. He was just making trouble. Said I had no lamp. With all those bright street lights on, what do I need a lamp for?
- A. Buy a lamp, why don't you?
- B. Even if I had the money, I wouldn't waste it on that junk.

- A. No, you'll save it to pay your repair bills!
- B. Originally, I was thinking of buying a friction generator lamp.
- A. Why spend so much? A kerosene lamp is good enough.
- B. It's true. Any kind of light will do. So I bought a paper lantern.
- A. Those are awkward to carry.
- B. Anyhow, no one could say I hadn't any light. I held the handle-bars with one hand and the lantern with the other.
- A. More trick riding.
- B. I hadn't gone very far, when a pedicab driver yelled — get off, quick! I've got a light, I thought. Why should I? It's burning, he called, burning! Naturally, I thought. What good's a lantern that doesn't burn? Suddenly I took one look, and I got off, quickly.
- A. Wasn't the lantern burning?
- B. It was burning all right. The whole thing — and my sleeve with it!
- A. Walk the bike home and be done with it.
- B. I scraped through everything else. I couldn't let this stop me.
- A. You can't ride on the streets at night without a light.
- B. I sneaked through the back lanes.
- A. Those are even darker.
- B. I didn't care. I turned into the first lane and began pedalling. Then I saw a policeman coming towards me.
- A. You got off then, I'll bet.
- B. Not me. Before he saw me I banked into another lane and sailed right out of sight. He couldn't have found me if he tried.
- A. You reached home?
- B. I landed in a ditch!

WU SUNG FIGHTS A TIGER

A story-teller's tale as told by Wang Shao-tang

Carrying his bundle, Wu Sung left the town and set out along the highway. The moon hung high. It was as bright as day. The weather was perfect for walking, but Wu Sung staggered, for he had drunk too much wine. Were it not for his staff, he would have fallen.

After travelling about a mile and a half, as he neared the foot of Chingyang Ridge, Wu Sung saw a small temple at the side of the road. Pasted on its wall was a proclamation. Although he had never been to school, Wu Sung could read a little. The proclamation was issued by the county magistrate and it said:

This autumn a fierce tiger appeared in the neighbourhood of Chingyang Ridge. It has already killed several travellers, to the sorrow and anger of this magistrate. We have directed our hunters to destroy the beast but, thus far, they have not succeeded. Know you all, therefore, that except for those on official business, no one is permitted to cross the ridge after dark. Even in daylight hours, travellers must go in groups, carrying staffs and beating cymbals, and be escorted by the local headman. If any man travelling alone is not warned by the town innkeeper and stopped by the local headman and is therefore harmed by the tiger, this magistrate will mete out severe punishment. No exceptions will be made.

Oh! said Wu Sung, I was too hasty. When that young waiter tried to stop me a while ago I shouldn't have struck him. I thought he was trying to keep me at the inn to rob me in the night because I was drunk. He meant well, and I wronged him. Let me think. Shall I go on or not? There's a tiger ahead. I ought to go back. But if I do, that young waiter will laugh at me. "Well Master," he'll say, "when I told you about the tiger, not only did you hit me—you said the tiger had invited you for supper! Why don't you go and dine then? Ah, I see. Probably you saw the proclamation, and you knew I wasn't lying. You got scared and came back. You're just a braggart, Master!" How can I let him laugh at me? If there was no tiger and I went back, it wouldn't

make any difference. But since there is one, I can't return! Am I going to be frightened by a tiger? A man can only go forward, he must not retreat. What can the tiger do to me? I'm skilled in the use of weapons; I learned how to defend myself. Well, now I can use my skill. The tiger and I will fight it out. If I win, I'll be removing a danger to the people, and that will be a good thing. If I lose, what of it? I'll make a meal for the tiger. In any battle a real man must be prepared to die. . . .

Wu Sung was a man of rare character. He knew there was a tiger on the ridge, but he shouldered his bundle and marched straight ahead.

After walking another mile or so, till he was some two miles out of Chingyang Town, Wu Sung again gazed at the ridge rising in front of him. The mountains ranged from north to south. Only by following the road west across the ridge could travellers get to the other side. The ridge was about a third of a mile high. Ordinarily, Wu Sung could have bounded over it without pausing for breath. But today he had drunk too much wine. His head was heavy and his feet were light. He walked unsteadily. Wine, after all, is not a good thing.

Wu Sung forced himself half-way up the ridge, and had to rest. At the side of the road was an old tree, beneath which was a flat boulder, six feet long and three feet wide and one foot high. I don't know how big the part embedded in the ground was. Anyhow it was clean, and a good place to rest. Wu Sung sat down on the boulder, placed his staff beside him and his bundle on the stone.

Ah, man is weak. If he had just sat, it wouldn't have mattered but, no, he had to sleep. He stretched out on the flat surface, lay his head on his bundle, and soon was snoring away.

You could hardly blame him for being so tired. Several nights he had walked right through, getting very little sleep. But what about the tiger? Wu Sung had forgotten it completely. Usually his memory was not so bad. But today, because he had drunk too much wine, it was hard for him to remember.

Still, it was lucky he slept when he did, otherwise he might not have sobered up in time. After several hours, he was awakened by a cold wind from the north-west. The wind had blown most of the drunken fumes from his head. It was past midnight. Wu Sung had been sleeping very comfortably, when he felt a strange presence. And what do you think it was? A man-eating tiger!

Yes, there was reason for the magistrate's proclamation. There was a tiger, all right. It lived in a big cave on the south side of the ridge, where there were no people. The mouth of the cave was hidden by a thick growth of dry weeds. Now the tiger had come out. It prowled across the ground, raising its head to look at the full moon. The wind began to moan and trees creaked in the gale. There was no wind before.

Why did it rise suddenly now? In the old days people said clouds came from dragons, tigers brought the wind. A tiger roars when it feels a wind, and the wind blows stronger when it hears a tiger, each adding to the awesomeness of the other.

Yes, the tiger had come out with a huge leap and a terrible roar. Then, like a stately official, it strolled to a thicket beside the road and waited for its prey. The tiger was hungry; it hadn't eaten its fill for several days. What did it eat? It liked people best. It feasted on humans with the same zest that we enjoy a good banquet. It also ate roebuck and deer and rabbits and other wild game.

Ever since the proclamation was posted, the tiger had been having hard times. People could no longer freely cross the ridge. They could only travel in groups, during daylight, and carrying cudgels. The tiger didn't dare attack them. He hadn't had any of his favourite food for some time. It was even difficult for him to find any small game; he had already eaten whatever there was.

But surely, there must have been a rabbit or two? Rabbits are very fast and they live in burrows that tigers can't get at. Some of them must have got away. But, no. The tiger didn't wait till the rabbit popped into its burrow. When it saw a rabbit, it let out a wild roar that paralysed the little animal with fear. Then the tiger would stroll up to it and swallow it down with one gulp.

Then what about monkeys? They can climb high in the trees. That should have made them safe. No, they weren't any better off, either. When a monkey saw the tiger coming it would scamper to the top branches of a tree and stare down at the huge striped hunter with beady eyes. "You may be fierce, old brother," the monkey would say to itself, "but you can't climb. What are you going to do about it?"

But the tiger was even smarter. It would sit down ten or twelve yards from the tree, raise its head and let out a terrible roar. The monkey would become very frightened and begin to tremble. Again the tiger would roar, and the monkey would shake harder than before. It didn't take much — eight or ten roars and the monkey would be trembling from head to foot. His eyes would see stars, his paws would lose their grip, his feet would slip, he'd go weak all over, and come tumbling down more dead than alive. Then the tiger would amble up, open his mouth and — gulp! He'd swallow the monkey down.

Does that mean he ate up all the game, so that there was absolutely nothing left? No, not really. When the tiger came to this neighbourhood, the small game scattered and fled. The tiger is the king of beasts. All the other animals are afraid of him. And when they fled, they howled and cried. Men have their language and animals have theirs. What did they say? — "Stay away from Chingyang Ridge. There's a tiger there

who eats everything!" One told ten, ten told a hundred. None of the animals would go near Chingyang Ridge. The tiger was out of luck.

When a tiger is hungry, it's fiercer than ever. This ferocious beast crouched in the dry grass and roared. The wind rose and the trees bent in the gale. The tiger was not far from Wu Sung now. Wu Sung was on the east side of the ridge, the tiger on the west. The roar awakened Wu Sung, and wind blew in through his pores and chilled his bones.

He sat up and rubbed his eyes. "What a strong wind." He sniffed. The wind carried a dank animal smell. "Mm, that's bad. There must be a tiger around!" Wu Sung was sober now. He remembered what the young waiter at the inn had said. Hunters in his home village had once told him too — if a big wind springs up when you're out in the wilds and it has an animal scent, be careful. Some savage beast is searching for prey.

Wu Sung knew he was in danger. He couldn't take any chances. Leaving his bundle, he seized his staff and bounded to the top of the ridge. His left hand on his hip, his right hand grasping his staff, Wu Sung looked carefully around. Nothing, he couldn't see a thing. Where was the tiger? Hiding behind a clump of dry grass beside the road. In autumn, the grass was the same colour as the tiger's tawny skin. As he crouched there in the dark, it was very hard to detect him.

Wu Sung couldn't see the tiger, but the tiger could see him. The beast gathered himself, roared, then leaped to the middle of the road and charged directly up the ridge at Wu Sung. Although Wu Sung was brave, he couldn't help crying out in surprise. In the moonlight, the beast was as big as an ox. Its white teeth flashed like knives in its scarlet mouth, and its tail was like a whip of iron.

What a monster, thought Wu Sung. I've been looking for you. You've come just in time. You and I can fight it out. We'll see which of us is the tougher. If I can't beat you, I'll invite you to a feast — on me. If I win, I'll be ridding the people of a scourge. . . . Telling it is slow, but Wu Sung moved very quickly. He took a good grip on his staff and stood poised, waiting for the tiger.

(ten-minute intermission)

In attacking a man, the tiger had three formidable weapons. The first was its roar. If you weren't a brave hero, those roars would turn your bones to mush and you wouldn't be able to move. The second the tiger's claws. They were like iron hooks. Once he got them into your shoulders, he'd pull your flesh from your bones and rip out your sinews. The third was his tail. It was strong as iron. One blow from that tail could break your leg or snap your spine. Unless a man could cope with all three weapons, he ended up in the tiger's stomach.

When the tiger saw that its roar had no effect on Wu Sung, it knew it would have to try other measures. The tiger was less than ten yards away. Wu Sung stood motionless, his eyes fixed on the advancing beast. The tiger crouched and leaped, reaching its front claws for Wu Sung's shoulders. There was no time for Wu Sung to raise his staff. He dodged to the left and the tiger sailed several yards beyond him.

That was a close call! thought Wu Sung. Another second and he would have had me! . . . The tiger was startled too. It revolved to face its victim but, before it could complete its turn, with one quick step, Wu Sung was upon it. Wu Sung raised his staff with both hands and brought it down with all his force, aiming at the tiger's head. There was a loud crunching, splintering crash.

Had Wu Sung cracked the tiger's head open? What made that sound? If Wu Sung had really got the tiger in the head, the sound wouldn't have been nearly so loud. Concentrating on the tiger, Wu Sung hadn't noticed the thick branch of a pine tree just above him. The staff had struck the branch, breaking it, itself also snapping in two. The tiger, seeing this huge man rushing up to it and hearing the crash, fled with a roar. The snapped end of the staff flew four yards through the air and clattered to the ground. An instant later, the branch also thudded to earth. The thousand-year-old pine tree shuddered violently, scattering a shower of pine needles and pine nuts. A raven's nest in the top branches, wrenched loose by the impact, came tumbling down in bits.

It was a tremendous blow, but it had missed the tiger. Now the beast turned and came towards Wu Sung again. Wu Sung tossed away his broken staff and stood waiting with his bare hands. He knew the tiger's movements now and he was looking for a chance to strike.

Again the tiger crouched, roared, and leaped, its front claws aiming for Wu Sung's shoulders. Wu Sung leaned to the right, and again the tiger missed him. But this time the tiger landed quite close; it whirled, intending to sink its teeth into Wu Sung's leg. With a quick thrust of his leg, Wu Sung kicked hard and the tiger's left eye was squeezed out. Frantic with rage and pain, the beast revolved in a tight circle.

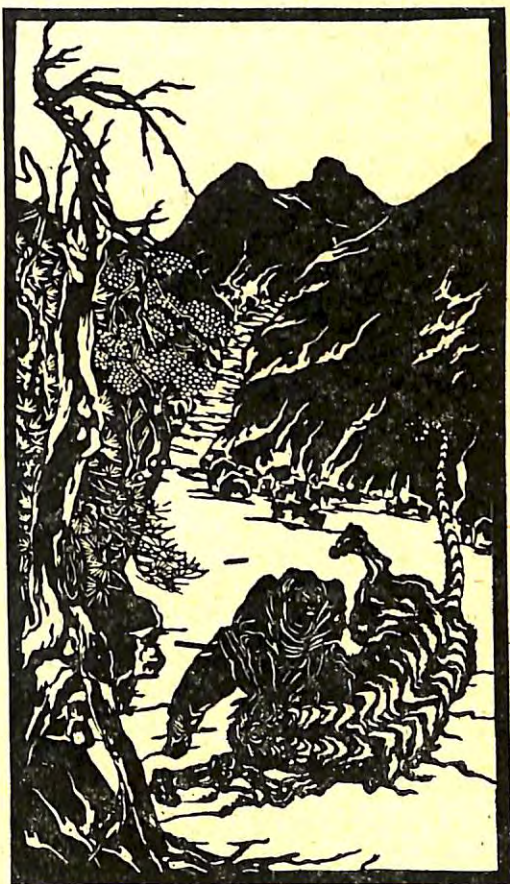
Now why did the tiger revolve in a circle? Well, even a man will be frantic if he loses an eye, to say nothing of a beast. This cruel beast relied on its eyes to find its prey; now suddenly one of them was gone. Naturally, the tiger was quite confused and did not know what to do. Wu Sung then seized his chance; while the tiger was turning away from him, he stepped forward and grabbed the tiger's neck with his left hand. The beast could not escape. When it wanted to go forward, he pulled it back; when the tiger tried to turn back, he would not let it move either. With a shout, he forced the tiger down. The tiger could only claw the ground; in no time at all it had dug four deep pits.

Wu Sung sat astride the tiger with his left hand grasping the tiger by the scruff of the neck. The animal still wanted to escape, but Wu Sung pinned it down with his legs. Feeling very uncomfortable, the tiger lifted its head and roared. Now why should it lift its head? It knew that somebody had it by the neck; it wanted to turn and bite him. As the tiger was turning its head to the right, Wu Sung raised his right fist and dealt a mighty blow on its right eye. Crash! The tiger was knocked and, what's more, its right eye was knocked out too. A few minutes before, Wu Sung had kicked out the beast's left eye, now with one blow he knocked out the right eye. With both eyes gone, the tiger was completely blinded.

After this blow the tiger was dizzy and could not move. Then with all his strength Wu Sung started pounding the beast's right shoulder. Crash, crash, crash! Wu Sung dealt a dozen blows. Because they were all struck at the same spot, later when people examined the tiger at the yamen, they found only one wound there. But the blows were quite useful; for now the tiger could no longer use its right paw. Though Wu Sung was anxious to finish off the beast quickly, after some dozen blows it was still alive and panting.

What's this? said our hero. He was becoming ashamed of himself. So my fist is quite useless. What do I have a fist for anyway? Why can't I kill the beast? Ah, yes, I understand. Though I've given it some dozen blows, they weren't directed at a vital spot. I'd better find one and finish the tiger off. But where is a vital spot?

Now the tiger was rearing its head again, and it roared. It was turning to the right again. Our hero clenched his fist and, using all his strength this time, drove a mighty blow at the tiger's right ear. The tiger's roar ended in the middle. It no longer reared its head or clawed the ground. It went limp all over.



Wu Sung looked at it. Hmm! It's probably dead. Our hero removed his right leg and pushed at the tiger with his hand. Crash! The tiger collapsed towards the right. It was dead all right. What? The tiger collapsed? Don't people say that even a dead tiger remains crouching? True, but it all depends how the tiger died. Tigers that die of old age or sickness do not lie down. There is a reason for that. When it is about to die, it knows that the end is near; so the tiger first chooses a good spot. It likes to keep its dignity. You'd think it wouldn't care about dignity when it's dying anyway, but it does. It puts its front paws forward, sits on its hind legs, raises its head and glares hard with its mouth open wide; sometimes it even hangs its tongue out. Only then does the tiger breathe its last. After death it remains like that, crouching. Passers-by are often fooled by dead tigers. As they come near, someone notices a tiger by the roadside. "Look out, Brother!" he yells. "There is a tiger up there. Run for your life! . . ." Actually the tiger is quite dead, but after death it still can frighten people.

The tiger that Wu Sung killed had a sense of dignity too, but after all that beating it was rather demoralized; so naturally it only collapsed to the ground.

You foul beast! Now what can you do? I have rid the world of this evil fiend. It can no longer do damage to the people. After our hero said that he turned around. My work is done; I'd better go on. He crossed the ridge and reached the boulder again. Putting his bundle on his shoulder, he looked at the broken staff and laughed, I am much obliged to you! Then he followed the road across the ridge.



THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE FICTION

LU HSUN

The following is a series of lectures delivered by Lu Hsun in 1924 at a Sian summer school to which he was invited by the North-west University and the Shensi Bureau of Education. They were not generally known or included in The Works of Lu Hsun, for they came to light a few years ago only.

As they were given just after the publication of his Brief History of Chinese Fiction, these lectures may be considered a synopsis of that book. Certain views and arguments are actually expanded here, making this valuable material for students of our classical literature and of the history of Chinese fiction.

Many historians have told us that the history of mankind is evolutionary, and China naturally should be no exception. But when we look at the evolution of China we are struck by two peculiarities. One is that the old makes a come-back long after the new has appeared—in other words, retrogression. The other is that the old remains long after the new has appeared—in other words, amalgamation. This does not mean there is no evolution, however. Only it is comparatively slow, so that hotheads like myself feel that “one day is like three autumns.”* The same applies to literature, including fiction. For instance, today we still find dregs of the Tang (618-907) and Sung (960-1279) dynasties in modern writing, or even the ideas and behaviour of primitive man. In my talk I mean to ignore these dregs—popular as they still are—and try to find the trend of development in our regressive and chaotic literature.

* A quotation from the *Book of Songs*. The poem describes how time drags when lovers are apart.

FROM MYTH TO LEGEND

The expression *hsiao shuo** (小說) was first used by Chuang Tzu,** who spoke of "winning honour and renown by means of *hsiao shuo*." But by this he simply meant trivial talk with no moral significance, something quite different from the modern meaning of the word. For Chuang Tzu considered the various schools of thought of Confucius, Yang Tzu, Mo Ti and the others as "trivial talk." And the other philosophers no doubt considered Chuang Tzu's writing in the same way. When we come to the section on literature and art in the *Han Dynasty History*,*** *hsiao shuo* means "the gossip of the streets," which is closer to what is called fiction today. Still, it was simply a collection of the talk of the common people made by the emperor's officers so that they could study popular sentiment and customs. It is not the same as modern fiction.

How did fiction first come to be written? According to the *Han Dynasty History*, "fiction writers were the successors of the officers whose job it had been to collect popular talk." Whether such an official function existed or not is another question. But even if it did, this can only explain the origin of such writing, not the origin of story-telling. Nowadays most students of the history of literature believe that story-telling grew out of mythology. When primitive men living in caves or in the wilderness were puzzled by such ever-changing phenomena of nature as wind, rain and earthquakes, which they could not account for, they attributed these things to supernatural beings, and made stories about the life and behaviour of the gods, as in the account of the creation of heaven and earth in Chinese mythology. So myths started. When these myths developed and became more human, demigods appeared—ancient heroes who achieved great deeds by means of superhuman attributes given them by the gods. Examples of these are Chien Ti,**** who ate a swallow's egg and gave birth to Shang, and King Yao, who ordered Yi***** to shoot down the ten suns in the sky. These tales, which show the difference between demigods and ordinary men, are today called legends. Then these stories evolved further, and truthful accounts became history while other anecdotes became fiction.

* In modern Chinese this means "fiction" or a "story."

** A philosopher of the Warring States period (403-221 B.C.).

*** By Pan Ku of the first century.

**** Chien Ti's son, Shang, founded the Shang dynasty (1700-1200 B.C.).

***** Yao was a sage king supposed to have lived in the third millennium B.C. Yi, or Hou Yi, was a famous archer.



The Pagoda Hill of Yen-an by Yang Hsien-jang

It seems to me that poetry must have preceded prose stories. Poetry started with labour and religion. For men at work sang to forget their hardships and, beginning with monotonous chants, ended by expressing their feelings with a natural rhythm. Another origin of poetry was primitive man's fear of and subsequent respect for the gods, which made him sing their might and praise their achievements. As for story-telling, I suspect it originated during times of rest. Just as men tried to forget their troubles by singing while they were working, when at rest they told stories to while away the time. This is how fiction started. So poetry and song grew out of labour, and prose stories out of leisure.

In ancient times, however, poetry and story-telling alike were based on mythology. This was so in ancient India, Egypt and Greece, as well as in China. But in China we have no great mythological works, while even the few myths we have are not yet compiled in books; we have to search for them in the ancient classics. One of our most important source-books is the *Book of Mountains and Seas* (山海經). The myths here are not systematically arranged; but among the most noteworthy of them, important for its influence in later periods, is the story about the Queen Mother of the West. Here is an example of such writing:

The Jade Mountain is where the Queen Mother of the West lives. She has a human appearance, the tail of a leopard and the teeth of a tiger. She can shriek, her hair is shaggy, and she wears trinkets. She rules over the avenging spirits and the five monsters of heaven.

There are many similar accounts. The Queen Mother of the West remained popular till the Tang dynasty, when the Mother of Li Mountain* took her place. Then there is the story, discovered in an ancient tomb in the prefecture of Chi, about King Mu of the Chou dynasty (1200-403 B.C.) who rode eight wonderful horses to the western regions. On the whole, though, there is a dearth of ancient myths in China, and what we do possess are fragmentary accounts rather than long narratives. Moreover, this is apparently not because many were lost but because there were always very few. To my mind, there are two main reasons for this dearth.

In the first place, life was too hard. The earliest Chinese lived in the Yellow River Valley where conditions were rigorous and men had to strain every nerve to wrest a living from nature. As this made them matter-of-fact, with a dislike for fanciful ideas, mythology could not develop or be handed down. Though labour gives rise to the growth of literature, it does so only under certain conditions. The work must not be too exhausting. Where you have toil and rest, or hard work but not too much of it, there songs and poetry will spring up and in leisure hours there will be

* A mountain in the province of Shensi near Changan, the Tang capital.

story-telling. But too much labour and too little rest mean a man is constantly tired, and when he is short of food and sleep he will not think of literature.

In the second place, men's memories are short. In ancient times stories of gods, ghosts and men were often intermingled, so that primitive beliefs survived in the old legends. But as time went on these legends died out. For example, as Shen-tu and Yu-lei* were famous deities who are supposed to have taken straw ropes to capture tigers and defend men against evil spirits, the ancients made door-gods of them. Afterwards, however, the two generals Chin Chiung and Yuchih Ching-teh** became the door-gods, as we see from many historical accounts. So later generations forgot even the names of Shen-tu and Yu-lei, to say nothing of the stories about them. And there were many such cases.

As there are no full-length myths in China, let us have a look at the *hsiao shuo* mentioned in the *Han Dynasty History*. Not one of all those listed there is left. Only fragments have survived. For example, the *Book of Ceremony**** (禮記) quotes the following passage from *Ching Shih Tzu* (青史子):

In ancient times, at the age of eight a boy would move to lodgings outside to learn the lesser arts and practise the lesser etiquette. When he bound his hair and began more advanced studies, he would learn the greater arts and practise the greater etiquette. At home he would study ceremony and literature, abroad his jade pendants would tinkle, and when riding in his carriage he would hear harmonious bells. Thus no improper ideas could enter his heart.

Now *Ching Shih Tzu* was classified as *hsiao shuo*, but judging by this quotation it seems to have been the same as the rest of the *Book of Ceremony*. It is hard to see why such a book was called *hsiao shuo*. Perhaps because it contained many ideas alien to Confucian philosophy. Of the surviving *hsiao shuo* said to date from the Han dynasty, the *Book of Deities and Miracles* (神異經) and the *Account of the Ten Continents* (十洲記) are attributed to Tungfang Shuo.**** The *Tales of Emperor Wu* (漢武故事) and the *Private Life of Emperor Wu* (漢武帝內傳) are attributed to Pan Ku. We also have *Penetrating the Mysteries* (洞冥記) by Kuo Hsien, and the *Miscellany of the Western Capital* (西京雜記) by Liu Hsin. The *Book of Deities and Miracles* is written in the same style

* Gods popular during the Han dynasty.

** Famous generals of the seventh century.

*** A Confucian classic embodying several old records. The *Ching Shih Tzu* is now lost.

**** An eminent scholar during the reign of Emperor Wu, one of the most famous Chinese emperors in history, who reigned from 140-87 B.C.

as the *Book of Mountains and Seas*, and gives accounts of miraculous phenomena. Here is an example:

The Lying Beast lives in the mountains of the South-west Wilderness. It looks like a rabbit with a human face, and can speak with human speech. It often cheats men, saying east when it should be west and bad when it should be good. Its flesh is delicious, but after eating it a man cannot tell the truth.

The *Account of the Ten Continents* contains what Emperor Wu is alleged to have heard from the Queen Mother of the West about these lands, and is also modelled on the *Book of Mountains and Seas*, although it is slightly more restrained in style. Both the *Tales of Emperor Wu* and the *Private Life of Emperor Wu* describe incidents from the birth to the death of that monarch. *Penetrating the Mysteries* deals with holy men, magic and prodigies in distant lands; while the *Miscellany of the Western Capital* records happenings in the world of men. The *Book of Deities and Miracles* and the *Account of the Ten Continents* are not mentioned in the *Han Dynasty History*, however, and cannot therefore have been written by Tungfang Shuo, but must be later works. The two accounts of Emperor Wu must also be by a later hand, for the style is not that of Pan Ku and they contain Buddhist ideas, although Buddhism was not widespread in China in the Early Han dynasty and the men of that time would not have used Buddhist concepts. As for *Penetrating the Mysteries* and the *Miscellany of the Western Capital*, these have been proved to date from the Six Dynasties period (317-581). Thus all these six *hsiao shuo* attributed to Han dynasty writers are spurious. Only Liu Hsiang's* *Account of the Saints* (列仙傳) is genuine. Keh Hung of the Tsin dynasty (265-420) also wrote about saints and fairies, and there were more such tales during the Tang and Sung dynasties which had a great influence on later ideas and fiction. When Liu Hsiang wrote, however, he was not aware that he was writing fiction, but thought he was recording facts. It is we who regard his work as fiction. The fragmentary legends in these books are still used as reading material for children today. As many people have asked whether they are suitable for boys and girls, I shall mention my view in passing. Some say that to teach children these legends will only make them superstitious and do much harm; but others argue that these fairy tales are suited to childish natures and will interest without injuring them. It seems to me that the whole question hinges on the state of education in this country. If children can receive a good education, they will study science and know the truth and not be superstitious. In that case no harm

* A famous Han dynasty scholar of the first century B.C.

will be done. But if young folk can have no better education and make no further mental progress, they will always believe the legends they heard when children, and this may be bad for them.

II

TALES OF MEN AND OF THE SUPERNATURAL DURING THE SIX DYNASTIES PERIOD

We can now go on to consider the *hsiao shuo* of the fourth to the sixth centuries. The ancient Chinese believed in ghosts and deities who lived apart from men, and in order to communicate with them they had shamans or wizards. Later, these shamans split into two groups: priests and alchemists. The priests talked about spirits, the alchemists about making gold and attaining immortality. This was the fashion from the Chin and Han dynasties right down to the Six Dynasties. There was therefore much writing about the supernatural. Take this example from the *Record of the Investigation of Things** (博物志):

Prince Tan of the state of Yen went as a hostage to the state of Chin. . . . When he asked the king's permission to return home, the king would not hear of it and said jokingly: "You may go when the crow's head turns white and the horse grows horns." Prince Tan looked up and sighed, whereupon the crow turned white. He lowered his head and lamented, whereupon the horse grew horns. So the king of Chin was forced to send him back. . . .

Tales like this show the influence of the alchemists of the time. Or take this anecdote from the *Garden of Marvels* (异苑) by Liu Chin-shu:

During the Yi Hsi era (405-418) a maid called Lan, who worked for the Hsu family in Tunghai, suddenly grew weak and pale; but the house was swept cleaner than before. The family set a secret watch, and saw the broom go from the corner of the room to the maid's bed. When they took the broom and burnt it, the maid recovered from her illness.

Evidently the men of that time believed all things had life. This was shamanism or animism. Such ideas still exist today. For example, we often see trees hung with placards announcing that all prayers will be granted. This shows that men of our generation still consider trees as gods, and are just as superstitious as the people of the Six Dynasties. As a matter of fact, in ancient times the men of all lands had similar ideas,

* Attributed to Chang Hua of the Tsin dynasty.

only later they discarded them by degrees. But in China they are still prevalent.

In addition to the two books just mentioned, two more accounts of the supernatural during the Six Dynasties period are *Records of Spirits* (搜神記) by Kan Pao and its sequel by Tao Chien.* Most of the former book is lost, however, what we have today being half genuine and half forged, with quotations from the original collected from various sources by Ming dynasty scholars together with other accounts. The sequel also deals with the supernatural; but as Tao Chien was an enlightened and intelligent man, he can hardly have written this. Some other writer probably made use of his name.

Another factor which encouraged the development of such tales was the coming of Indian thought. During the Tsin, Sung, Chi and Liang dynasties, Buddhism was extremely popular. Many Buddhist sutras were translated, and numerous tales were told about gods and ghosts, in which both Chinese and Indian supernatural beings figured. One example is this tale of the goose cage:

When Hsu Yen of Yanghsien was travelling in the hills of Suian, he came across a scholar . . . lying by the roadside, who said that his feet ached and asked for a lift in the goose cage which Hsu was carrying. Hsu thought he was joking; but the scholar got into the cage . . . and sat down quietly beside the two geese, who did not seem to mind him. Hsu carried the cage again, but did not find it any heavier. Further on, when he stopped to rest under a tree, the scholar came out of the cage and offered to treat him to a meal. Hsu accepted with pleasure, and the scholar took from his mouth a copper tray laid with all manner of delicacies. . . . After several cups of wine, the scholar said to Hsu: "I have a girl with me. May I ask her to join us? . . ." Then from his mouth the scholar produced a girl. . . . She sat down and feasted with them. Presently the scholar was tipsy and went to lie down. The girl said to Hsu: "I have brought another man with me. . . . I shall call him out. . . ." Then the girl produced another young man from her mouth. . . .

Such stories were not of Chinese but Indian origin. Thus we can see the Indian influence in the tales of the supernatural of that period. We should bear in mind, however, that when writers of that time recorded supernatural happenings, they did so just as we record the daily news today. They were not deliberately writing fiction.

After dealing briefly with tales of the supernatural, let us turn to tales about men. During that period these tales were very simple too,

* The great poet, also known as Tao Yuan-ming, who lived from 365-427. See *Chinese Literature*, No. 2, 1958, p. 117.

rather reminiscent of the ghost stories. Here are two quotations from *Social Talk* (世說新語) by Liu Yi-ching of the kingdom of Sung:

. . . When Yuan Yu was at Yen he had a fine carriage which he would lend to anyone. A man who was burying his mother wanted to borrow the carriage but dared not ask for it. When Yuan heard of this, he sighed and said: "Though I have a carriage, men dare not borrow it. Why should I keep it?" So he had the carriage burnt.

. . . Liu Ling often got drunk and behaved wildly. Sometimes he took off all his clothes and remained naked in his room. When somebody saw this and laughed at him, he retorted: "Heaven and earth are my house, and these rooms are my breeches. Why should you get into my breeches?"

That was how men behaved in the Tsin dynasty. From our modern point of view, the burning of the carriage and Liu Ling's abandoned ways seem rather peculiar, but they were not considered so then because the men of that time admired eccentric behaviour and philosophical talk. This philosophical talk started with the free discussion of the Han dynasty. As political life towards the end of the Han dynasty was corrupt, eminent scholars frequently discussed affairs of state. At first their views were widely influential; but later they offended the rulers and were persecuted. Men like Kung Yung and Mi Heng, for instance, were plotted against and killed by Tsao Tsao.* So the scholars of the Tsin dynasty dared not discuss political affairs but talked of metaphysical subjects instead, and this became purely abstract talk. Such scholars still had a great influence, though. Moreover, a man who could not discuss metaphysics was hardly considered a scholar, and therefore *Social Talk* was looked upon almost as a textbook by the literati.

Before *Social Talk* other books had appeared like the *Forest of Gossip* (語林) and *Kuo Tzu* (郭子); but these are now lost. *Social Talk* was compiled from material dating from the Late Han to the East Tsin dynasties. Later Liu Hsiao-piao wrote a commentary for it, in which he referred to more than four hundred ancient works, most of which are also lost. This enhanced the value of the book for later generations, and it is still very well-known today.

The *Forest of Humour* (笑林) by Hantan Chun of the kingdom of Wei also preceded *Social Talk*. Written in a simpler style, this book has disappeared too, though we can find quotations from it in Tang and Sung dynasty works. Here is one example:

* A famous general and poet of the Three Kingdoms period (220-280), who founded the kingdom of Wei.

A man whose parents were living went to another district to study for three years, after which time he came back. His uncle asked him what he had learned, and observed that he had not seen his father for a long time. "Yes, I was more distressed than Duke Kang of Chin at Weiyang,"* said the youth. (Duke Kang's parents were dead.) Then his father reproved him, saying: "What good has study done you?" He replied: "Unlike the son of Confucius, in my youth I received no instruction from my father,** so I have learned nothing."

Evidently this book consisted mainly of jokes.

The two types of writing represented by the *Forest of Humour* and *Social Talk* did not exert an important influence because, though later writers imitated them, there was no further development of either genre. For instance, the popular collection of jokes *A Whole Forest of Humour**** (笑林广记) is of course modelled on the *Forest of Humour*; but whereas the bulk of the jokes in the earlier work are intellectual, those in the latter show a streak of vulgarity and are often concerned with men's appearance. This is a lower type of humour. There were even more imitations of *Social Talk*, like the *Sequel to Social Talk* by Liu Hsiao-piao, mentioned in the *Tang Dynasty Records*, *Modern Social Talk* by Wang Cho of the Ching dynasty (1644-1911), and *Present-Day Social Talk* by Yi Tsung-kuei in our own time. But as social conditions in the Tsin dynasty were completely unlike those of modern times, it is rather ridiculous to imitate that writing today. We know that between the Han dynasty and the Six Dynasties there was much fighting and social unrest. As men had a gloomy view of life, Buddhism and Taoism were popular and many escapist ideas were generally accepted. Under their influence, some men of the Tsin dynasty searched for means of becoming immortal and took drugs. Others tried to be intoxicated all the time in order to forget the troubles of this world, and drank a great deal of wine. It is known that one of the drugs commonly taken in those days consisted of five different minerals, which made men feel hot, parched and inflamed, so that they liked to wear old clothes, for new clothes chafed their skin. Because they seldom took baths most of them were lousy, and that is why they "chatted while catching lice."**** They also drank in a quite uninhibited manner, forgetting life and death. Those were the social conditions of that time, but since our way of life today is completely different, it would be the height of folly to try to imitate writing produced under such dissimilar circumstances.

* In 636 B.C. Duke Kang sent his uncle back to his own state, bidding him farewell at Weiyang.

** A stock phrase meaning that a man lost his father early.

*** Compiled in the Ching dynasty.

**** Said of the great scholar Wang Meng, who lived in the mountains as a hermit.

As I have already pointed out, the scholars of the Six Dynasties did not consider their tales as fiction, for they believed those ghost stories and anecdotes. Hence the section on literature and art in the *Old Tang Dynasty History** does not classify writing about the supernatural as *hsiao shuo*, but as history or biography. Not until the time of Ouyang Hsiu** of the Sung dynasty was such literature considered as fiction. But anecdotes about real men were held to be more important than accounts of the supernatural, for they were closely bound up with achieving fame. If country scholars in those days wanted to become famous, they had to pay court to prominent men. In the Tsin dynasty they had to make up to statesmen like Wang Tao and Hsieh An.*** This is why the poet Li Po said: "Once a fish climbs past the Dragon Gate, its value increases tenfold."**** But to talk with such celebrities, suitable topics had to be found, and this meant reading books like *Social Talk* or the *Forest of Gossip*. Thus when Yuan Hsiu went to see Marshal Wang Yen,***** the marshal asked him what was the difference between the teachings of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. Yuan answered: "*Chiang-wu-tung*." (将毋同, Might-not-same.) This impressed the marshal, who made him an official, and he was known as the Three-Word Secretary. But what does "*chiang-wu-tung*" mean? Some interpret it as "They might not be the same," others as "Mightn't they be the same?" At all events, it was an ambiguous answer. If you wanted to learn this kind of verbal fencing, you had to read *Social Talk*.

III

THE "STRANGE TALES" OF THE TANG DYNASTY

In the Tang dynasty fiction underwent a great change. Whereas during the Six Dynasties period brief tales about real men and ghosts were recorded as facts, Tang scholars began to write fiction consciously. So this was a great step forward in the history of Chinese fiction. These stories were a good length and contained much detailed description, unlike the earlier concise anecdotes. This was therefore a great advance in writing too. But the men who wrote in the old style disapproved, and called such writing "strange tales" (傳奇, *chuan chi*)—a name meant to be derogatory. Many of these stories are lost now, but in the *Records of the*

* Compiled during the Five Dynasties period (907-960).

** The famous eleventh-century scholar who compiled the *New Tang Dynasty History*.

*** Two statesmen who belonged to powerful families.

**** According to the legend, all fish in the Yellow River tried to swim upstream past the place known as Dragon Gate, for if they succeeded they turn into dragons.

***** An anecdote from *Social Talk*.

Tai Ping Era (976-986) (太平廣記) compiled at the beginning of the Sung dynasty we can still find some of them. (Incidentally, this book is a large collection of stories from the Six Dynasties period to the beginning of the Sung dynasty.) Wang Tu's *Story of an Ancient Mirror* (古鏡記), written early in the Tang dynasty, tells about the miraculous adventures of an old mirror. Though fairly long, it consists of many strange incidents strung together, rather like the earlier tales. Then there is the *Story of the White Monkey* (白猿記) by an unknown author, about a general of the Liang dynasty (502-556) named Ouyang Heh, who went to Changlo and penetrated into the mountains. His wife was carried off by a white monkey, but later he rescued her and she gave birth to a son who looked like a monkey. Ouyang Heh was killed by the first emperor of the Chen dynasty (557-589). His son Ouyang Hsun was prominent at the beginning of the Tang dynasty, but because he looked like a monkey his enemies made up this tale. So apparently as far back as the Tang dynasty men had started attacking each other by fictitious writing.

During the reign of Empress Wu (684-705), Chang Tsu wrote *The Fairies' Cavern* (游仙窟) describing a journey to the north-west from Changan, during which he stopped to rest one evening at a house where he met two young women with whom he drank and amused himself. The plot is rather simple, but the tale is written in a euphuistic style not used previously for stories, and this makes it an exceptional piece of work. The Ching dynasty scholar, Chen Chiu, who wrote the *Romance of Yenshan* (燕山外史) in the euphuistic style, thought he was doing something new; but actually the innovator was Chang Tsu. *The Fairies' Cavern*, which was lost in China, can still be found in Japan. Chang Tsu enjoyed such literary fame and foreign travellers to China paid so much for his writing that it is quite conceivable that this tale was taken to Japan during his lifetime. As a matter of fact, his writing is rather flippant and not of the highest order, but he has a lively style.

Towards the middle of the eighth century the fashion changed, and there were many writers of fiction. Even those who despised short stories now started to write them. This was connected with certain developments in the civil service of that time. The candidates for the government examinations were in the habit of giving a sample of their writing to influential figures at court when first they reached the capital. If these compositions — usually their best poems — were praised, they would be highly regarded and have a better chance of passing the examinations. So this sample-writing was of great importance. The men of the later eighth century grew rather tired of poetry, and some scholars who used stories instead won fame through them. Then even those who disapproved of fiction felt constrained to write it, and short stories were all the rage. *The Tale of the Pillow* (枕中記), written by Shen Chi-chi during the Ta Li era (766-779), was very widely known. The plot is briefly as follows: A

man named Lu who was travelling to Hantan lamented his bad luck. Then he met an old man named Lü who gave him a pillow, and when he slept on this he dreamed that he married a girl of the Tsui family in Chingho. (As this was then a most illustrious family, such a match was a great honour.) He passed the government examinations and after repeated promotion became a minister and a censor, but other jealous officials had him demoted and banished to Tuanchow. A few years later he was appointed palace secretary with the title of Duke of Yen. Then he grew old and died after a long illness. At this point he woke up, and found that not enough time had passed to cook a pan of rice. This story was a warning against undue ambition and setting too much store by officialdom, wealth and fame. In the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) Tang Hsien-tsu wrote *The Dream of Hantan* (邯鄲夢), and in the Ching dynasty Pu Sung-ling wrote *A Sequel to the Dream* (續黃梁) which was included in the *Strange Tales of Liaochai** (聊齋志異). Both of these were based on Shen Chi-chi's story.

Another eminent writer of that time was Chen Hung, who with his friend Pai Chu-yi witnessed the rebellion of An Lu-shan during which the emperor's favourite, Lady Yang, died. They were so moved by this tragedy that Pai Chu-yi wrote his *Song of Eternal Regret* (長恨歌) and Chen Hung a tale to accompany this poem. His story had a great influence later, and in the Ching dynasty Hung Sheng based his drama *The Palace of Eternal Youth*** (長生殿) on it. Pai Chu-yi's brother Pai Hsing-chien was also a famous writer. His *Story of a Singsong Girl**** (李娃傳) tells how the son of a noted Yingyang family went to the capital and led a life of dissipation. When he had spent all his money he had to earn his living as a professional mourner, helping to carry coffins and sing dirges. Later, a girl named Li rescued him and made it possible for him to study, so that he passed the examinations and became an army inspector. Pai Hsing-chien has an excellent style, and tells a moving story. This tale also exerted a considerable influence on subsequent literature, inspiring the Yuan drama *Chuchiang Pool* (曲江池) and the Ming drama *The Embroidered Coat* (綉襦記) by Hsueh Chin-tui.

The Tang scholars did not write much about the supernatural, and made it take second place. There are, of course, some collections of short ghost stories which were still influenced by earlier writings. Examples of these are *Accounts of Mysteries and Monsters* (玄怪錄) by Niu

* Written in the late seventeenth century. See *Chinese Literature*, No. 1, 1956, p. 108.

** See *Chinese Literature*, No. 4, 1954, p. 69.

*** See *Chinese Literature*, No. 2, 1954, p. 98.

Sheng-ju, *The Yuyang Miscellany* (酉陽雜俎) by Tuan Cheng-shih, *More Mysteries and Monsters* (續玄怪錄) by Li Fu-yen, *Records of a Palace Chamber* (宣室志) by Chang Tu, *The Tuyang Miscellany* (杜陽雜編) by Su Ngo, and *Strange Tales* (傳奇) by Pei Hsing. But these Tang dynasty tales have more elaborate plots and are better written than their Six Dynasties counterparts.

Apart from those already mentioned, two other Tang story-writers deserve special attention because they did much to shape the course of later literature. One is Yuan Chen, who wrote little but carried great weight and was well known. The other is Li Kung-tso, who wrote more and had a great influence too, but later enjoyed less fame. Now let us consider these two men separately.

Yuan Chen, or Yuan Wei-chih, was a famous poet and a contemporary of Pai Chu-yi. His only tale *The Story of Ying-ying* (鶯鶯傳) deals with a young man named Chang and a girl called Ying-ying and is so well-known that we need not recapitulate it here. Yuan Chen's poetry and prose were greatly admired, but this story is not impressive, and at the end of it he makes Chang abandon Ying-ying, saying: ". . . As his virtue was not sufficient to withstand this wanton's blandishments, he had to break with her." In fact he excused Chang's heartlessness, writing a virtual essay of apology. Yet many later works were based on this story. Among them are the chantefable *The Western Chamber* (絃索西廂) by a scholar named Tung in the Golden Tartar period, which was sung to an accompaniment of stringed instruments; the drama *The Western Chamber* (西廂記) by Wang Shih-fu of the Yuan dynasty; the *Sequel to the Western Chamber* (續西廂記) by Kuan Han-ching, and *The Western Chamber of the Southern School* (南西廂記) by Li Jih-hua and Lu Tsai of the Ming dynasty. Many plays were based on this story. But in these later versions the plot is slightly different: there is a happy ending to the romance. This change was made because the Chinese like a happy ending. I suppose we in China know that life is not perfect, but we do not like to admit it; for if you admit it openly, the problem arises: "How to remedy it?" Then men begin to worry and think of reforms, and that leads to trouble. As the Chinese do not like trouble and worry, readers are annoyed when a story describes the trials of life. So unhappy endings in history are generally changed into happy endings in fiction: all debts are repaid, and we deceive each other. This is one of the problems of our national character.

As for Li Kung-tso, little is known of him, and though he wrote many stories, only four are left today. *The Governor of the Southern Tributary State** (南柯太守傳) is his most famous work. It tells of a man named Chunyu Fen, who had a large ash tree south of his house.

* See *Chinese Literature*, No. 2, 1954, p. 208.

One day after drinking he fell asleep in his eastern chamber, and dreamed that two men dressed in purple invited him to the Great Kingdom of Ashendon. There he married the king's daughter and served as governor of the Southern Tributary State. He did well and was promoted; but later he was defeated when he led an army against the kingdom of Sandalvine, and after his wife died he was sent home. He woke up to find that this was all a dream and that very little time had actually passed, though he seemed to have lived through a lifetime. When he went to look at the large ash tree, he found an ant-hill there and a swarm of ants, and these were the Great Kingdom of Ashendon and the Southern Tributary State. The moral of this story is much the same as that of *The Tale of the Pillow*, but the excellent ending and the spell cast on the reader are far superior. Tang Hsien-tsu of the Ming dynasty based his drama *The Southern Tributary State* (南柯記) on this story.

Li Kung-tso's *Story of Hsieh Hsiao-ngo* (謝小娥傳) tells about a girl whose father and husband, both travelling merchants, were killed by brigands. She dreamed that her father told her that his murderer's name was "Monkey in a carriage, grass at the east gate." And her husband told her that his murderer's name was "Walk among the grain, a man for a day." No one could solve this puzzle; but the writer explained that the first man was called Shen Lan (申蘭), and the second Shen Chun (申春). When the murderers were caught, this proved to be the case. Though this rather simple tale just used Chinese characters as a puzzle to catch murderers, it had a great influence on later fiction. For instance, in Li Fu-yen's *More Mysteries and Monsters* there is a similar tale, *The Nun Called Miao-chi* (妙寂尼). In the Ming dynasty a story on the same theme was written in the vernacular, and there were others in the *Cases of Prefect Pao** (包公案).

The third story, *Li Tang* (李湯), is about a prefect of Chuchow who heard from some fishermen that there was a great iron chain in the river at the foot of Tortoise Mountain. When he made his men pull out the chain with the help of oxen, a great storm sprang up and a monster like a monkey with white fangs and golden claws rushed up the bank, terrifying all who saw it. Then the monster disappeared again into the water with the iron chain. Li Kung-tso explained that this was the river-god Wu-Chih-Chi which "was stronger than nine elephants when it attacked, and could leap great heights and gallop like the wind." King Yu** ordered Keng Chen to capture it, had it bound with a strong chain, and removed it to the foot of a hill at Huaiying so that the River Huai could flow peacefully. This story also influenced much later writing. I

* Pao Cheng, prefect of Kaifeng during the Sung dynasty, was known for his justice and wisdom. He was a hero in popular folklore.

** Pacifier of the floods. A legendary king of the third millennium B.C.

suspect that Monkey Sun Wu-kung in the popular romance *Pilgrimage to the West* (西遊記) is modelled on Wu-Chih-Chi. However, Professor Hu Shih* of Peking University says that Monkey comes from Indian mythology, and a Russian professor, Baron A. Von Staël-Holstein, also observes that there is a similar story in India. But I doubt Professor Hu Shih's theory for several reasons. First, Wu Cheng-en, the author of the Chinese romance, did not study the Buddhist canons; secondly, there is no such story in any Buddhist scripture translated into Chinese; thirdly, Wu was familiar with Tang stories, as his *Pilgrimage to the West* shows very clearly. Therefore I still believe that Monkey was derived from Wu-Chih-Chi. At all events, I still cannot agree with Mr. Hu Shih that Li Kung-tso was also influenced by Indian legends.

As the fourth story, *Old Woman Feng of Luchiang* (廬江馮嫗), is very simple and of little literary value, we need not go into it here.

Many Tang stories were later made into dramas. This was the case with the story of the girl with a red whisk, the man with the curly beard, and the girl named Red Thread. In this way these tales became widely known and they are still very popular today. However, *chuan chi* or strange tales as a genre died out at the end of the Tang dynasty.

* Bourgeois historian and philosopher, now serving the Kuomintang reactionaries.

(To be concluded in the next issue)



WRITERS' FORUM

THE SELF-DESTRUCTION OF HOWARD FAST

Tsao Yu

A year ago Howard Fast betrayed the Communist Party. Official American spokesmen and the reactionary press made capital out of this, considering it splendid propaganda against the Soviet Union and communism. And Fast, with an overweening sense of his own importance, started publishing recantations and explanations right and left, as well as anti-Soviet, anti-Communist slander written to please the American capitalists. Both he and they believed that this would deal a heavy blow against communism.

And some people said: "This is most unfortunate."

To my mind, however, this is not unfortunate at all but a good thing.

In the first place, the great, irresistible advance of communism is not going to be held up just because Fast has turned renegade. He imagined his example would make many intellectuals leave the revolution. But while he wrote "My Decision" and announced his defection from the American Communist Party, other Party members, for instance Herbert Aptheker, came to the decision to remain a member. Since Howard Fast's betrayal of the Party, countless intellectuals all over the world have joined it. In people's minds the Communist Party will always represent an indestructible force for peace and progress and the future of mankind.

In the second place, ulcers must be removed. It is always better to have such things exposed in the clear light of day for all to see than hidden within the revolutionary ranks. Fast's exposure of his real self is to our advantage. Many intellectuals who join the Party become staunch fighters for the proletarian revolution, but if those, who are Communists only in name but actually extreme individualists, leave the Party, this simply increases the purity of the Party.

In the third place, Fast's defection helps to drive home the lesson that revisionism and bourgeois individualism are the greatest enemies of our cause. Fast joined the Party clinging with one hand to revisionism

and with the other to bourgeois individualism. Although he took part in some revolutionary struggles, he never gave up these two ways of thinking. Fast claimed: "I became a Marxist within my own personal structure." But his juxtaposition of Marx and Jesus Christ, Darwin and the Gospel of Luke, and the wishful thinking shown in his confusion of bourgeois democracy with his hazy view of socialism could lead only to destruction. Insatiable individualism hastened his destruction.

Fast announced that after the news of his betrayal was published he stopped receiving letters and telegrams from the Soviet Union. He said this was undoubtedly because Soviet post and telegraph offices had confiscated these communications, and this proved the lack of freedom in the Soviet Union. Apparently Fast imagined that he had a monopoly of the truth and that the people of the Soviet Union would telegraph their congratulations on his disloyalty and offer him a medal for opposing their country and communism. This reveals his stupidity as well as conceit. Fast had visited the Soviet Union; how could he fail to realize that the Soviet people with their level of proletarian consciousness would see through his contemptible defection immediately!

The Soviet Union was the first country to do away with exploitation, raise the economic and cultural standards of the working people and consistently champion world peace and human justice; yet he called this "socialism by slaughter and terror."

Who is actually carrying out a policy of slaughter and terror? It is American imperialism with "that most splendid thing — American democracy" which Fast defends. In October 1956 in Hungary thousands of the defenders of the revolution lost their lives, and the whole country became the scene of massacres and bloodshed. It was under the instigation of the American agents that reactionaries and the former exploiting class in Hungary organized and armed this dastardly revolt. They used Communists and other progressives as human targets. Atrocities reminiscent of the Middle Ages were perpetrated near the Budapest Party Committee headquarters. Communists were hanged on the trees, and the reactionaries showed themselves more savage than beasts. Yet this did not worry Howard Fast, who styles himself the personification of human love. This did not arouse his sympathy or righteous indignation. But when the Soviet army came to the rescue of the Hungarian people upon the invitation of the Hungarian government and helped them to rebuild their socialist order, Fast started screaming like Dulles or Eisenhower about "socialism by slaughter and terror." He tried to lay all blame on the Soviet Union and stir up ill will between Soviet and Hungarian peoples by maintaining that Hungary was not a free and democratic state.

American imperialism is building up its armed forces for war at a tremendous speed, arming West Germany and Japan with atomic weapons

and hydrogen bombs, occupying Taiwan by force and spending tens of billions of American dollars every year on armaments. In England, France and elsewhere in Europe and Southeast Asia it has set up military bases; flouting public opinion, it has raised Japanese war criminals and Nazi spies to positions of responsibility; it persists in carrying out nuclear weapon tests in spite of protests from all over the world and turns down all the Soviet peace proposals. "That most splendid thing — American democracy," which Fast advocates, is actually in the service of an aggressive, war-mongering monster — American imperialism.

When the British and French imperialists, with the encouragement and support of the American rulers, launched an aggressive war against Egypt, using Israel as their tool, the Egyptian people resisted heroically. The roaring of guns in the Mediterranean, the bombing of Cairo, the cruel destruction of Port Said, brought the whole world to the brink of war. During this great international crisis the firm and resolute declaration of the mighty Soviet Union played a decisive part in helping the gallant Egyptian people to halt the imperialist troops and restore peace to the Mediterranean. Yet fired by narrow racial hatred, Howard Fast, who claims to love humanity and to be a champion of the Jews, labelled the just action of the Soviet Union "international anti-Semitism." He remained blind to the aggressive policy of the Israeli government which acted in the interests of the American, British and French imperialists and against the will of the Jewish people. The sufferings of the Egyptian people meant nothing to him.

Hostile though he was to the Soviet Union, however, Fast could not deny the glorious socialist achievements of the Soviet economy. But, absurdly enough, after his betrayal he suddenly dubbed this "socialism without morality."

What does he mean by this?

He means that the Soviet Union has resolutely suppressed counter-revolution and curtailed the freedom of speech of reactionaries. What he wants in effect is to do away with the dictatorship of the proletariat and re-establish his kind of American bourgeois democracy, and do away with the Communist Party which brings the working people happiness and yet brighter prospects for the future. We need not wonder that the American capitalist papers have devoted so much space to his writing and been so loud to extol his discovery of "that most splendid thing — American democracy."

It is true that in the American constitution there is mention of liberty, equality and democracy; but today numerous progressive Americans are under observation or persecuted by the police and special agents. The United States today is the home of unremitting class oppression, unemployment, persecution, economic crises and countless restrictions imposed

upon the poor. There are millions unemployed. These Americans are deprived of the minimum human subsistence, let alone democracy.

The so-called American democracy is only for the rich, democracy, as Lenin put it, "restricted, truncated, false and hypocritical, a paradise for the rich and a snare and a deception for the exploited, for the poor."

It is true that the proletariat has seized power in the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies and is enforcing the dictatorship of the proletariat, and of course there is no bourgeois democracy of Howard Fast's type in these countries where the people are the masters of their own destiny. But there is democracy for the vast majority — proletarian democracy. The rule of the proletariat is growing increasingly powerful precisely because we have a fully developed proletarian democracy.

During the last forty years this genuine democracy for the working people has raised the economy, culture, science and living standards of the Soviet Union to unprecedented heights. Forty years ago the labouring people and national minorities of the Soviet Union were insulted and oppressed but today they enjoy prosperity and ample cultural opportunities. They have representatives in the highest bodies of the government, their wishes have become the laws of the state, Soviet foreign policy defends world peace, and the Soviet Union has consistently pressed for disarmament and opposed the cold war. While the American imperialists are frenziedly testing nuclear weapons, the Soviet Union has called a halt to such tests and proposed a summit conference in order to achieve the peace for which the whole world longs.

As Chinese writers, we are proud to see so many Soviet writers from the ranks of workers and peasants upholding proletarian democracy. They have written splendid works which serve the needs of socialism and glorify the sanctity of labour, a phenomenon completely new to world history. Yet Howard Fast condemns this as "tyranny," "immorality" and "slaughter and terror."

Fast asks why did the Soviet writers never challenge their government. Only a renegade could pose such a question. Why should proletarian writers challenge a government which is faithfully carrying out the wishes of the proletariat?

Howard Fast is a hypocrite dominated by the lust for money and consumed with envy of millionaires and those who "make good" in America. Because the underlings and scribes of the bourgeoisie are quick to detect their own kind, the Macarthyist, Eugene Lyons, lost no time in getting in touch with Fast to urge him: "Throw off the Communist weight (he should have said 'truth') from your heart and mind." The notorious anti-Soviet reporter Harry Schwartz approached Fast too. Then he started wagging his tail for the Wall Street magnates.

Fast admits that in the past, "In the United States, I was crippled in my action as a writer." He speaks regretfully of the prohibitions imposed

on him by American "democracy" and wistfully recounts how from comparative wealth and success, he was reduced to a struggle for literary existence. His work "became less and less known." To an ambitious individualist no doubt no blow could be greater than this.

That is why he turned renegade and joined the world of "best-sellers" and startling fabrications, the world of the capitalists' minions. He lies about the Communist movement, with a view to sowing discord among our ranks. He can never understand the solidarity which is stronger than steel and the high degree of democracy among us. He has no inkling of what communism means. He joined the Party with confused and reactionary ideas. He is like the ass in one of La Fontaine's fables who carried a sacred image on its back and paced slowly and proudly along receiving the worship of the crowd with infinite condescension, imagining that everyone was worshipping it. But when the image was removed, men saw that it was nothing but an ass.

American reactionaries hoped that Fast's defection might create confusion in the minds of just and progressive people all over the world. This has been proved wishful thinking. There is an old saying: "The dog may bark at the moon," but the moon will go on shining. The vain efforts of renegades like Fast are not only shameless but incredibly stupid.

NOTES ON LITERATURE AND ART

THE EARLY CHINESE PROSE

Wu Hsiao-ju

There are two main types of prose in China: "free prose" and "euphuistic prose." The latter is distinguished by parallelism and special rhythmic patterns; most of its sentences consist of six or four characters and contain splendid imagery and many classical allusions. In fact, it is closely akin to poetry, except that it is unrhymed. Free prose knows no such rules or restrictions. In these articles we shall discuss the euphuistic style as well as prose in general, not including works of fiction.

We can trace the origin of Chinese prose to the Shang dynasty (c. 1700-1200 B.C.), when the written language already possessed a fairly large vocabulary and adequate syntax. As ancient Chinese was virtually monosyllabic and pictograms — not phonetic symbols — were used, the very nature of the written language exerted a restraining influence on its style, which was pre-eminently brief and con-

cise. The rulers of that period believed in the supernatural. Before deciding on any important action they consulted diviners, who heated the carapaces of turtles, and the answer of the gods was indicated by the cracks produced. The results were inscribed in laconic language on the oracle-bones,* and this is the earliest Chinese prose extant. Sometimes we find short, complete narratives on the oracle-bones. By the twelfth century it was the custom of nobles to record their victories in war or the virtue of their ancestors on bronze vessels and these bronze inscriptions were another early form of Chinese prose, also characterized by extreme brevity. This was due to the special nature of the language, the difficulty of making the inscriptions, and the limited size of the bones and bronze vessels which prevented the records from becoming too long, and the simple character of the contents which did not call for lengthy treatment. During this period records were also inscribed on tablets or slips of wood or bamboo held together with cords or thongs. It is easy to see that the clumsy nature of these records must have acted as a deterrent to wordiness, and made scribes

This is the first of three articles on Chinese prose. In our next numbers we shall publish *Euphuistic Prose and Free Prose* and *The New Tradition in Prose* by the same author. We hope these three monographs will give our readers a general picture of the development of Chinese prose during the last three thousand years.

* See *Chinese Literature*, No. 1, 1958, p. 156.

strive for the greatest possible succinctness and accuracy in the use of words. Here, then, we have the origin of the tradition of brevity and polish of Chinese prose. As bamboo and wood are perishable, not many of those early records are left today. A few ancient memoranda and official announcements are preserved in the *Book of History* of the Western Chou period (twelfth to eighth century B.C.), but these were probably edited and reworded by the official historians of the time.

Ancient China was, by and large, a slave society. The king as chief slave-owner had great authority. Culture and education were the monopoly of the nobility and the king's officers controlled all scholarship. Under such conditions chronicles were written to record the deeds and sayings of the king, the supreme ruler. Thus "The left historian records actions, the right historian words." The "words" were the sovereign's orders and pronouncements, while the "actions" were the chief historical events with the king as the central figure. By the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 B.C.) the royal authority had declined, there were various independent states; whose rulers had their own official historians, and the prose of that time consists mainly of official decrees or historical annals.

The earliest prose work preserved in relative entirety today is the *Book of History*, which gives us the early orders and official statements—the "words"—recorded by the historians of the Western Chou dynasty. The only record of the "actions" still extant is the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, official records of the state of Lu edited by Confucius which is also concisely written. The fact that the

earliest narrative prose in China was closely linked with historiography is another significant feature of Chinese literature.

Although the edicts and announcements in the *Book of History* are political documents, their literary flavour shows that the standard of writing was fairly high, and many colourful figures of speech in use today come from this ancient book. The sayings "As clear as looking at a fire," "Trim as the mesh of a net" and "A spark of fire may set the whole plain ablaze" come from an edict of the Emperor Pan Keng of the Shang dynasty. The official pronouncements breathe a lordly air, the graphic language conjuring up a picture of these proud slave-owners. Of course, these accounts were written so long ago that not all readers today can understand them; but in the *Book of History* we already see the terseness and polish characteristic of Chinese prose.

The *Spring and Autumn Annals* contains a wealth of meaning couched in concise, compact terms. Virtually each word and sentence has its special significance, and enormous care is shown in the use of language. There is a marked tendentiousness and clear differentiation between right and wrong—good is praised and evil denounced. This is because Confucius edited these annals in troubled times when slave society was being transformed into feudal, and although he tried to conceal certain facts which reflected badly on the ruling class, his sense of justice made him see many problems from the viewpoint of the people so that he could not cover up all abuses completely. He therefore evolved this style with its hints and innuendoes, its undertones of sarcasm



Winding the Yarn Attributed to Wang Chu-cheng (Sung dynasty)

or disparagement, to show praise or condemnation. Thus Mencius of the Warring States period (403-221 B.C.) said: "When the Master wrote these annals, treacherous ministers and evil-doers were dismayed." The best Chinese prose is powerfully suggestive. As Lu Hsun commented, very often in a criticism of evil men "No word of condemnation is spoken, yet the whole truth is revealed." This characteristic derives from the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, and constitutes its chief value.

Two other fairly large works of a high literary quality which record the history of various states at the end of the Chou dynasty are the *Tso Chuan* (*Tsochiu Ming's Chronicles*) and *Kuo Yu* (*Anecdotes of the States*). According to tradition, both these were written by a blind annalist called Tsochiu Ming. The *Tso Chuan* gives a fairly detailed narrative and is superbly written. Though it contains many of the rulers' sayings, in the main it is a chronicle of events whereas the *Kuo Yu* consists largely of sayings; and certain inconsistencies and duplicated passages in these two works make it seem unlikely that they are by one man. They were probably compiled during the Warring States period. These books have the characteristic pithiness and lucidity of Chinese prose to an even more marked degree, and are an advance on the earlier style of writing.

All past men of letters and historians rated the *Tso Chuan* very highly. Thus the Tang dynasty historian and critic, Liu Chih-chi, said: "He uses graphic descriptions to clothe dry bones with flesh, and beautiful phrases to express approbation. His style has variety, distinction and spontaneity." The three outstanding qualities of the

prose in this work are: first, it describes complicated events like battles, revolts or conferences clearly and fully; secondly, meticulous descriptions and a variety of styles are used to bring historical figures or events to life; thirdly, not only is the dialogue completely authentic, but the language has beauty and colour on account of its parallelism, well-balanced sentences, discriminating choice of words and vivid phrases. When we consider that all these attributes are based on a concise and polished style, the author's achievement is even more remarkable. Some of the anecdotes in the *Kuo Yu* are clear and well-constructed too, and bring out the personalities of the speakers.

The time from the Warring States to the unification of China by the first emperor of Chin in 221 B.C. saw a great development of classical prose. Because the central authority was weak and various states were fighting for supremacy, culture and education ceased to be monopolized by the nobility, there was general intellectual activity, and "a hundred schools of thought contended." This was an age of outstanding thinkers and statesmen. There were philosophers like Mencius and Hsun Tzu of the Confucian school; Mo Tzu, Sung Yen and Yin Wen of the Mohist school; Chuang Tzu of the Taoist school; Shang Yang and Han Fei Tzu of the Legalist school; Kung-sun Lung and Hui Shih of the Logicians' school; as well as strategists like Wu Chi and Sun Pin, and such orators and sophists as Su Chin and Chang Yi. All these men taught disciples, wrote books and travelled from state to state, hoping to find some powerful ruler who would put their ideas into practice. They used intensely vivid yet clear and logical

language to express their philosophical and political views, writing books for their disciples. These philosophical and political works form one of the finest bodies of Chinese prose, and have remained a source of inspiration for all later theoretical writers.

These works are lucid and graphic, easier to understand than earlier writings because they are closer to the vernacular—the old annalists, we must remember, wrote for the rulers and were not so close to the people. The arguments are persuasively presented, and serious reasoning and penetrating analyses are so shot through with wit and humour that they have great human appeal. Indeed, although these works deal with abstract ideas, the authors have literary talent—sometimes of a very high order—and use parables, fables or magnificently imaginative illustrations to explain profound philosophical concepts in such a way that readers find them easy to accept. These fine qualities became a part of the best tradition of Chinese theoretical prose, exercising a great influence on later writers. This link between our prose and philosophical thought is another significant feature of Chinese literature.

All the philosophers of the Warring States period have their distinctive prose styles, just as their outlooks differ. Mo Tzu's language, for instance, is relatively repetitious and detailed, that of Mencius is more incisive, while all Chuang Tzu's work is illumined by his superb imagination. In using parables, Mencius generally takes stories from daily life, while Chuang Tzu loves to invent fantasies, and Hsun Tzu chooses examples from every field of knowledge. Mencius enjoys quoting anecdotes from ancient history,

Chuang Tzu makes up beautiful allegories, and Han Fei Tzu draws on popular legends and folklore. Mo Tzu presents his arguments in a straightforward, deliberate manner, Mencius is more abrupt and quick, while Han Fei Tzu is most sharp and penetrating. Their different literary styles provide later writers with most valuable material for study.

During this period there appeared another work combining something of philosophy and history, the *Chan Kuo Che* (*Sayings of the Warring States*). This contains many of the current arguments of the sophists and orators, as well as numerous accounts of famous historical figures and heroic deeds. As literature, it is an outstanding collection of early prose. Some of its political ideas resemble those of the other philosophers, and many of the longer anecdotes are skilfully constructed and highly polished. When trying to enlist a ruler's support, the orators often make a detailed analysis of the territory, products, political and social conditions of his state, interspersing their arguments with fables and legends. The narrative passages are in a simpler and livelier vein than the more archaic *Tso Chuan* and *Kuo Yu*, and are made absorbing by descriptive touches. In this sense, the *Chan Kuo Che* is the forerunner of Ssuma Chien's immortal *Historical Records* written in the Han dynasty.

The histories of the Warring States period and the work of philosophers and statesmen have inspired Chinese men of letters for over two thousand years. The conciseness and distinction of their narrative and the fluency and clarity of their tendentious writing have been handed down through the ages. Indeed, our later writers

have consciously striven to combine brevity with ease, lucidity with beauty. The early historians' practice of recording speeches verbatim also became a tradition, resulting in the enrichment of narrative by eloquent rhetoric or lively dialogue, while profound reason-

ing is made to appear less difficult by its literary grace and the anecdotes and fables with which it is illustrated. Later writers set themselves a high standard when they tried to rival the variety and richness of style of this early prose.

THE FUNNY-MEN AND STORY-TELLERS OF THE CHINESE VARIETY THEATRE

Wu Wei-yun

Chinese variety is a popular folk art, embracing many different kinds of entertainment and varying from district to district. A performer must be able to act and sing many parts and be a competent mimic who can imitate a cock, a dog, a horse, a clock and so forth. The stage properties he uses are very simple. Generally he merely holds a folding fan or a piece of wood with which to strike the table to draw attention. As the staging is of the simplest, a show can be put on anywhere. This is why the variety theatre has been called the "light cavalry" of Chinese drama.

Variety has a long history in China. One of the earliest forms was *hsiang-sheng* — the repartee and patter of one or more funny-men. More than two thousand years ago the feudal oppression in China gave birth to a class of jesters, who specialized in barbed jokes about their betters. Though these men served in palaces, they represented the views of the common people and made pointed digs at rulers who wanted to carry out unpopular policies. The great Han his-

torian, Ssuma Chien, in his *Historical Records** described two such jesters, Chan and Meng, who cracked good jokes and showed great astuteness. Chan lived during the Chin dynasty (221-207 B.C.). When the first emperor of the Chin dynasty told him he meant to devote a great deal of money and labour to enlarging his pleasure gardens, Chan said: "Fine! We can fill the park with animals, and when the enemy attacks us we can get the deer to butt them." This sarcastic retort made the emperor abandon his plan. Later, when the first emperor's son succeeded to the throne, he decided to use conscript labour to improve the appearance of the city walls by varnishing them. "That will look very handsome," said Chan to the emperor. "And after the walls are varnished, the enemy will find it hard to scale them. To varnish the walls is comparatively easy, but varnish mustn't be exposed to the sun. We shall have quite a job building a house larger

* See *Chinese Literature*, No. 4, 1955, p. 79.

than these walls to shelter them from the sun." The emperor laughed and dropped the scheme. So with two jokes, Chan saved his fellow men many hardships.

Ssuma Chien had high praise for the other jester, Meng, whose words were full of wisdom and whose satire was of the keenest. During the Spring and Autumn period, when Chuang, the king of Chu, lost his favourite horse, he wanted to bury it as if it had the rank of a minister. When Meng heard this, he came to mourn the dead horse. "Let this steed be buried with the rites befitting a prince," he said. "And summon your barons from all parts of the country to attend the funeral, so that they understand that Your Majesty thinks more highly of this horse than of men." Then the king realized his mistake, and did not give the horse an elaborate funeral. These anecdotes make it clear that, though serving the rulers, these folk artists still represented the people.

In later centuries clowns and jesters continued to criticize and poke fun at their rulers. In the Tang dynasty, before the Chinese drama developed fully, there were early dramatic sketches called *tsan-chun-hsi*, played by two actors who kept up an amusing patter and cracked jokes on topical subjects. Such artists needed a ready wit and great courage to voice popular discontent. The comedians in Chinese variety today continue this good tradition.

The modern skits are performed by one artist or two. The funny-man just takes his stand by a table, a folding fan in his hand, and begins his performance. This simple staging has come down from the Tang dynasty. Its exponents use satire as a weapon to strike a blow against all that is

backward in our life. An important part of their stock in trade are their jokes, commonly known as "wrappers." Before the "wrapper" is opened no one knows what is inside. If the contents are poor, the audience is disappointed; but if the unwrapping causes general laughter, the message gets across. These jokes must be relevant to the main theme, for they are designed to bring out the moral and leave behind a strong and vivid impression.

The famous modern comedian, Hou Pao-lin, now thirty-nine, has been performing since the age of sixteen. After liberation, he has been able to give full play to his wit and satire. In the last few years he has composed and edited many skits, and written a number of articles about this form of entertainment. He once said: "*Hsiang-sheng* should be a sharp weapon to ridicule and attack our enemies, and to show up what is out-of-date and backward in China now. We should not joke simply for the sake of joking, for laughter is not our only aim. We use jokes to express our ideas and to educate people. Today's *hsiang-sheng* are very different from those of the past, and we must make it clear what we are for and what we are against."

These skits consist of four main elements: story, mimicry, jokes and acting.

As the funny-men's satire is conveyed through amusing anecdotes, they must have a good memory, clear elocution, fluency and expressive gestures. Their fluency and eloquence can be seen from the tongue-twisters and puns often made up on the spur of the moment. Most of them have amazing memories, too, and can reel off endless classical allusions, old stories and legends, and accurate in-

formation on various subjects such as astronomy, geography, history and science. In one skit called *Geography*, for instance, the comedian recited a whole string of place names. Starting with Peking, and going on to all parts of Asia, Europe and the rest of the world, he rattled off several hundred geographical names in one breath.

The artist must also be an accomplished mimic, able to reproduce the cries of insects, animals or birds, the wailing of a baby, the sound of a trumpet, different types of gestures and dialects, and the characteristic delivery of famous actors. Such mimicry implies grasping and expressing what is essential, not all the naturalistic details, just as a cartoonist does. I shall never forget the marvellous impersonation one comedian gave of that old virtuoso Liu Pao-chuan performing a Peking drum ballad—how he walked on to the stage and stood there, his singing and his gestures, all portrayed to the life.

Jokes are the most important part of *hsiang-sheng*. The chief comedian and his assistant must be possessed of a great fund of ready wit, and fluency and clear enunciation. A good funny-man should be able to make up jokes on the spot, to rock his hearers with unexpected laughter, for then his performance will never be stereotyped or monotonous. This part of the *hsiang-sheng*, which the audience welcomes most, is also the most difficult. Another gift the actor needs is that of keen observation. Incidents which pass unheeded by most of us may provide him with good material and serve as objects for satire. This was shown in *Adventure on the Street*,*

which is aimed at those who disobey traffic regulations. A fellow who rides a bicycle without proper brakes at top speed and refuses to carry a lamp at night, after some amusing adventures, ends up in a ditch. A skit like this not only makes people laugh, but contains useful social criticism too.

Drama is another important element of *hsiang-sheng*. At first the performers simply used local tunes and fitted ridiculous words to them to raise a laugh. Later this developed into one distinct form of *hsiang-sheng*. Excerpts of well-known operas are chosen, and the audience enjoys them no less than a regular opera. For example, there is a scene well known to all opera fans called *Yellow Crane Tower* from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Chou Yu, commander of the naval forces of Wu, has invited Liu Pei, king of Shu, to a feast. After Liu Pei has left his kingdom, General Chang Fei is afraid he may be murdered, and is very angry with Chuko Liang for advising the king to go. He rants and raves and demands to know where Liu Pei is. When the opera has proceeded in all seriousness to this point, the performer playing Chuko Liang suddenly jumps up and says: "How the hell do I know where your friend is? I'm just here to help you out with a skit. Why all that high-faluting talk?" This sudden anticlimax always brings the house down, and earthy realism like this is a characteristic of *hsiang-sheng*.

Another equally popular art in Chinese variety is story-telling. An experienced story-teller, equipped only with his eloquence and a piece of wood, can hold a large audience spell-bound by the vividness with which he relates a long tale or popular romance.

* See *Adventure on the Street* on page 89 of this issue.

Of course the story-teller depends on his texts, and the story itself is decisive in determining his success or failure. But a good plot alone is not enough: the narrator must have outstanding dramatic talents and wide knowledge to bring his tale to life. To hold the audience's attention, he must be able to act any role, and have a good voice, mobile features and supple limbs. Then the modulation of his voice, his changing expression and gestures will make the characters seem authentic. The stories themselves, it goes without saying, should be well-constructed with interesting incidents leading up to a climax. There must be no loose ends. The language, too, is of the greatest importance. It must be easy to understand and concise, touched with humour but free from platitudes.

More than three hundred years ago there lived a popular artist named Liu Ching-ting. A superb story-teller, a natural wit and a great satirist, he became the companion of famous scholars and officials. One remark of his could lessen the tension in the atmosphere, and he was much admired for his humour and eloquence. He could describe past and present so vividly that his hearers felt they were living through the scenes described and were moved by the same emotions as his heroes. Liu Ching-ting once remarked that his master had taught him how to observe facts and select material. A story-teller must be conversant with men of all walks of life, and with the dialects, customs and conventions of different places. Moreover, his knowledge must be accurate down to the last detail. His scripts provide merely the outline of certain stories: he himself must fill in the details and add episodes to make them

interesting. His success in doing this depends on his powers of observation, his skill in analysis and selection, and his discrimination in retaining what is relevant and rejecting what is not. We find an analogy in the work of a painter, who sees every kind of phenomenon in the countryside, but chooses what he thinks best to put in his picture.

After assembling and selecting his material, the artist must consider how best to tell his story to arouse and hold the interest of the audience. Sometimes he uses straightforward narration, at others he may introduce brief sketches, and occasionally he will leave something unexplained in order to unravel the mystery later. These are simply a few of the many devices of which he must be the master. And eventually everything must be cleared up to the satisfaction of the audience.

We know from a Ming dynasty anecdote how Liu Ching-ting told the story of Wu Sung and the tiger. This tale came from the popular romance, *Water Margin*, but Liu Ching-ting handled it in his own way.

He put in many descriptions, complete to the smallest detail. When he reached a climax, his voice rang out so loudly that you feared the whole building would collapse. And he related how, when Wu Sung went to the tavern and found no one to serve him with wine, he roared with rage till the empty vats reverberated.

This mention of empty wine vats reverberating must have impressed the audience with Wu Sung's superhuman strength and boldness, and suggested that the presence of the tiger on the mountain meant very little business in the tavern. Such effects are not

achieved by a story-teller who keeps strictly to his script.

Liu Ching-ting's method of story-telling had a great influence on later artists. His most famous successor in modern times is Wang Shao-tang, who has followed this profession for more than fifty years.* Wang tells nothing but stories from *Water Margin*. He does not keep to the text, however, but has rearranged the stories of the four chief characters, Sung Chiang, Wu Sung, Lu Tsun-yi and Shih Hsiu as forty episodes. This rearrangement is after the style of Liu Ching-ting, but Wang Shao-tang is a superb artist in his own right. Most Chinese audiences are thoroughly familiar with the heroes of *Water Margin*, but when they hear Wang relating their adventures, these men come alive to them, and even some of the minor characters take on a new interest. Wang is also a skilled mimic. When he describes how Wu Sung kills the tiger, we hear the tiger's roar intermingled with the sighing of the wind and the rustle of falling leaves—details of atmosphere which cannot be expressed in words, yet which he succeeds in conveying. Similarly, when he speaks of sailing, he imitates the splash of oars, the creaking progress of the boat, the splash when it capsizes, and the boom when it founders on a rock. All this creates a sense of authenticity, and makes his hearers feel they are

on the spot. Again, Wang is supremely successful in putting himself into his characters' place and conveying their thoughts and feelings by the tone of his voice. However dramatic the story, he never uses exaggerated or theatrical gestures, but with the flicker of an eye or slight movement of the fingers, gives exactly the impression required. This shows his understanding of human nature after years of study, and his stature as an artist.

Wang Shao-tang has taught his art to his grand-daughter, Wang Li-tang, in order that he may have a successor. This sixteen-year-old girl has already begun to give public performances, and is gradually becoming a popular story-teller.

In the old days *hsiang-sheng* and story-telling, like other forms of variety, were despised by the ruling classes and the artists had a low social status and a hard life. Since the liberation they have won respect and made great progress too, producing many new items of considerable educational value. Now that living standards have improved and wireless sets are to be found in more homes, these variety artists reach larger audiences. They provide some of the most popular programmes on the air, and thousands of listeners at home by their own fire-sides laugh at their jokes and breathlessly follow their stories. Indeed, these popular arts have now assumed a more important place in Chinese life than at any previous period of our history.

* See *Wu Sung Fights a Tiger* on page 96 of this issue.

LIU HSIEH'S THEORY OF LITERARY CRITICISM

Sung Su-liu

Liu Hsieh is one of the most famous literary critics of ancient China. His great work, *Carving a Dragon at the Core of Literature* (文心雕龙), written at the beginning of the sixth century, deals systematically with the main problems of literary theory, explains the laws governing the development of literature, and discusses questions relating to the art of writing; it also gives a concise yet adequate summary of the most famous writers and works before his time. Liu Hsieh's influence on later ages was immense. He has always been highly regarded by Chinese scholars. Thus in the seventeenth century Sun Mei, himself a literary critic, wrote of him: "He sums up the whole and goes straight to the heart of the matter, presenting in fifty essays the flower of all past literature." In our view such praise is no exaggeration. In fact, it represents the considered opinion of past generations of writers.

Carving a Dragon at the Core of Literature consists of fifty essays. The first five of these deal with the spirit of the ancient classics and expound the author's own views on literature. The next twenty discuss such different literary forms as songs, epigrams, epitaphs, essays, dissertations and memoranda, with comments on their origin and development as well as their chief exponents. Last of all, there are twenty-five essays about the content and form of various works, rhetoric, language, rhythm and style, the relationship between literature and the spirit of the age, principles of

literary criticism and the idiosyncrasies of certain writers.

We have very little information about Liu Hsieh beyond that given in the *Liang Dynasty History* and the *History of the Southern Dynasties*. All we know is that his other name was Yen-ho. The son of a noble family which had declined, he was very poor and never married. During the Liang dynasty he served in the humble capacity of a palace steward. He made a serious study of Buddhism, and within a year of his death became a monk, taking the name of Huei-ti.

He lived at a time when China was split into two, the age of the Northern and Southern Dynasties. After the Sien-pi and To-ba tribes overran north China, the Hans established the Southern Dynasties — Eastern Tsin, Sung, Chi, Liang and Chen — south of the Yangtse River. Liu Hsieh lived during three of these dynasties, the Sung, Chi and Liang. The southern rulers relied on the support of hereditary nobles and great landowners. Exorbitant usury and ruthless annexation of land concentrated the wealth in the hands of a few, leaving the peasants to shoulder the burden of heavy taxation while the upper classes lived in wanton luxury. Literature became increasingly vapid and devoid of content, with decadence and formalism as its chief characteristics, and Liu Hsieh wrote to combat this unhealthy trend. In his last essay, which explains the purpose of his book, he says: "We live long after the sages, and our literature has

degenerated. Writers love the bizarre and admire what is showy and fantastic. Writing is over-embellished, has strayed far from true literature and is growing specious and heterodox." Many writers of his day tried to hide the emptiness or degeneracy of their work under a cloak of splendid verbiage and the literary trend at the time was anti-realist. In his book Liu Hsieh makes many sharp criticisms of this trend.

Even more important than Liu Hsieh's attacks on these unhealthy tendencies is the fact that the principles he upheld were basically those of realism. This gave him great strength in his fight. And this is the fundamental reason for the high regard which his great work has always inspired.

Liu Hsieh believed that literature grew out of men's natural and social environment. In his essay "On the Surroundings," he expresses the significant view that: "Men's emotions vary according to the world around them, and their utterances are based on their emotions." Similarly, in "On the *Book of Songs*," he says: "Men's seven emotions are moved by the things around them. And it is natural that, when moved, men should express their emotions." In "On the Influence of the Age" he makes an even more important point by affirming the influence of "changes in the times" on literary style, for here he is touching upon the fundamental truth that literature reflects objective reality and is influenced by social life. After making a serious examination of the history of literature before his time and analysing the works of different periods, he comes to this conclusion: "The contents of folk songs alter with the times, and so do literary styles.

... Literature changes with society, and flourishes or withers away according to the spirit of the age." It is beyond dispute that Liu Hsieh considered the chief function of literature to be the reflection of objective reality, men's natural environment and social life.

Many of Liu Hsieh's admirable views on literary criticism stem from this basic principle. Taking realism as his starting point, he emphasizes that truthfulness in literature and art should be the foremost criterion in literary criticism. He attacks the dishonesty of the writers who served the ruling class, and declares that there is no genuine content and no emotional appeal in authors who "write of ease and tranquillity in a time of great hardship and distress... long for official regalia yet sing of marshes and fields, are involved in mundane affairs yet treat vainly of matters quite outside this world." He liked literature "rich in feeling and written with distinction... genuine emotion and well-chosen expressions." In his view, a true poet or essayist should "dip into the marvellous without losing the truth, and appreciate the blossom without sacrificing the fruit." Truthfulness is the life of art, but this was not acknowledged by the literati of that time, who gave all their attention "to finding ingenious rhymes or effective epithets."

Liu Hsieh considered that another important criterion of literary criticism was a work's educational value. This is indeed a principle which all realist literary critics must uphold. In "On Following the Sage," he points out that literature can serve to govern men. It must benefit humanity by deepening its readers' understanding of life and encouraging them to seek

for better things. To Liu Hsieh, this was the sacred duty of a writer. In "On the Truth," he praises the writings of Confucius because they "set forth the glory of the universe and enlighten humankind." In other words, they describe reality in all its complexity and educate and inspire men, enlarging their understanding of real life. He believed that poetry could "elevate human nature . . . foster the good and correct the bad." Obviously, the "truthfulness" which is the life of literature and art is closely linked with the profundity of the ideas expressed. A work of literature which does not set out to teach men what is right cannot be said to possess artistic truth.

Since an author reflects reality and influences the reader through his work, Liu Hsieh tells us the best way to judge him is to study his work objectively and make a thorough analysis of it.

An author sets pen to paper to express the feelings which move him. A reader studies the work to grasp its mood. If we follow a stream we can find its source even though it is hidden in a deep recess. Though the reader is far removed from the writer in time and cannot see him face to face, he can know his heart by reading his works. If he fails, it does not mean that the work is too deep but that his own understanding is too shallow.

Here are two different processes. The writer experiences certain emotions and expresses them in writing; then the critic or reader studies the work to discover the ideas and feelings which the author has tried to express or succeeded in expressing.

If instead of judging the work on its own merits the critic relies solely on subjective reasoning, he cannot make a correct estimate of the work or its writer. This was the case with the estimation of Chu Yuan during the Han dynasty. Thus Liu Hsieh says in his essay on the poems of Chu Yuan: "Four authorities (the Prince of Huainan, Emperor Hsuan, Yang Hsiung and Wang Yi) compared them to the Confucian classics, whereas Pan Ku said they failed to measure up to the *Tso Chuan*." This discrepancy in opinion arose because these critics did not study the poems thoroughly. "They did not examine them minutely enough, or evaluate them accurately enough." As a result, "They praise or condemn a work as the fancy takes them, overestimating or underestimating it. . . . To discover its worth one must examine it well." After examining and analysing every aspect of Chu Yuan's poems, Liu Hsieh reaches a conclusion which convinces us: "In spirit they approach the ancients, in language they are close to the present age. Their brilliance and beauty are incomparable." Liu Hsieh invariably passes judgement in most concise terms on a writer or his work, but because his brief conclusions are the result of long study we always find them entirely appropriate, with nothing exaggerated or partial about them. His study of the poems of Chu Yuan is a notable example of his conscientious and scholarly approach. A good realist critic will not pass a casual judgement on a work over which a writer has laboured long and hard.

To make a completely correct criticism is no easy matter, however. According to Liu Hsieh there are usually three obstacles in the way. First, "Most critics in the past have

despised contemporary writers and admired the ancients." Secondly, writers usually belittle each other. "Pan Ku and Fu Yi* had approximately the same literary attainments, yet Pan Ku accused Fu Yi of letting his pen run away with him. And Tsao Chih** spoke most scathingly of Chen Lin. . . .*** Tsao Pei**** was therefore quite right when he said that all writers run each other down." This prejudice means that writers cannot make a fair judgement. Thirdly, a critic tends to judge a work according to his personal tastes and interests, and this frequently prevents him from pointing out its good and bad points objectively.

The gallant applaud a lofty tone, the cultured enjoy a polished argument, the clever appreciate embellishments, the lovers of the miraculous are impressed by strange tales. When something suits their taste they approve of it and praise it, otherwise they disapprove of it and ignore it. Thus critics consider the infinite variety of literature from the point of view of personal prejudices. One who faces east can never see the western wall.

In other words, when a critic is governed by his own likes and dislikes and had no objective criteria, he is bound to miss the truth.

For all these reasons, it is very hard to judge a literary work fairly. Even when its merits and defects are fairly

obvious, a critic may make a wrong judgement. Liu Hsieh uses apt similes to explain this in his essay "On Appreciation."

Unicorns and phoenixes are not ordinary stags and pheasants, and pearls and jade are not pebbles and gravel, as we can see clearly in the sunlight. Yet a man of Lu takes a unicorn for a stag, a man of Chu takes a pheasant for a phoenix; a man of Wei thinks a pearl that shines by night a curious pebble, while a man of Sung thinks a bit of gravel a jewel. If such mistakes can be made about objects so distinct, how can we say it is easy to judge literature which is so much more difficult to analyse?

This is a key problem for critics. How can they make correct literary judgements uninfluenced by personal prejudice and conforming to the truth? Liu Hsieh has given a fairly satisfactory answer to this question. His two chief points, already mentioned, are that literary criticism must have objective criteria: we must ask whether or not a work reflects reality truthfully and penetratingly, whether or not it is beneficial, capable of elevating and educating readers.

Liu Hsieh also points out that a critic should have a thorough grasp of literature and art. He must have read all the best works, the most profound in content, the most masterly in technique. Only then can he pass accurate judgement.

After playing a thousand tunes a man knows something of music, after examining a thousand swords he understands good weapons. So to gain comprehensive knowledge one must take a broad view: gaze

* Two well-known scholars of the Later Han dynasty.

** A well-known poet and young son of Tsao Tsao of the Three Kingdoms period.

*** A talented scholar and contemporary of Tsao Chih.

**** Eldest son of Tsao Tsao.

at high mountains to estimate small mounds and dip in the ocean to judge ditches. When a man has no prejudice, no bias one way or the other, no personal likes and dislikes, he can see things in a balanced way as clearly as in a mirror. . . . Therefore, before we study a work of literature, we should first lay down six rules. First, we must consider the general structure, secondly the use of language, thirdly the change of moods, fourthly the general and peculiar styles, fifthly the use of allusions, sixthly the rhythm of the writing. After examining these things, we can differentiate clearly between good and bad.

Liu Hsieh devotes much of his book to these six aspects of literary form, attaching great importance to them. This does not mean, however, that he ignores the content of a work of literature. On the contrary, he stresses the importance of the content, always placing it before form. Thus he says:

Feeling is the warp of writing, and language the woof of ideas. Only after the warp is there can the woof be woven. Only after the ideas are there can fluent language be written. This is the fountain-head of literature.

Hence he was in favour of "writing to express the feelings," but against

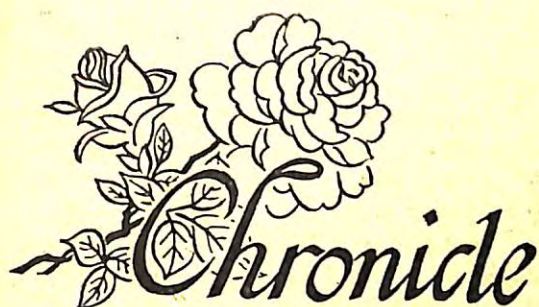
"feigning certain feelings for the sake of writing." This view was diametrically opposed to that of most of his contemporaries who cared only for literary form.

Of course, literary form is an important factor too. Weaknesses here can seriously damage the content of a work, for even one word or phrase improperly used may mar the whole. Thus:

In writing, men use words to make a sentence, put sentences together to make paragraphs, and combine paragraphs to make the whole essay. If the whole essay is brilliant, it is because the paragraphs are free from blemish. If the paragraphs are lucid, it is because the sentences have no defect. If the sentences are well-constructed, it is because the words are correctly used.

This enables us to understand why Liu Hsieh laid such emphasis on the importance of "mastering the art of writing," and why he paid special attention to artistic form.

Many of Liu Hsieh's views on literary criticism are extremely penetrating. In addition to these brilliant theories, he has given us excellent examples of objective criticism in his detailed surveys of different writers and their works.



An Important Conference of Literary Critics

Early in the summer the Chinese Writers' Union called a conference of literary critics. During this conference the work done in the past was reviewed, and there was discussion on future developments in this field.

First, the conference affirmed the great contributions made by literary critics since the founding of the people's republic in struggles over questions of principle in literature and art. During last year's struggle against the rightists and revisionists, in particular, the critics did much to defend the Marxist line in literature and art, refute the reactionary ideas of the bourgeoisie, clear the way for socialist literature and create the necessary conditions for the enormous advance in writing this year. The conference also pointed out, however, that literary criticism still lags far behind the new writing and is unable to satisfy the public demand. Many shortcomings still exist in our theoretical research and teaching of literature, and China has not yet a strong body of literary critics armed with Marxism. All who attended the conference agreed that the main task of our literary critics

should be to encourage the rapid and healthy growth of socialist literature and to continue to refute all anti-socialist trends in literature and art.

Secondly, the conference was of the opinion that critics must continue to combat revisionism and dogmatism and carry out the policy of "letting a hundred flowers blossom, a hundred schools of thought contend." Sharp and spirited criticism and self-criticism are needed, as well as writers who have the courage to express original ideas and launch bold attacks.

There are two types of contradictions within the ranks of the people: that between the working class and the bourgeoisie, and that between the progressive and the backward. The main way of helping the working class and all that is progressive to overcome the bourgeoisie and all that is backward is to boldly expose contradictions, take opposite sides and encourage debates and arguments. If we remain silent or attempt peaceful co-existence with mistaken views, this will simply benefit backward, bourgeois and idealist ideas, and will hamper the development of Marxism and socialist culture.

Conversely, it will be an excellent thing for the development of Marxism if we take even more interest in free debate and contending schools of thought. The conference also urged that criticism should be clear and pointed, proletarian principles should be upheld, but the critics' attitude must be sincere and friendly. We must learn how to offer criticism in a patient and comradely way.

The conference pointed out that there are two methods of literary criticism: one is divorced from reality, anti-Marxist and dogmatic; the other — the Marxist way — is linked with reality and our present tasks, and has originality and individuality. We are for the second method and against the first. In literary teaching and research work there is a tendency at present towards ignoring actual life, towards laying emphasis upon the old and belittling our achievements today. It goes without saying that we prize our classical literary heritage; but because of the age during which these works were written and the class from which their authors came, they contain strong elements of reactionary individualism. The study and teaching of classical literature should entail Marxist literary criticism. While correctly evaluating the masterpieces of our great predecessors, we should point out their limitations from the viewpoint of historical materialism and not idealize their backward ideas. Students

of classical literature should be encouraged to pay attention to modern literature at the same time. Periodicals and newspapers should carry more reviews of modern literature and thus strengthen the study of it. The conference also proposed that the bodies engaged in literary research should publish a selection of the writing of the last thirty-odd years, and summarize the experience of modern literary movements in China.

Finally the conference stressed the need for all literary critics to carry out the mass line. As novels, films, plays and other forms of literature are written for the people as a whole, we must encourage concise and clear reviews written in simple language but containing profound ideas. And a great variety of styles is needed. Critics must try to be accurate, vivid and lively. Newspapers and periodicals must also encourage the average reader to take part in these discussions. Since criticism should be based on popular opinion, critics should pay constant attention to this and study it. They should distil its essence and raise it to a higher level, in order to guide and form public taste correctly. It is essential that expert criticism and popular opinion be integrated in this way. Only so can criticism avoid being divorced from reality, and only so can we gradually expand the ranks of literary critics and by this means encourage more and better writing.

Peking Writers and Artists Discuss Chou Yang's Report

After the publication of Chou Yang's "A Great Debate on the Literary Front," a translation of which appeared in the third number of *Chinese Literature* this year, some Party and non-Party writers and critics in Peking met to discuss this report. Among them were Cheng Chen-to, an authority on literary history, the poet Tsang Keh-chia, the novelists Ai Wu and Yen Wen-ching, the critics Lin Mo-han, Shao Chuan-lin and Chen Huang-mei, as well as many others.

All who took part in this discussion agreed that the report not only summarizes the lessons of the struggle against the Ting Ling and Chen Chi-hsia clique in 1957, but also makes a clear analysis of the development of revolutionary literature in China since the May the Fourth Movement, giving the first assessment of the historical experience of the struggle between the Marxist line and bourgeois line in the proletarian literary movement during the past thirty years or so. From 1919 onwards the revolutionary literature of China developed under the leadership of the working class. After 1921 many bourgeois writers dissociated themselves from this movement, and the struggle between the two lines in literature and art dates from that time. The first openly to raise the anti-Communist, anti-popular banner were Hu Shih and his supporters, the *Modern Critic* school, the Crescent Moon Society, and the men who styled themselves the "Third Group." Later the Trotskyite Wang Tu-ching and people like Hu Feng crept into the ranks of revolutionary writers and tried to peddle bourgeois ideas under the banner of Marxism; while writers

like Feng Hsueh-feng and Liu Hsueh-wei supported the Hu Feng clique. At the same time in Yenan, Wang Shih-wei, Hsiao Chun, Ting Ling and others voiced the same ideas as Hu Feng and Feng Hsueh-feng in the Kuomintang-controlled areas. After liberation Chen Yung, Chung Tien-fei and Chin Chao-yang followed the same line. The distinguishing characteristic of these writers was revisionism. The participants in this discussion felt that Chou Yang has given an extremely clear outline of these trends of thought.

They also agreed that Chou Yang had hit the nail on the head when he pointed out that bourgeois individualism is the root of all evils in a socialist society. Bourgeois individualism is the basic characteristic of Ting Ling, Feng Hsueh-feng, Chen Chi-hsia and their like. Because they considered what they wrote as their own, they were bound to come into conflict with the principle that literature and art should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers, and with the Party leadership. This is why they opposed the Party and the people and formed their anti-Party clique. The most profound lesson to be drawn from last year's struggle against this clique is that writers and artists must free themselves once and for all of the bourgeois individualism which impedes their progress, and dedicate themselves to the service of the people.

In addition, there was unanimous agreement on the penetrating and forceful criticism made by Chou Yang on revisionist ideas in literature and art. His report indicates that the fundamental difference in literary principle between ourselves and the

revisionists is most clearly expressed in the views on the relationship between literature and politics. The discussion stressed the importance of this point. It is the law of social development that art is subservient to politics. This law applies to the bourgeoisie as well as to the proletariat. Revolutionary literature and art are weapons in the revolutionary struggle, and since they form a part of the whole revolutionary fight of the proletariat they must serve political needs. The actual relationship between politics and art is constantly changing: as the political situation changes so does the content of art, while in step with this the methods of writing develop and alter. This is why in the age of socialism we advocate socialist realism in literature. The revisionists, however, deny that this relationship can change and claim that it is enough to follow the realism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In fact, they oppose the

subservience of art to politics today, and therefore argue that our modern art is false, that writers have no freedom, and that socialist literature has proved a failure. Hoping to remove the weapon of art from the hands of the proletariat, they put forward such slogans as "Art is politics!" to counter the view that art should serve the revolution. Actually they want art to serve the political end of reactionary classes. In that case there will be no need for Party leadership, and writers need not identify themselves with the people. The writers and critics who took part in this discussion were keenly aware of the danger of revisionism, and recognized the need to insist on the socialist line in literature and art. Only in this way can writers and artists unite on a firmer footing. Only so can socialist literature and art develop further.

Similar discussions on Chou Yang's report have been held in other parts of China.

Traditional Painting Is Linked with Industrial Art

Early in March this year, the Shanghai Studio of Traditional Chinese Painting called on all artists of this genre to link their work with industrial art. Since then eleven artists, including Wang Ko-yi, Tang Yun and

Chi Pai-shih's "Chicks" adapted for use on enamel cups by Tang Yun



Cheng Shih-fa, have gone to work in the Shanghai Enamelware Factory. These painters, whose hands held nothing but brushes in the past, are now making basins and cups every morning with the other factory hands. In the afternoon they make designs for the enamelware, and in the evening teach the techniques of traditional painting to young art lovers in the factory.

In less than one month's time they have produced sixty-four new designs of flowers, birds, fruit, figures and landscapes. By adapting the work of such masters as Chi Pai-shih and Hsu Pei-hung, or making new designs themselves in the traditional style, they have increased the variety and improved the quality of industrial art.

This linking of traditional painting with industrial art is a new experi-



A Tai girl, a design for use on wash-basins by Cheng Shih-fa

ment and has aroused interest among artists throughout the country.

The Discussion on Literary Style

One of the subjects being discussed today by Chinese writers is the problem of improving our literary style. The eminent novelist and dramatist Lao Sheh raised this question at the Fifth Session of the First National People's Congress in a lively speech entitled "Down with Foreign *Paku*." Following this speech, which aroused considerable attention, the *Wenyi Bao* (Literary Gazette) organized a discussion on how to improve the style of modern writing, and the *New Observer* fortnightly published an interview with Kuo Mo-jo, president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, on this issue. Simultaneously many periodicals in China printed articles on the

modern literary style. A lively discussion is still going on.

The *paku* style of writing has a long history in China. Many centuries ago the feudal rulers evolved this highly stereotyped essay form to fetter the ideas of intellectuals and make them flunkies of the government. The *paku* essay consisted of eight sections. The themes were invariably quotations from the chief Confucian classics. This essay form with its meaningless verbiage was required of all candidates who sat for the civil service examinations set by feudal rulers. And even after this examination system was abolished, the *paku* essay left a strong mark on the written language. The

May the Fourth Movement dealt the old *paku* a mortal blow; but before long a new literary style known as foreign *paku* came into fashion. This was the creation of certain bourgeois and petty-bourgeois intellectuals who were under the influence of Western culture; and this Western-style *paku* has persisted for many years among the ranks of revolutionary writers. Lu Hsun, China's greatest modern man of letters, made several attacks on this literary style, saying: "*Paku*, whether new or old, should be wiped out." Mao Tse-tung, too, has always opposed writing devoid of content but full of verbiage, which makes indiscriminate use of new jargon and progressive terminology. In its place he advocates lively, meaningful writing which can be readily appreciated by ordinary people.

It is generally felt that there is great significance for our writers in the raising of this problem of literary style again today. In this period of socialist construction we need language which is popular, lively, accurate and able to express the heroic spirit of these times. Some books and periodicals have millions of readers, and as our cultural revolution progresses even greater demands will be made on our authors. It is therefore important to know how to supply the needs of this growing readership and make our literature truly popular.

The general consensus of opinion is that there are two main defects in most writing today. The first is wordiness, the second dullness. Much modern writing lacks precision, freshness, raciness and polish, and is so far removed from the lively vernacular that the mass of readers cannot enjoy it. Kuo Mo-jo, Lao Sheh and the poet Tsang Keh-chia have pointed out that

this is not only a question of language, but one linked with the writer's way of thinking. Long ago our old realist writers have pointed out that language conveys thought, and a writer whose ideas are confused or illogical can never produce a great work. Lao Sheh and the novelist Chao Shu-li also make the point that since literature is written for the people it should use the language of the people, so that they can understand and appreciate it. This brings up the problem of how literature should serve the masses. Tsang Keh-chia tells us that the poems of many of our modern poets are not enjoyed by workers and peasants, and he feels if such poets want to write popular poetry they must change their style to suit the needs of the people as a whole.

Because the literary style of many works is dry, insipid and bookish, it does not hold the interest of the general reader. Writers should study the colourful speech of everyday life and make the written language as close as possible to the vernacular. Kuo Mo-jo emphasizes the relationship between language and thought, between form and content, and the rule that form is determined by content. The language used as a vehicle for proletarian ideas must be close to that of the working people. It is from their speech that the writer must forge the instrument to convey his ideas with precision. To write well he must integrate form and content in one harmonious whole. There are still writers, however, who like to spin out their work. Our short stories often run to more than ten thousand words: those of a few thousand words are the exception. The same is true of poetry: there are few short poems of only four or eight lines. Both Kuo Mo-jo and

Yeh Sheng-tao emphasize that length does not constitute quality in writing, but that this is determined by the content. An author should not write at unnecessary length. Only if he eliminates all phrases, sentences or paragraphs which are not essential will readers welcome his work.

It is unanimously agreed that the best way to overcome the influence of *paku* and create a new literary style is to live among the people and become one with them. A writer who lives

with the labouring people and shares their thoughts and feelings cannot write *paku*, whereas writers divorced from the masses cannot write anything else, because they are cut off from reality. Now many writers and intellectuals have gone to the countryside to work and live with the peasants and identify themselves with the working people. This will lay the foundation for a new literary style and put an end to empty, stereotyped writing.

Small Art Forms Are Popular

One afternoon in early summer gongs and drums sounded at Tien An Men, the largest square in Peking, and singing could be heard. An open-air performance was being given by a well-known Shaohsing opera company on a visit from Hangchow.

This street performance attracted a crowd of workers, soldiers, government employees, students, white-haired old ladies and young mothers with small children in their arms, who watched spellbound. When the programme was over an old man, clapping vigorously, called to the performers: "Thank you! You have given us a splendid show!"

This company from Hangchow brought with it to Peking a number of new operas dealing with current political movements and production efforts. These topical works reflect life today during the great "leap forward" — all the new ideas and trends and the vigorous spirit now abroad. These plays are short and lively, and most of them include some songs and

dances. They take a great variety of forms: street shows, one-act plays and traditional Shaohsing opera. All are characterized by tremendous verve.

A street show performed by the Shaohsing opera company from Hangchow





An on-the-spot discussion with the audience

They aroused great interest among Peking audiences, and writers and artists in the capital are following the example of these Hangchow players.

This is in fact a tradition of the revolutionary movement in Chinese literature and art. During the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, street-plays like *Put Down Your Whip!* and *yangko* plays like *Brother and Sister Reclaim the Waste Land* served a useful role in uniting and inspiring the people in their revolutionary tasks at that time.

But for a fairly long period preceding last year's rectification campaign and the struggle against the rightists, quite a number of writers and artists, influenced by bourgeois ideas, opposed what they called "writing and performing for immediate propagandist purposes," looked down on small art forms and were unwilling to write and perform for the workers and peasants.

Now that a great socialist revolution in the realm of politics and ideas is

under way throughout China, the outlook of writers and artists has also undergone a tremendous change. Many of them have settled down in the countryside. Art troupes are performing in the country and on construction sites. In numerous cities and towns hundreds of socialist songs are being composed. Amateurs are busy writing in their spare time. The peasants have produced countless folk songs about the enormous advances they have recently made. In a word, there

is a new spirit and enthusiasm everywhere.

The people want long novels, plays and operas, large paintings, big sculptural groups, great symphonies; but they also need far more shorter and smaller works. Without question great works which require a long time to complete are needed to reflect the spirit of this great age. At present, however, there is an even more pressing need for all sorts of smaller works which can be quickly produced and deal with subjects of vital interest today. Small works can also be gems. We must supply popular songs, ballads and short plays. We must lose no time in writing of our modern heroes and their exploits to encourage the men and women who are building socialism. This is the sacred task incumbent on all writers and artists. The Hangchow company's performance in a public square shows a new trend in Chinese literature and art today, and one which is rapidly spreading throughout the country.

The Kite—a Sino-French Film

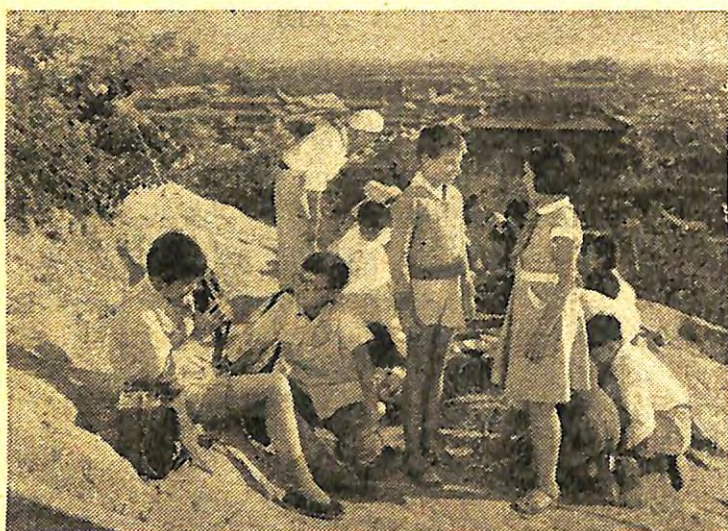
The Kite, a feature film in technicolour and the fruit of the first collaboration between French and Chinese film workers, is now completed and will shortly be released in China, France and elsewhere. The film was directed by Roger Pigault and Wang Chia-yi. Filmed against the background of real life, it has the enchantment of a fairy tale. The story starts in Paris when Pierrot, his sister Nicole and their friend Bébert find a kite on a big tree. Painted on the kite is the face of the monkey king, Sun Wukung, from the popular Chinese romance *Pilgrimage to the West*. This kite has been sent by Hsiao-ching, a little boy in Peking, and has flown all the way past India and Egypt to Paris. A letter

attached to it says Hsiao-ching hopes the boy who finds it will be his friend. Because mischievous Bébert snatches away the tail of the kite with the sender's address, Pierrot goes home in low spirits; but as he is dozing off that night the monkey on the kite comes alive, lands with one somersault on his bed and promises to help him. Monkey plucks a hair

from his body and blows on it, and immediately the hair turns into a beautiful lotus flower on which Pierrot and his sister float through the air to China. After a great deal of difficulty they find Hsiao-ching. But just at that moment Pierrot hears his name called. He wakes up and finds himself hugging his pillow—it was all a dream! It was not Hsiao-ching who called him, but Bébert who has come to apologize. Bébert gives him back the address of the kite's owner, and together they write to Hsiao-ching. They also write another letter and fasten it to the kite, which soars up into the blue sky, attended by a flock of doves, to seek friendship with the children of the whole world.

Monkey comes down from the kite and promises to take Pierrot to China





At Coal Hill Park, Pierrot asks Chinese Young Pioneers to help him look for Sung Hsiao-ching

The French director, Roger Pigault, loves China and loves children. Three years ago the idea for this film came to him, and through the good services of the famous Dutch film director Joris Ivens he proposed it to his Chinese confrères. Now, thanks to the combined efforts of film workers of both countries, his wish has been realized.

The small actors in *The Kite* are amateurs who are appearing on the screen for the first time and are able to speak their own language only. Hua Wei-ming, who acts as the interpreter between the Chinese and the French children, has a Chinese

father and a French mother, and can therefore speak both languages fluently. When she knew that this film was to be made, she went eagerly to the Peking Film Studio to offer her services as an interpreter, and with her help the other French and Chinese children managed to understand each other very well. Chang Chun-hua who takes the part of Monkey is the well-

known exponent of Peking opera who visited Paris in 1955, when he also played the monkey king. The children of Paris were delighted by his performance.



At last Pierrot finds Sung Hsiao-ching and they fly the kite together outside the Temple of Heaven

The shooting of this film started in July 1957 in Paris, and after the French scenes were made the French film workers came to Peking. From the moment they left the airfield the little French actors started playing with Chinese children. The theme of *The Kite* is friend-



Away from the camera, Nicole (Sylviane Rozenberg) enjoys a quiet moment with one of her Chinese colleagues

ship, and the close Sino-French co-operation during the making of this film was itself a splendid expression of this friendship.

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We wonder if you have enjoyed reading this number. Is there a story or article you particularly liked or disliked? What else would you like to read in our coming issues? Your comments will help to make the magazine better reading for you.

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ARTISTS IN THIS NUMBER

Chiang Chao-ho, a professor in the Central Institute of Fine Arts, is fifty-six years old and comes from Szechuan Province. One of China's outstanding contemporary painters, he started to draw at the age of six and mastered the art of painting after years of hard work and study. With Chinese brush and paper as his medium, he succeeds in bending the traditional style to a modern visual approach. *The Doves Are Coming* is one of his latest posters.

Yang Hsien-jang, one of the many young woodcut artists to come to the fore in recent years, is twenty-eight

and comes from Shantung Province. *The Pagoda Hill of Yen-an* is one of his latest works.

"**Winding the Yarn**," a Sung dynasty painting, is representative of a new form of genre-paintings which appeared at that time. Earlier artists had usually selected their themes from the life of people in the upper social strata and it was only in the Sung dynasty that homely scenes of the life of the working people came into their own. *Winding the Yarn*, one of the most notable genre-paintings of the time, is said to have been painted by Wang Chu-cheng.

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