

CHINESE LITERATURE

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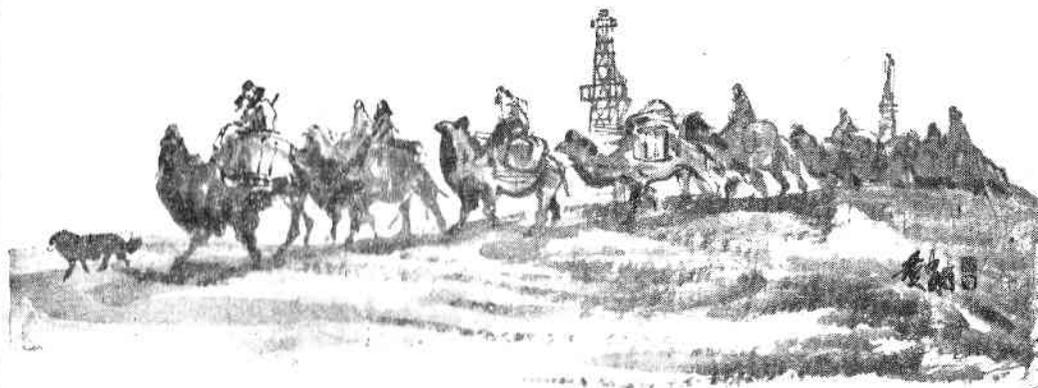
CHINESE LITERATURE

monthly

EDITOR: Mao Tun

ASSISTANT EDITOR: Yeh Chun-chien

Published by Foreign Languages Press
Pai Wan Chuang, Peking (37), China
Printed in the People's Republic of China



LI JO-PING

A Souvenir

I arrived at the Black Wind Hills oil field late one night.

The first thing the following morning an old friend called for me and took me around to a few of the drilling teams.

I was no stranger to the place, having visited there three years before. Then it was just a dismal corner of the Gobi Desert. Now it was a brand-new tent city. The hills bristled with drilling rigs. Roads to the oil fields spread like the strands of a spider's web. Supply trucks, water wagons and oil tankers shuttled rapidly back and forth. I simply couldn't believe my eyes.

My friend was a young geologist who had taken part in the prospecting of the Black Wind Hills. Although at first he had disliked working in the wilderness, he had become one of the best workers in the district. Evidently sensing my mood, he asked with a wave of the hand:

Li Jo-ping, a young prose writer, is the author of *Sketches from the Tsaidam*. Two of his travel notes, *The Sun-and-Moon Mountain and Lake Chinghai* and *The Charban Salt Bridge*, were published in *Chinese Literature* No. 2, 1960.

"Do you recognize these roads?" Without waiting for my reply, he added in an emotional voice: "They used to be paths for antelope and hungry wolves. Man never set foot here. But look at them now!"

"It's you fellows who opened the roads up," I said.

"We —" He paused. "Many people travel the same road, but they don't do it in the same way. As for me, the road to the Black Wind Hills is one I'll never forget."

"I haven't seen you for several years, Meng Fei," I said. "You've changed a lot."

"Have I?" He smiled thoughtfully. Then he asked: "Do you know Iron Man Chang?"

I shook my head, puzzled. Why should he suddenly bring up this stranger?

"*Aiya*, he's the famous Old Platoon Leader of the Black Wind Hills. You mean to say you've never met him?"

Meng Fei unzipped his wallet, pulled out a picture and handed it to me. It was a half length photo of a soldier of the People's Liberation Army. A fur hat on his head, he wore a fleece coat and a cartridge belt. A short bristly beard covered his face. He looked about forty-seven or forty-eight. His most striking feature was his large eyes. They burned straight at you, like an eagle's. I turned the picture over. On the back a brief inscription was scrawled: "To Brother Meng Fei from soldier Iron Man Chang."

"I certainly was lucky to find a friend like him out here," Meng Fei asserted fervently. He put the picture carefully back in his wallet.

As we strolled along, Meng Fei told me his story.

I

When our prospecting team first arrived here three years ago, Meng Fei said, Iron Man Chang was in charge of a squad of guards who came along to protect us. They had recently been discharged from the army and were now doing guard work for our prospecting team.

It was a bitterly cold spring day. As we proceeded along the foot of the Kunlun Range, there was nothing but desert before



us and behind. We hadn't met a living soul in nearly ten days. It certainly was a desolate place. My heart beat heavily. I hoped we could leave the Gobi soon.

We were all on camel-back. Again we climbed to the top of a rise. Let's hope we'll see something different when we cross this one, I prayed to myself. But on the other side it was still the Gobi — grey, misty, and vaster than ever. I felt very depressed. It was then that a voice behind me boomed:

"A grand place for a long gallop!"

I turned around. A great, hulking, dark-complexioned fellow, a rifle slung across his back, was pointing with his whip from atop his camel. He must be the "Old Platoon Leader" the soldiers talked about. Infected by his pleasure, I said jestingly:

"A gallop over that ground and you'd probably break your neck."

He cut my camel sharply with his whip, making the beast jump and frightening me silly. "Don't get smart with me, young feller!" he roared. "I'm not a man who can be pushed around."

I was startled by his familiarity. We had only met that day. Yet his manner had the warm directness of an old friend. Suddenly he drove his mount forward, shouting happily, like a child:

"Hey, young feller, what's that? It looks like a river—a big river!"

I gazed in the direction he was indicating. Sure enough, a broad green river shimmered in the trackless Gobi. Mountains, woods and buildings were reflected in its waters, and red and golden flowers. Beautiful! But then my common sense told me—it was only a mirage. It was the Gobi making faces at us. Iron Man stared at it delightedly. I didn't know whether to pity or laugh at his simple credulity. Of course water was the key to our work in the desert, to our very existence. There were nearly thirty of us in the prospecting team, and Iron Man and his soldiers were responsible for supplying us with water. No wonder he was so pleased at the sight of the river. Licking his dry lips, he struck his camel with his whip and raced forward.

"That's no river," I shouted after him with a laugh. "It's a sea."

"So that's what a sea is like!"

"You were all over when you were a soldier. Haven't you ever seen a sea?"

"Never a real one."

"After a while, we'll row across it. See, there are boats there by the shore, and people too."

"Really?" He squinted his eyes and looked. By this time the others could no longer restrain themselves. They burst out laughing. Only then did Iron Man realize that I had been ribbing him. Glaring, he shook his fist at me.

"All right, so you fooled me! But just wait. I'll get even!"

I didn't have to wait very long. It was a Saturday, and that night in camp, after we finished dinner, I sat down in my tent and got ready to write a letter to my sweetheart. I was terribly in love then. I wrote to her every Saturday night, without fail. The Gobi faded from my mind and I saw instead the limpid

Sungari River and Taiyang Isle—lovely as a picture. That was where Li-li and I used to meet.

Spreading a sheet of stationery on my little table, I took up my pen. Just then I heard someone raise the tent flap and enter stealthily. I glanced around. It was our youngest guardsman—Little Chiang, a lively boy who was always tagging behind Iron Man like a tail.

Holding a small lantern, he stood smiling awkwardly by my side. I ignored him and started to write. But he wouldn't go.

"What are you hanging around here for?" I demanded gruffly.

"Nothing special, Comrade Meng, nothing special." He turned to leave.

"Come back here. What did you want to see me about?"

"Nothing special. Our Old Platoon Leader said, if you were busy, not to bother you."

"Your Old Platoon Leader?" I didn't get it. "What's he up to?"

"It's like this. Because we made camp early today, he thought you might come and give us soldiers a talk."

"A talk, eh?" I said warily. "He said he'd get even with me. He's up to something. Tell me what it is."

"That's not it at all. He really wants you to give us a talk."

I laughed. "About geological techniques? You fellows don't need a talk on that."

"Who says we don't? Our Old Platoon Leader told us: Before, we carried guns as soldiers in the fight against the enemy. Now we're carrying guns as soldiers in the search for oil. It's a very important job! But what kind of soldiers are we if we haven't the faintest idea where to look for it!"

"Your Old Platoon Leader has got something there!" I put my things away and followed Little Chiang to the guard tent.

The moment I entered, Iron Man bellowed: "Attention!" Seven or eight guards sprang to their feet. Iron Man stepped forward, clicked his heels and saluted. Flabbergasted, I grabbed him by the arms.

"Sit down, please," I begged. "And tell the other comrades to sit down too!"

Grouping themselves around two lanterns the men produced fountain-pens and notebooks, and looked at me expectantly. I spoke about petroleum, from its source right up to its use in

agriculture and industry. Of course I also referred to the geography and weather of the Gobi and explained mirages, such as the one which had astonished Iron Man earlier in the day.

From time to time the men murmured appreciatively. Little Chiang, his hands supporting his head, listened entranced. Iron Man sat motionless, his head down. Occasionally he flashed a glance at me with those big eyes and smiled. He was smoking a short-stemmed pipe with a cartridge shell for a bowl. He drew on it noisily, as if trying to suck in my every word with its smoke.

After a while Iron Man brought a cup of water and placed it quietly beside me. Water is scarce in the Gobi. We were only allotted one canteenful each. He had kept it especially for me, but how could I take water out of a man's mouth? Nevertheless, as I warmed to my talk, I automatically reached out and took a swallow. Why, it was sweet and fragrant. He had added sugar!

"We prospectors are making history, comrades," I said in conclusion. "We're doing a difficult but glorious job."

Iron Man warmly shook my hand. He was too moved to speak. Raising the cup to my lips, he insisted that I finish it. When I did so, he smiled with satisfaction.

II

The summer dragged on. I kept counting the days, longing for autumn, when we were due to leave. Life was dull in the Gobi, and my initial enthusiasm was gone. I began to hate the wretched place. It seemed to me we'd never find any oil here. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say I no longer had any interest in looking. At a meeting of technicians I proposed that we wind up our prospecting in the Black Wind Hills as quickly as possible and move on to another area. I said we were only wasting our time and energy. None of the other technicians agreed. They criticized me for impatience and lack of determination. From then on, a coolness developed between me and my colleagues.

One day my team was leading our camels to a new prospecting site. That's right, we had long since given up riding them. Due

to the shortage of water they had become just skin and bones. And the men looked almost as bad as the animals! I knew that right now finding water was our most urgent and most difficult task. Several technicians were already helping Iron Man and the guards search. I asked Comrade Yang, our team leader, whether I too couldn't help. After talking it over with Iron Man, he agreed.

As the sun was setting we arrived at the furthest outpost of the Black Wind Hills site. We split into two groups, as usual. Comrade Yang led one group in some preliminary prospecting. Iron Man took the other off to find a place to camp. I went with Iron Man in a tour around the hill. On the north side was a long valley, on the east was a wide flat. Iron Man picked the north side.

The guards entered the valley at a trot. They stacked their rifles, took up picks and shovels and went to work. They levelled the ground, erected the tents, unloaded the camels. Before you knew it, a hamlet of white tents had sprung up and smoke was spiralling up from the cook stoves. Whenever I came back from the wilds with the other technicians and saw that smoke rising in the distance it gave me a warm feeling. And when I reached camp, had a meal and got into bed, I felt snug and comfortable, just like at home. Today I realized that creating that homy atmosphere was not such a simple matter.

I walked around, trying to give the guards a hand, but they didn't seem to need me for anything. At least I can set up my own camp bed and lay out my bedding, I thought. But I couldn't find them anywhere. I grew frantic. It didn't matter if I lost anything else, but in my pillow-case was a letter I had written to Li-li. I couldn't lose that!

Hurrying into my tent, I bumped into Little Chiang. Oh. He had already set up my bed, as usual, and untied my bed roll. The pillow rested at the head of the bed. Little Chiang was arranging my quilt. I was very embarrassed.

"Let me do it," I said.

"No, no," the boy replied. "This is my job. I'm supposed to do it."

I could still hear his words as I lay in bed that night.

I slept poorly. Around midnight I was awakened by the sound of footsteps. Frightened, I sat up. Had wolves come to dine on us? I pulled open the tent flap and looked. A tall dark figure with a gun was pacing at the mouth of the valley. It was Iron Man! Though autumn nights in the Gobi are as cold as winter, there he was, standing guard for us! I looked and looked, and my heart went out to the middle-aged ex-platoon leader.

The following morning I went with him and Little Chiang to search for water. Whatever they did, I did. I also ran about; I too was anxious. But the discouraging thing was, though we wandered from sunrise to sunset all over the big flat that extended from south to north through the Black Wind Hills, not a drop of water did we find. Plainly there had once been a river bed on the flat, but now it was fissured and cracked like the skin of a crocodile. We dug in places where grass was growing, but even at a depth of several feet the ground was still hard and dry. A cliff, a gully, a withered dead poplar—all gave us hope. But finally I didn't even have any hope left.

Iron Man's big eyes peered everywhere. He didn't say a word. I could hear him breathing hard as he relentlessly continued the search. Little Chiang sat on the old river bed, propping his head in his hands. I lay down beside him.

"What's the Old Platoon Leader so worried about?" I asked idly. "If we don't find water today, we'll find it tomorrow. Don't you fellows always find water sooner or later? What's the use of getting excited?"

Little Chiang glared at me. "It's easy enough to hear you say it," he snapped.

Why should he take that tone of voice with me? He really must be upset about that water.

"Your Old Platoon Leader seems to have lots of experience in finding water." I explained. "He knows just where to look."

"What do you know about our platoon leader? Nothing!" Little Chiang retorted coldly. "When he joined the revolution you were probably still a babe crawling around on the floor. He's fought more battles than you've read books. The first time he was wounded you probably weren't even in school yet!"

Little Chiang's mockery annoyed me exceedingly. When jesting with their Old Platoon Leader I must have inadvertently

said something the guards thought disrespectful. Otherwise, why would the boy be so angry with me?

I got angry too. "Why do you talk like that?" I demanded. "Have you got anything against me?"

"I certainly have," he retorted bluntly.

Getting up, I walked stiffly away. The sound of a shot halted me in my tracks. Another shot rang out. I saw Iron Man, holding his rifle, running down the slope after a herd of bounding antelope. One of the beasts dropped, then another. Iron Man slung them over his shoulder and came striding towards us elatedly. Little Chiang rushed forward to meet him.

"*Aiya*, you got it right in the back of the head!" cried the boy, relieving him of one of the dead antelope. "There's enough here to feed the whole team."

"These beasts means we have hope of finding water," Iron Man exclaimed delightedly.

"What do you mean?" I asked. I forgot that I was mad at Little Chiang.

"They're a clue. If they weren't after water, why would they come to the flat?"

"Of course they're after food and drink," Little Chiang cried.

"That's right," Iron Man confirmed. "If antelope can live here, why can't we? If they can find water, we can too."

His words sounded reasonable, but I wasn't convinced.

We started back for camp at dusk, Iron Man and Little Chiang leading the camels. Although the water buckets were still empty, they were in high spirits. The moon grew bright, and Little Chiang burst into song. As for me, I felt that if they weren't pessimistic I had even less cause for concern. But the boy's sarcasm still rankled. I didn't speak all the way home. After we had walked quite a distance, Iron Man patted me on the shoulder and asked:

"What's eating you, young feller? Worried because we haven't found water? Better let us take care of that. You go back to your job. It's much more important than ours."

"Water affects the existence of nearly thirty people. There isn't any more important job right now than finding water."

"But finding oil is something that affects the happiness of the whole Chinese people. I really envy you young geologists. You've

got learning, you've got a skill. Whether we find oil or not in the Black Wind Hills all depends on you. Some day, we may have oil wells here. Ah, what a sight that'll be."

He was too moved to go on. It was as if the wells were already there before his eyes. I smiled.

"Your wish is a fine one," I said. "But from the way the work is progressing it's hard to say whether there's any oil here or not. We mustn't be blindly optimistic."

Iron Man was silent for a moment, then he said: "Right. But we shouldn't say it's impossible either. We haven't finished our prospecting yet, have we?"

"It's purely a question of scientific technique."

"Also true. But why is it that all the other prospectors say we have hope of finding oil? Why are you the only one who doesn't agree?"

"Huh! In technical questions it isn't a matter of the minority having to agree with the majority."

Iron Man was silent for a while, then he said: "It seems to me a person ought to be determined. How can a man live without determination? Whether you're fighting a revolution, or courting a girl, or looking for oil, you've got to be determined. Take a soldier, for instance. If he thinks he becomes a real fighting man the minute he slings a rifle across his back, he's wrong. You've got to be armed with determination too. Otherwise you'll tremble when you meet the enemy, you'll run when they charge. You won't be a soldier, you'll be a no-good deserter!"

His words made me break out in goose pimples. I strode abruptly away. The fairly good impression I had of him originally was now gone completely. He was just a crude and irritating big clod!

III

Unfortunately, a few days after I stopped speaking to Iron Man, the prospecting team called a meeting of technicians to discuss our work. Everyone was quite excited. After studying the data and maps carefully once again, they all were sure there was oil in the Black Wind Hills. To confirm their belief, they decided

to ask the Bureau of Geology to extend our prospecting period and sink a few exploratory shafts.

My heart beat erratically when I heard this. Iron Man and the guards still hadn't found water, although they had been searching for five days. Without water, how could we drill? How could we live? But I couldn't convince the others. I said: "You can't convince me either. If you send in a report based on your analysis, I'll send in a report based on mine. I'll go to the bureau and talk to the chief geologist."

That night I wrote out my report. The next morning I went to our team leader to request that he let me go to the bureau. I discovered that the night before he had already picked another technician and two guards to make the trip. They had packed some dry rations, loaded three camels and were ready to leave. Everybody was trying to force their own water on them. I grew frantic.

"You're not very strong and it's a rough journey. You'd better not go," the team leader said to me. "The other comrade can hand in your report."

"I wrote it," I cried, "and I insist on delivering it personally."

"Keep calm, young feller, keep calm," the Old Platoon Leader urged.

It was no longer early. The sun had already risen. The men going to the bureau set forth. The whole team accompanied them a long way down the road, as if seeing off close relatives. Then everyone went to work. I said I wasn't feeling well and stayed in camp. I flung myself down on my bed and lay there for a full half hour.

I gazed around the tent. Suddenly the thought came to me: Why shouldn't I just get up and go?

I quickly set out towards the north. The blowing sand still hadn't obliterated the tracks of the three men and their camels. Following them was easy. But, afraid that I might be noticed by the comrades who were prospecting near by, I left the trail and made my way through the more secluded sand dunes.

Although far off I could still see the tents in the valley, they no longer interested me. I also could see my comrades working in the Black Wind Hills, but they seemed very remote. The more I thought, the more convinced I was of the intelligence of this

measure I was taking. Chest high, I crossed sand dune after sand dune, hill after hill. I felt that I was quite a man, a fellow of matchless courage. Full of energy, I pushed on.

But after crossing another dune and entering a stretch of lowland, I was suddenly assailed by a feeling of intense loneliness. All around was the Gobi — silent as death. Before me sand dunes rolled in endless waves. Not a man or camel was in sight. Behind, the Black Wind Hills were lost in mist. You couldn't be sure whether they were really there or not. I was alone. Where was I going? What sort of person had I become?

Someone behind me cried: "Coward, you're running away from the battle!" I was startled. It was the voice of the Old Platoon Leader. "The main thing is determination. A man can't live without it. . . ." I don't know what made me imagine I heard this.

My head felt ready to burst. My lips were parched. Automatically I reached for my canteen. Tilting it, I drained it dry. I felt much better then, and my head cleared. I wandered about the lowland. "Meng Fei, Meng Fei, you're disgraceful," I said to myself. "You nearly became a deserter!" I broke into a cold sweat at the thought.

Almost instinctively, I turned and began striding back. I walked unhesitatingly, with no regrets. At that moment Iron Man and Little Chiang seemed immeasurably dear. I remembered the Old Platoon Leader's sincere advice with pleasure.

But the more I marched the further away the misty Black Wind Hills seemed to be. I pressed on. After travelling another few minutes, there was still no sign of the hills or the tents in the valley. According to the time and rate at which I had been walking, I should have been there long ago! Could I really be lost? In a panic, I scrambled up a high dune and peered all around. I was very tense. My heart beat like mad.

A familiar laugh boomed out from the foot of the flat. I looked. Iron Man and Little Chiang were there with two camels. Stripped to the waist, the men were laughing and pummeling each other. What were they so happy about? Never mind — I had got back. Overjoyed, I rushed towards them, shouting: "Old Platoon Leader, Old Platoon Leader!"

I ran, and the distance between us shrank. But when I nearly reached them my head started spinning, and I collapsed to the ground in a faint.

When I revived, Iron Man was holding me in his arms. "You shouldn't run so fast in this sun, young feller," he said reprovingly. "What's your hurry?"

Unable to speak I threw my arms around him and hugged him. He patted my back with a hand as big as a lotus leaf. Then he said with a laugh: "Take a look, young feller. What do you think we've found?"

He pointed to a newly dug trench, not far off. For prospecting purposes, I thought. "Did the team leader ask you to dig that here?" I queried.

Iron Man laughed. "That's right. Trench prospecting. Very good!"

He took a pick and jumped into the trench. He disappeared with a thud. Drops of mud splashed out. Water! I rushed to the edge of the trench. Iron Man was standing in muddy water up to his thighs. He was still digging. When he saw me he cupped some water in his hands and flung it in my face. It splattered all over me; some of it got into my mouth. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Little Chiang pointed at me and collapsed with laughter, holding his belly. I spat out the gritty water and excitedly jumped into the trench.

Iron Man resumed digging. I saw a deep dark scar on the left side of his waist. Was the wound from shrapnel or from a bullet? Or had it been made by an enemy bayonet? I recalled Little Chiang's sarcastic remark: "Our Old Platoon Leader has fought more battles than you've read books! The first time he was wounded you probably weren't even in school yet!"

Something drove against my heart. Never had I been so stirred.

Then Little Chiang jumped into the trench too, and we all dug away until sunset. The trench was as long as an ox trough, but much deeper. The water had risen higher than Iron Man's waist. Soon it was nearly up to Little Chiang's head. The two of them kept playing around, shouting and splashing each other. That Old Platoon Leader acted more like a teen-ager than a grown man. Though I didn't join in their battle, I got splashed

plenty. My eyes and nose were full of mud. But I was so happy I never stopped grinning.

At dusk, the Old Platoon Leader clambered out of the trench. He looked as if he were made of mud. "Let's get our things together and go back," he said. "By tomorrow the mud will settle and the water will clear."

Leading the camels, each laden with two buckets of muddy water, we returned to the Black Wind Hills. By then it was dark. The whole team greeted us with joy. They laughed at our mud-spattered appearance. "Making up as clowns to go on stage?" they asked. They raised us on their shoulders and carried us around the valley, jumping and whooping triumphantly.

That night I ached in every joint. Although it was Saturday, I didn't have the energy to write to Li-li. I flopped into bed and slept like a log. In the middle of the night I awoke with a start, my heart pounding. For the moment I thought I was still alone in the desert. I couldn't fall asleep again for a long time. As I was dozing off, Iron Man came in softly, felt my head with his big hand and covered me with his fleece-lined overcoat. Very moved, I grasped his arm.

"Didn't mean to wake you," he said. "I was afraid you might be overtired. Sure enough, you were talking in your sleep. Your forehead is warm, too."

"I'm all right. I don't have any fever. You ought to go to bed yourself."

Iron Man tucked my quilt around me. "Don't think too much, young feller. Sleep. Sweat it out and you'll feel better." He softly left the tent.

I wanted to call him back, to tell him how miserable and ashamed I felt. Even if he berated me severely I would relish it. But his footsteps had already faded away.

IV

From that day on my relationship with Iron Man changed. It seemed to me I never had a dearer friend. Little Chiang, who had been a shepherd boy as a child, was shorter than I, but I felt that he topped me by a head.

Not long after, a manually driven shaft-digger arrived from the bureau. According to our team leader's new plan, he himself took charge of the detailed prospecting. I was made responsible for the sub-surface geological exploration. Iron Man and his guards, in addition to their regular duties, also became temporary drillers and porters. The Black Wind Hills were far from power sources — only manually operated drills could be used. The guards had to turn the crank and carry water. Both were tiring work, but carrying water was the most tiring. Naturally, the Old Platoon Leader appointed himself one of the water carriers.

Every day he went out with the guards, a bucket on his back, and walked three or four *li* down the hill to the trench well he and Little Chiang had dug. There he filled his bucket and trudged back up the slope.

Worried about his health, I urged him not to work so hard, but he wouldn't listen. One day I stopped him as he started down the slope, carrying his bucket. "There are plenty of other things you can do," I said to him. "Why do you pick such an exhausting job?"

"Oh, there are hard jobs and easy jobs, are there?" He countered. "Which is an easy one? I'd like to try it."

His jesting irritated me. "You needn't pretend you're so tough. Little Chiang told me long ago: You've got a bad case of arthritis."

"Where?"

"Below the knee."

"Hah! That's pure rumour. Arthritis can't touch me."

"And you've been wounded in many places. I suppose that's not true either?"

"I didn't say that. But a man can recover, can't he?" The Old Platoon Leader walked away and left me.

I saw him often, bent forward at the waist, the bucket on his back, as he plodded steadily up the hill. His padded military tunic became worn out at the shoulders, exposing the cotton. I got some cloth and old cotton to make him a protective cushion. But the next day he had already stitched one for himself and another — big and round as a life-preserver — for Little Chiang.

Before long the friction of the rope wore these out too. Iron Man sat down and repaired them with rapid stitches, as neatly

and carefully as any frugal housewife. He did this time and again, adding patch to patch. Once I saw him resting on the slope, the heavy bucket on his back, his mouth opening and closing. Panting with exhaustion, I thought. But when I listened more carefully I heard that he was singing.

Another day, as I was examining some gravel, Little Chiang came rushing over. "Comrade Meng Fei," he cried, "where's the first-aid kit?"

"What's wrong?" I quickly asked.

"Our Old Platoon Leader is sick. When we got halfway up the hill, his legs began to tremble. He ground his teeth and broke into a sweat. When I asked him what was the matter, he couldn't answer. I wanted to carry him, but he pushed me aside."

"Can it be that his arthritis is inflamed again?"

"Arthritis, nothing. He's still carrying a big piece of shrapnel in his thigh. When he gets too tired, it hurts him terribly. Don't waste any more time. I've got to give him some pain-killer, quick."

I dashed into the tent, got the first-aid kit, and raced down the hill, Little Chiang right beside me.

As I ran, I scolded him: Why had he concealed the Old Platoon Leader's injury from me? Even before we reached him, I saw Iron Man at the foot of a bluff, rubbing his right leg vigorously with both hands. I ran even faster. But when I rounded a bend and came up to him, I was astonished. Leaning forward, he was advancing calmly and steadily up the slope with a bucket full of water on his back.

Little Chiang and I exchanged a dumbfounded glance. Then the boy dragged the load from his back and I rushed to grab the rope. Iron Man looked at us in surprise. "What are you two up to?" he roared. "Have you gone crazy?"

"We're not crazy," Little Chiang retorted hotly. "What about you? You fell to the ground trembling all over, and you still ask what we're doing!"

"Take your bucket and be off," Iron Man snapped. "I had a touch of my old ailment and now it's gone. What are you making such a fuss about?"

"Kill yourself, then, if you don't want to live," I fumed. I opened the medicine kit. "How is the pain now?"

"Forget it, young feller. Medicine and me have nothing in common." He sat down on a stony retaining wall and leaned against the bucket.

Glaring at him, I took two sedatives from the kit and borrowed Little Chiang's canteen, intending to force Iron Man to swallow them. He sat resting idly, gazing out over the Gobi with a smile. On his face was the same naive, laughable expression of enchantment he had worn the first time he saw the mirage. Pulling out his cartridge shell pipe, he lit up and began puffing away.

He pointed into the distance. "There's that queer thing again, young feller."

I followed his line of vision. Sure enough, a great sea had appeared on the flats at the foot of the Black Wind Hills. Its green waves glinted in the sun. Tall buildings, sailing ships, trees and flowers were reflected in its waters. Truly enchanting. Ordinarily, I would have teased him about it. But now I only said inascibly: "I told you before: It's just an optical illusion caused by the reflection of the sun's rays. An illusion, pure and simple."

"I don't care whether it's simple or complicated," Iron Man drawled. "I think it's mighty pretty."

"Quite a dreamer, aren't you?" I asked mockingly.

Iron Man laughed. "What's wrong with dreams? Maybe I'm just a fool, young feller. I know very well the thing isn't real, but I like to believe that it's genuine. Who knows? Some day it may come true. Dare you say that it won't?"

"Ha-ha! Maybe in our next incarnation."

"Suppose it takes that long. All right. The way I look at it, that's the Gobi's tomorrow."

"The Gobi's tomorrow"! The phrase penetrated deep into my consciousness. How beautifully he put it. I stared into the distance. The scene before me no longer appeared false, but real. I was enchanted.

"Have you forgotten?" the Old Platoon Leader asked with a smile. "You said we were creators of history. You're right, young feller. But we can't lie in history's cradle and let other

people rock us. Or reap the benefits after others have done all the creating. No. We've got to build history with our own two hands, we've got to pitch in and sweat." He was quite stirred. "Take our work, for instance. We've all got to pound and drill till the oil spurts. Then the mirage will come true. Our vast drab Gobi will take on colour. Right?"

I stared at the Old Platoon Leader. He amazed me. Only now did I really understand him. I was moved beyond words. I forgot all about the sedative pills in my hand. When I remembered the Old Platoon Leader's illness again, I found that I had crushed them.

Once more he stooped to lift the bucket. But I firmly pushed him back to his seat. At a look from me, Little Chiang pulled the rope from Iron Man's shoulder. I raised the bucket to my back and started up the hill.

"Stop treating me like an invalid," Iron Man protested.

That bucket of water must have weighed well over a hundred catties. Before I had gone a few steps I had trouble with my breathing, and I staggered from side to side.

"Careful, young feller," the Old Platoon Leader laughed from behind me. "Don't put your back out of joint!"

That made me mad. I plugged ahead. Strangely enough, as soon as I really threw myself into it, my load seemed to grow lighter and my steps became steadier, faster. But it was when that weight felt most oppressive that I understood Iron Man best, for I knew then what it was like to shoulder responsibility. His explanation of the creation of history showed what a difference there was between him and me. He understood much better than I what a man's function in this historical era should be.

V

Three years passed. Black Wind Hills became an impressive-looking oil field. When people ask what brought about this remarkable change, the first thing that comes to my mind is Iron Man and Little Chiang and the guards, buckets of water on their backs, bent far forward at the waist, plodding the slopes. And

then I remember the weight on my own back, and the bitter-sweet taste in my heart.

The guards have become drillers, drill masters, truck drivers, technicians, even as chiefs of drill rigs. Today, Little Chiang is head of the water supply depot. They learned their jobs with remarkable rapidity. Nearly all of them are model workers.

But Iron Man is still the Old Platoon Leader. The only difference is that his old guards have gone on to other jobs and new guards have taken their place. The oil field authorities had wanted to put him in charge of a drilling team, or make him second in command of district brigade. But he only smiled and shook his head. "I know my own ability," he said. "Just let me still be the Old Platoon Leader."

"What is it?" I asked him once. "Can't you bear to part with that gun of yours?"

He hugged the rifle to his chest. "That's right. I want to be a soldier all my life. I know you want me to take up a new line. But I just can't bring myself to do it. I want to hang on to this gun."

"Many of our drillers and technicians formerly served under you as guards. You'd be ideal as a leader of the oil field district. Why not take the job?"

Iron Man laughed. "I still tell them off when they need it, whether I'm brigade leader or not."

Of course that was true. Even though many of them by then outranked him, all of his old soldiers still listened to him. But Iron Man didn't stay very long in the Black Wind Hills. He went off with another oil prospecting expedition to the Tarim Basin. The Tarim is even wilder and more remote from civilization than the Hills. It's also an unpopulated area.

I asked him for a souvenir several times before he left. He finally gave me this picture. But he's left me very much more than that, something that will be valuable to me for the rest of my life.

*Translated by Wang San
Illustrations by Huang Chou*

ODSOR

A New Year's Gift

As the lunar New Year approached, a festive atmosphere enveloped the grassland. The herders wore their colourful best. Gay songs filled the air. Mitge, a woman in her fifties, was especially happy. She rose before dawn. Humming to herself, she rummaged through her trunks and closets, selecting her handsomest garments. She finished her preparations as the truck rolled up and blew its horn. Quickly, she emerged from the yurt. The commune truck was going to Silinhot for supplies, and she was riding with it part of the way. The young driver hopped down from the cab. He gazed at her attire doubtfully.

"It's pretty cold out at the construction site. You don't have enough clothes on."

"Silly child. They're tearing through the job in leaps and bounds. I can't go down looking like a frump."

"Your son Hadbat will be coming home in a couple of days for the New Year holiday. Why must you go to him?"

"That canal they're digging has them enchanted. Who knows whether they'll come home or not? Besides, I've got important business there." Cheerfully, she climbed into the cab. Mitge wore a brand-new Mongolian gown of dark red, tied neatly at the waist by a broad blue sash. She looked very smart.

Odsor is a young Mongolian writer. *The Wrestler*, from his collection of short stories *The Distant Gobi*, was published in *Chinese Literature* No. 11, 1962.

It was a bright day. Through drifting veils of clouds the rising sun poured golden rays that reflected dazzlingly on the misty ground. Herds of fat cattle and tall horses of an improved breed, wandering over the snowy fields on both sides of the highway, pricked up startled ears at the sight of the racing truck. In anticipation of the holiday the girls who tended the sheep and the women hauling the manure had adorned themselves with head kerchiefs of various hues. From the distance they resembled multitudes of flowers floating on a silvery sea.

Faster and faster sped the truck. Clusters of yurts and bare trees spotting the snowy plain flew backwards. From time to time Mitge bounced high on the springy seat, as if in rhythm with her happily beating heart.

Nearing the canal district, they saw a column of smoke billow into the sky, followed by a thunderous boom. Startled, Mitge asked:

"What are they doing — firing cannons?"

"No. This section of the canal is being dug by the Prosperity People's Commune. They're using dynamite to break open the frozen top soil."

"Oh. I've heard of that dynamite. It's powerful stuff. My son says it nearly deafened him once." Holding up one hand to block out the sun, Mitge peered ahead. Pointing at the worksite with her chin, she inquired:

"Those small black little rooms crawling around there — are those machines for pushing the soil?"

"That's right. They're called bulldozers."

"Drive past them slowly. I want to take a good look."

The driver decreased his speed. Mitge pressed her wrinkled forehead against the side window of the cab and stared at the chugging vehicles operating a short distance from the road. Somewhere in those crowds of working men around the bulldozers was the boy she had been thinking of day and night.

His name was Hadbat and he was her only son. Hadbat was twenty-eight this year. In the Ulantug Commune, to which they belonged, he was quite well known. Progressive-minded, talented, he had been admitted to the Communist Party at the age of eighteen. Just as the secretary of the Party committee had said, Hadbat was a new type of herdsman.

All the girls in the neighbourhood had their eye on him. They called frequently on Mitge, ostensibly to help her with her household chores. If Hadbat was at home, girls herding cattle rode far out of their way to pass his door. Mitge knew from their manner what was on the girls' minds, and she watched her son closely for his reactions. But he kept going about his daily tasks and never seemed to give girls a thought. Though he chatted and joked with them, there was none to whom he paid any special attention.

As the years went by, the girls were married off. Hadbat remained unconcerned, but his mother grew worried. She was anxious to find him a match, and looked forward to the day when she could fondle a chubby grandson.

Much to her delight, a few days before, she had received word that her son and a girl named Chang Ying — assistant head of the Prosperity Commune — had fallen in love. Chang Ying had an excellent reputation, and Mitge said proudly: "The old saying is right — 'The slow horses walk with the slow, the fleet run with the fleet.' Hadbat has found himself a fine bride at last."

Indeed, Chang Ying was no ordinary girl. During the year of the Big Leap Forward, 1958, she had headed a team of girls who dug wells and ditches, and brought irrigation to a large stretch of arid plain. For this she had become famed throughout the banner.* Her commune had kept the red pennant of excellence for the past two years. No other commune had been able to take it away from them.

But what, actually, was she like? Prosperity Commune members were also working on the canal. Mitge was longing to go down and have a good look at her. Her son's letters had urged her not to travel all that distance. He promised to mail her a picture. But Mitge couldn't wait. She decided to go to the worksite and visit her son and his girl. At the same time she could see the canal they were digging.

Now, the truck halted in front of a row of tents. Getting down from the cab, Mitge walked with a beaming face towards the construction workers. Her son Hadbat hurried forward to meet her with the large strides of a Mongolian wrestler. The sun had bronzed his handsome face. After greeting his mother in the

* County.

customary manner of the plain, he asked what brought her on this unexpected visit.

"Shouldn't I come to see you?" she countered with a laugh.

Actually, Hadbat knew very well why she had come. He started to escort her to his tent. She held him back.

"It was warmer in that truck than in our yurt. I'm not the least bit cold. Come on, first show me your Prosperity Canal."

Pleased, Hadbat turned and took her to the construction site.

Everywhere, men were singing as they worked. Though it was still winter, the young fellows were sweating as if it were spring. "There's our canal, ma," Hadbat said. "Over a hundred *li* long. It cuts through three waterless pastures. Not only will tens of thousands of cattle be able to graze there soon, but tens of thousands of *mou* can be set aside for growing fodder."

"That's nothing," another young fellow named Prantai interrupted. "Next year when the water is let in, we're going to build a small power station on the bank. Then we'll have electricity too."

"Our herders will settle down permanently on these shores," Hadbat explained. "We'll have a lot of conveniences here."

Mitge walked excitedly along the dyke. Many of the young herdsmen working on the canal knew her and stopped to greet her. She gazed at the crowds of men and the bulldozers working in the snow.

"Why don't you use dynamite?" she asked. "That would save a lot of trouble."

A young fellow pointed at a red pennant floating over the site. "We snatched that from your future daughter-in-law. But we used up all our powder doing it."

"So you've got the pennant but you can't hold it." Mitge smiled. "Won't they snatch it back if you dig the frozen earth with your bare hands?"

That remark hit upon a sore spot. The fact was that since their supply of dynamite ended their excavating rate had dropped to an average of only two cubic metres per man daily.

There was heated discussion and much laughter in the big tent that night. The tent served as the brigade's dining hall and meeting room. Many people remained after the evening meal to chat with Mitge.

She couldn't help recalling the days when she and her departed husband had herded cattle for the rich local lord. During the long winter nights she rarely saw the glow of a lamp or heard the sound of laughter. There was only the frightening howling of wolves and the groans of her ailing husband. How happy young people were today. They knew nothing of worry or misery. If only Hadbat's father were alive to see it.

The cheerful racket continued till the Party secretary announced that a meeting of activists was about to begin. Then those participating took their seats. The secretary urged Mitge to get some rest — she had been given a bed in the corner of the tent. But when she heard that they were going to discuss how to step up their excavating, she couldn't sleep. She lay in bed, listening.

Dynamite was the key question. People got excited as they talked, and so did Mitge. Although she was not supposed to be taking part, suddenly she sat up and said: "If you don't have any on hand, why can't you borrow some? What about the Prosperity Commune? What about Chang Ying?"

Hadbat and his mates wouldn't agree to this. They said rather than use people's dynamite to hold on to the red pennant you had won from them, it would be better to just give it up and be done with it. Besides, at such a critical moment, Prosperity probably wouldn't lend you any.

But Mitge stuck to her guns. She said: "This isn't just a matter of personal glory. The main thing is to get the canal finished quickly."

The Party secretary thought a moment. "Mitge's right. There's no conflict between our friendly contest and co-operation in a communist manner. But I hear they don't have much dynamite left themselves. We shouldn't shift our troubles to others. We've got to lick this with our own fighting spirit."

"It seems to me," someone said in a low voice, "without dynamite all the fighting spirit in the world won't crack frozen ground."

"Why not?" Hadbat jumped up as if he had been stuck with a pin. "We've dug canals without dynamite before," he shouted. "What's so tough about frozen ground? We've just got to behave like revolutionaries and pitch in and fight. For the sake

of finishing in time for the sowing season, for the sake of next year's grain crop, for the sake of keeping that red pennant, comrades, I propose we break our old custom and not go home for New Year."

Even before the last words were out of his mouth, a forest of approving fists thrust up into the air.

"Good," said the Party secretary. "We'll take our holiday when the job is done. Since you've all agreed, tomorrow we'll get our brains working on it and figure out some methods."

Early the next morning the activists started out for work. When this news was transmitted from tent to tent and yurt to yurt, the other workers also poured out into the frosty dawn and went to the construction site ahead of time. Stirred by their enthusiasm, Mitge called from the entrance of her tent: "I won't go home either, boys. I'll stay here and help the cooks. I promise to give you better, more delicious food than you ever had at home."

"If you cook for us, mama, we're willing to stay even if it means not going home for a hundred years," the young fellows shouted back.

From dawn to dusk the worksite was a maelstrom of activity. Mitge had been drawn in, the moment she got out of the truck. Putting on a white uniform, she pinned up her hair, rolled up her sleeves, and took up her job like an old veteran. She forgot all about her daughter-in-law to be. But the Party secretary was a considerate man. He telephoned Chang Ying and told her Hadbat's mother had arrived.

Although the men wouldn't go home, the construction site authorities decided nevertheless to give them a three-day holiday. On New Year's Eve, two big lanterns were hung in the main tent where everyone gathered. They drank the fermented mares' milk the Prosperity Commune had sent over, and sang Mongolian folk songs along with a famous vocalist whose voice was coming in over the radio. Many of them toasted Mitge and wished her well. The mischievous Pranalai, keeping a straight face, said to her:

"We've talked it over, and decided we'd better tell you the truth. We don't want you to be too shocked when you meet the bride tomorrow. She's an awful fright. Her face is as black

as that wooden image that stands guard in front of the lama temple."

Of course Mitge saw through him. "I never cared for the shrinking violet type of girl," she laughed. "If that's what you like, I'll try and find you one."

Everybody burst out laughing.

"When she comes tomorrow, what gift will you give her?" Pranlai queried. "You can't let the bride go back empty-handed."

Mitge became uneasy. Of course. The child was coming to see her future mother-in-law for the first time, and it was the New Year. She certainly couldn't let her depart without a gift. But what should it be? Originally her plan had been to stop by where Chang Ying was working on her way home, just to say hello, and leave a bit of the excellent butter and cheese their commune produced. How could she have known that the girl would make a formal call?

Mitge berated herself for having been so short-sighted. At home she had several fine gifts—a pair of woman's black cowhide boots, a red satin head kerchief, a carpet woven in Harbin, a piece of dark blue serge, a satin coverlet of sky blue with red flowers—things she had been preparing for years for her son's wedding. But she hadn't brought even one.

After celebrating half the night, everyone finally retired. Five or six young fellows slept in the same tent with Hadbat and his mother. All were soon snoring peacefully. But Mitge, worrying about her gift, couldn't sleep. She got out of bed, turned up the lamp wick, and went softly from bed to bed to make sure that all the boys were properly tucked in.

Some time after midnight the wind rose, blowing snow in through the tent flaps. Mitge squatted by the stove and added coal. Through the howling of the northwest wind, suddenly she heard the drone of an engine and then the honking of a horn.

Mitge stood up hastily and went outside.

A truck had halted in front of the tent. The glare of its headlights blinded Mitge for a moment, until the driver switched them off and jumped down from the cab. Hailing her in a high clear voice, he walked up and said: "This snowstorm blotted out everything. I nearly lost the road." He entered the tent.

He was a good-looking boy of medium height. His fur hat and eyebrows were rimed with frost. Sitting down by the stove, he turned up his ear flaps to reveal a slightly swarthy oval face and smiling eyes like crescent moons. He couldn't have been more than seventeen or eighteen.

"Is Comrade Hadbat at home?" asked the driver.

"That's him, over there." Mitge pointed at her son, sleeping on the bed. In keeping with the holiday custom, she poured the guest a cup of tea and milk, and also served some puffed rice, butter and cheese. "I'm his mother," she added. "Do you know him?"

"Ah." The driver showed his even white teeth in a pleased smile. "We're good friends. I've brought his brigade some dynamite."

"*Aiya*, so that's why you've come. How wonderful. We heard we couldn't get any for another two weeks. Everybody was very worried. They've been trying new methods day and night. They're not even going home for New Year." Mitge was very glad. She hurried over to the bed and shook her sleeping son.

"Don't wake him, mama," the young fellow urged. He produced a small notebook. "Tell me, have they worked out any good ideas?"

While heating some dumplings for the guest, Mitge told him about the new developments at the worksite.

The young fellow jotted them down. Then he rolled up his sleeves and unceremoniously helped himself to a bowl of puffed rice. Smilingly, he listened to her recital.

Mitge's enthusiasm grew as she talked. The guest asked her why she was still up so late at night. Unable to repress her joy, Mitge told him: her son's future bride was paying her a New Year's call tomorrow. Leaning close to the driver, she confided: "The girl is Chang Ying—the whole banner knows about her. They say she's clever and able, and very pretty. I'm so happy. How could I sleep?"

The young fellow covered his mouth to smother a chortle of laughter.

"What's so funny?" Mitge demanded. "Do you know her?"

"I certainly do, mama. That daughter-in-law of yours isn't at all what you say. She's a silly girl."

Mitge stopped what she was doing. "How do you know?" She glared at the guest.

"Because I—" The young fellow hesitated. "I'm her older brother."

"Oh." Mitge rushed over and grasped his hand. "So we're relatives," she cried affectionately. "No wonder I felt warm the moment I saw you." She bustled back to her cooking. Before long she presented the driver with a platter of steaming dumplings.

When the boy finished them, he drank a bowl of soup. Then he took off his fur coat and laid it down by the stove.

"You mustn't sleep there, child," Mitge remonstrated. "Come on, take my bed. I can't sleep. I'm on duty tonight."

"Don't bother about me, mama. I'm used to roughing it. Any place will do. The floor is broad. I'll be quite comfortable here."

"Maybe you'll be comfortable, but I won't. Who ever heard of letting a guest sleep on the floor?" She pulled the young fellow to her bed.

He argued no further. Thanking her, he stretched out and, without even removing his hat, promptly went to sleep.

The next morning when Hadbat opened his eyes he discovered that someone else was sleeping in his mother's bed. "Why don't those fellows go back to their own tent?" he grumbled. "Must they always crowd in here?"

"Not so loud," his mother cautioned in a whisper. She pointed at the sleeping driver. "That's Chang Ying's brother. He drove over in a truck last night. He's brought you something good. Go outside and see."

"I thought her brother was studying in Huhhot." Hadbat reached out to lift the fur tunic that was covering the driver's head. His mother pushed his hand aside.

"Don't disturb him. He's just gone to sleep."

Outside a voice shouted: "That Prosperity Commune is all right. They heard we have no more dynamite, so they sent a truck through the snowstorm last night and brought us quite a few cases."



Hadbat dressed hastily and dashed out. Parked at the door was a brand-new Liberation truck with "Prosperity People's Commune" painted in big letters on its side. A crowd of men were unloading dynamite.

Hadbat was happy but puzzled. Chang Ying had never told him her brother could drive a truck. When he finished helping unload and returned to the tent, the brother poked his head out of the fur tunic and gazed at him with a smile.

"So it's you," Hadbat cried delightedly.

"You make more noise than a magpie," his mother scolded. "Now you've woken him up." She brought in a basin of hot water for the guest to wash his face with.

"Ma, take a good look." Hadbat pulled off the driver's fur hat. A pretty girl with her hair in two braids was smiling at her shyly.

Mitge, overjoyed, put down the basin, flung her arms around Chang Ying and showered her face with kisses.

Translated by Sidney Shapiro

Writings of the Last Generation

YU TA-FU

Arbutus Cocktails

For six months I lay ill, confined to my room. Naturally, once up and about again I felt the urge to travel. "A change of air" is the term we use today for what used to be called "throwing off noxious influences." At all events, it is only human nature to want to move after long inactivity. Besides, we were in the middle of a heat-wave which made you eager to escape to wide open spaces. My thoughts turned first to the warm springs in Japan, then to Chinese resorts: Peitaiho, Weihaiwei, Tsingtao, Kuling. . . . But the last few months had reduced me to such a state of shabbiness and near-starvation that I had to lay aside these ambitious plans. In the end I decided to pay a visit to Hangchow. The fare would cost less, and I had an old friend there. I should be able to see him and stroll through those dimly lit streets redolent of wine, talking over all we had done in the seven or eight years since we parted.

The afternoon after this decision was reached found me with the friend I had not seen for so long in a small restaurant beside the West Lake,* sipping the arbutus cocktails then in season.

Outside blazed a mid-summer sun, fierce as in the tropics. From the tepid, muddy water of the lake rose a faint odour of decay. There were few rickshaws on the road and not many pedestrians either. My friend and I, who had to ask the price

* The well-known scenic spot in Hangchow.

of each dish we ordered, were the only customers sitting there among empty tables thickly coated with dust.

We had not met for seven or eight years. To cut a long story short, we had both taken the same preparatory course at the university in Tokyo but gone our different ways after graduation and been completely out of touch ever since. Recently, however, a young sharper had raised money in my name by sending out a circular stating that I had fallen ill in Shanghai and been admitted into X Hospital run by a charitable organization. He appealed to all men of good will and philanthropists, whether they knew me or not, to make a contribution and help save my life. Word of this had somehow reached my old friend, with the result that a month previously he had sent two hard-earned dollars to X Hospital in Shanghai. As it happened, I knew one of the doctors there; and consequently, a fortnight earlier, this doctor had passed on to me the two-dollar donation along with a very brief letter. The receipt of this letter and discovery of a certain unfinished manuscript published under my name made me investigate until I got to the bottom of the trick played by the aforementioned young sharper. But at least this little tragicomedy had brought my friend and myself together again.

He was wearing a linen gown patched on the shoulders. Once inside the restaurant, he hung this up by two buttons on the wall. That left both of us barbarously attired in nothing but vests and pants. Needless to say, his vest was dirtier than mine and I spotted two small holes in the back. My own was a native product on which I had expended fifty cents just before setting out from Shanghai.

Not only was he completely unchanged by the last seven or eight years, I found him exactly the same as the year he entered the university in Tokyo and took the preparatory course. The short beard on his chin looked just as it had a dozen years ago — as if he had just trimmed it two or three days ago. In fact, seen from a distance, his lower jaw reminded you of a small black-lacquered wooden fish* hung upside-down. Strange as it may seem, in our four or five years as classmates and in the seven

* A skull-shaped block on which Chinese Buddhist priests beat time when chanting.

or eight years since our returning to China, during which time we had not met, this growth on his chin had not varied by one iota. You could swear the fellow had been born with it and was doomed to sport it until his dying day. His eyes, puffy as if from weeping, were also the same as in his student days, focussed vaguely on the tip of his nose and holding the hint of a bewildered smile. His forehead was as broad as ever, his cheekbones just as prominent, the cheeks below them equally scored and hollow. And he looked no older than in his student days. You could take him for any age between twenty-five and fifty-two.

I had gone straight from the train to the summer school not far from the station where English and mathematics were taught. It was a wretched hole of a place, that school, one room upstairs and one down, like the tenements sublet in Shanghai. I arrived while he was in the middle of a lesson. Eight or nine young duffers of fourteen or fifteen were sitting in the dark, poky room staring blankly at the blackboard to which he kept turning and stretching out trembling fingers to write mathematical problems and formulae. The only sound in the room was the squeak of his chalk. This being the case, I centred my attention on his bent back and the sweat stain on his linen gown. When I had asked for him downstairs he must have heard his name up here, and the classroom was so quiet that he could not have failed to hear me mounting the stairs. Witness the fact that when I reached the top all his students turned to stare at me; yet he, whose reactions had always been rather slow, went on stolidly copying out his formulae. I had to edge into an empty place in the back row of the class. Having copied out all the formulae and problems, he checked through them carefully from beginning to end, coughed a couple of times, put down the chalk, dusted off his gown and then at last turned slowly away from the blackboard. Sweat beaded his forehead and upper lip and must have blinded his puffy red eyes as well, for he failed to see me and went on talking for a while as if all were as usual, before sending his students to the other room for English. The floor shook as they rushed out, jostling, to the other poky room. Then I quietly stood up and went over to pat his damp shoulder.

"Oh! When did you get here?"

At last he evinced some surprise, raising his lacklustre eyes from the tip of his nose. Gripping my fingers in his left hand, with his right he pulled a damp, grimy handkerchief from his pocket and started mopping his head.

"I was so absorbed in my teaching, I didn't hear you come up. What a scorching day! Well, are you really better?"

This incoherent way of talking when excited was another carry-over from his student days. After a perfunctory answer, I asked if he had any more classes.

"Grade A has graduated, so there's only Grade B left," he said. "I'm through with my maths for today. The head's taking them for English now."

"Suppose we go down to the lake, then?"

"A good idea. Let's go right away."

So down we went to the lake, to this small, fourth or fifth-rate restaurant.

Having sat down and ordered a few cheap but tasty dishes, we sipped our arbutus cocktails and started chatting.

"How are you making a living nowadays?" was his first question.

"I've no job and am permanently hard up, but I manage to make ends meet. How about you?"

"You can see the shape I'm in, but it's all right. This month's teaching in the summer school will bring me in an extra sixteen dollars."

"And after that?"

"I'll go on teaching in the primary school. There are only two teachers, the head and myself, so there's no danger of losing that sixteen dollars a month. I hear you've been writing. Do your books bring in much money?"

"Not much. Anything between sixteen and sixty dollars a month."

"That fellow who said you were in an old people's home in Shanghai, why should he use the name of somebody like us?"

"Probably because he's poisoned by a little education. Because, like us, he has a little knowledge but no proper use for it."

"The proper use of knowledge—that's what's occupying me now. I've not used my knowledge of chemistry for a single day

since coming back to China. But this time, I really think it's coming off."

He turned his face away to look at the sunlight outside.

"Yes, this time I think I'll pull it off."

Oblivious of my presence, he was talking to himself.

"Two thousand dollars for the first lot of machines, 1,500 for the factory premises, 1,000 to buy quartz, lime and other materials, 1,000 for wages and advertisements — can't do without advertisements, you know. That totals 5,500. A capital investment of 5,500. Then we go into production, and even if we only produce a hundred a day, that means 3,000 in a month. In a year, 36,000. Knock off twenty per cent and that still gives you 25,800 dollars. Six thousand to pay back the capital, 6,000 to expand the plant, 10,000 to build housing. Of course, all members of the firm will be able to live there. Yes, I need only one year, after one year things will be all right. . . ."

I had not a clue as to the meaning of these hurried calculations.

"What are you working out?" I asked softly. "An exercise for tomorrow morning?"

"No, no, a glass works. In one year capital and interest will be repaid and I'll be able to spend ten thousand on building a hostel — I'm on to a good thing this time! Ha, once that hostel's built, you're welcome to move in and write there. You can draft a few advertisements for us too, how about it? Drink up, now! Finish that glass!"

Still day-dreaming, he raised his glass and I had to do the same. I had eaten the arbutus and now gulped down the liquor. After drinking he clamped his lips together and closed his eyes, remaining silent for a moment. Then he opened his puffy blood-shot eyes and called:

"Here, waiter! Two more glasses!"

When two fresh cocktails arrived, he closed his eyes and leaned back against the wooden partition. With one hand he mopped his perspiring face, with the other he picked the fruit out of his glass and put it into his mouth. Leaning back, eating with closed eyes, he went on muttering:

"Yes, we'll build a house, western-style, overlooking the lake. Glass, we'll use the glass from our works, stained glass. Ten thousand dollars. Ten thousand silver dollars. . . ."

Some minutes passed while he muttered to himself and ate. Then he raised his cup abruptly again, opening his eyes to say:

"Here, old classmate! Drink, my friend!"

There was nothing for it but to swallow half my drink. He, however, finished all the fruit and liquor in his tall glass. Then once more he closed his eyes, leaned back against the partition and shouted:

"Waiter! Two more glasses!"

Two more brimming glasses were put down in front of us. Just as before he leaned back with closed eyes, popping arbutus after arbutus into his mouth. Since I was feeling quite tipsy by this time, I paid no attention but rested my head on my arms and prepared to sleep. I was dozing off when I heard a buzz in my ears:

"That's it! Ten thousand dollars! A house by the lake. An old classmate's come all this way. . . . We must drink, my friend! Drink up!"

I could not sleep through this noise. But exhausted by two glasses of liquor on a broiling day, on top of a tiring train journey, all I wanted was to find a hotel and rest. Just then, however, opening his eyes again, he proposed another toast. Waking up, I too opened my eyes and drank with him. When the sweet, burning liquid reached my stomach, my head started reeling and I called for the bill. The moment the waiter handed it to me, however, my friend sprang up like a madman, seized my right hand which was holding some notes, and with his left fumbled desperately in his wallet. The waiter took my money and came back with copper change, which he placed on the table. At that, livid, a murderous look in his bloodshot eyes, my friend snatched up the coins and threw them in my face. Something cold struck my right temple, which started to sting. Inflamed by drink myself, I glared back and roared:

"Are you crazy? What's the idea!"

His irregular features were ghastly, contorted with rage.

"To hell with you! Down with all capitalists! Down with you parasites! Here, let's see who's the stronger! Who asked you to pay? — Flaunting your money in my face!"

Scowling and gritting his teeth, he charged at me with clenched fists. In my fury I fought back.

Crash! Tables, chairs, glasses and dishes overturned, and the two of us rolled out into the street. How long we fought I do not know. Idlers, rickshawmen and police crowded round us, shouting.

I woke up parched with thirst, bruised and aching, behind wooden bars in the No. 2 Police Station. Summer nights are short, and now at nearly four in the morning it would soon be light.

Only when I had taken a good look round and asked the policeman on duty outside what I was doing in the lock-up, did some recollection of the previous day come back to me. When I inquired about my friend, the policeman told me he had sobered up two hours earlier and gone back to the school by the station. I urged him to get permission from the superintendent for me to leave, and he came back soon enough with my gown, Panama and wallet. I put on my gown and begged for a cup of water. By the time I had slipped a five-dollar note into his hand, put on my hat and left the police station, day had already dawned. The early morning wind cleared my brain, bringing back the memory of all that had happened the previous afternoon. A pang like a mild electric shock ran through me. And as I walked slowly on, I found myself muttering:

"Well, such is life!"

August 1930

Flight

1. Running Away from Trouble

The Chinhua winds east to meet the Chu as it meanders southward, and the confluence of these two rivers has for centuries been a prosperous market town and centre of communications. About ten thousand households live here, their junks forming a forest of masts, and the well-watered mountainous region is rich

in natural resources. Although the county town of Lanhsi is small, it has such strategic value that all those battling in the late twenties for the control of Chekiang Province knew that this was the first port to seize in the upper reaches of the Chientang River.

As the National Revolutionary Army* advanced east from Tungchiang, Fukien Province came over as soon as an order was received, and while the year 1926 drew to a close the vanguard of the Northern Expedition Army approached the Hsienhsia Mountains, whose capture should make their position invulnerable. The peasants of eastern Chekiang, long trampled underfoot by the warlords, began to stir and look forward to some action.

On the eve of a social upheaval, roughly the same phenomena may be observed in all villages and small towns throughout the country. First, troop movements; next, a flood of rumours; and then the evacuation of the rich who know, like weathercocks, when a storm is brewing. Though the order of evacuation may vary slightly, in general it follows certain hard and fast rules: the plutocrats of the provincial capitals and big cities move into the foreign concessions in Shanghai, small-town money-bags move to the cities and provincial capitals, while of course the local gentry in the villages move to the nearby small towns till the trouble blows over.

Tung Yu-lin had hired a small junk and filled its hold with cases and crates of valuables. With him were his wife, whose hair was already turning white, his much loved daughter Wan-chen, a student in a normal school in Hangchow, his thirteen-year-old son Ta-fa, and the family maid Ai-ngo. As they surreptitiously left their home in Tung Village and set sail for Lanhsi in the north to take refuge there, the late-rising winter sun was already above the tree-tops and the thick frost on the ground was sparkling like crystal. As the junk cast off, Tung Yu-lin wiped his perspiring forehead with the sleeve of his padded gown and gave last instructions to the hired hand left in charge, who had

* China was ruled by many feudal warlords during the early 1920's. In 1925, the Chinese Communist Party together with the Kuomintang set up a national government in Canton and formed a National Revolutionary Army. The next year this army set out on a northern expedition against the warlords.

come to see them off, reminding him to collect all debts and interest. Swaying as the boat rocked, he looked at the morning sun in the east, the fields and hills on both sides which belonged to him, and felt a pang at having to leave his property. Not till the woods and fields of Tung Village were lost to sight did he lower his head and step silently into the cabin.

The Tung family's fortune had been built up in two generations. Tung Yu-lin's father Tung Chang-tzu had deserted from the Taiping Army* bringing back considerable loot. That was before Tung Yu-lin was born, when his mother was working as a slatternly barefoot serving girl for an impoverished family in the next village. Nearly twenty years of fighting, affecting ten provinces or more, had left its mark on the Chinese countryside; but because this region was rich and not too densely populated, recovery proved fairly rapid. Tung Chang-tzu came back a strong fellow of eighteen. By the time Tung Yu-lin was born he had worked hard for several years and built a three-roomed thatched cottage west of the village, besides improving the soil of thirty *mou* of sandy land near by. In those days, moreover, the land tax and cost of living were low. Thanks to Tung Chang-tzu's economy, apart from land, a house and immovable property, Tung Yu-lin inherited a wine vat filled with bright silver dollars which he found buried under his father's deathbed.

Tung Yu-lin was half an inch shorter than his father but resembled him in every other way. They had the same heavy jowls, broad shoulders, ferrety eyes, pug nose, large mouth and wispy moustache. He inherited not only his father's appearance but his miserly habits too. The year that he was nineteen, Tung Chang-tzu found him a worthy wife from Shangtang Village a hundred *li* away. When the old man lay on his deathbed with closed eyes, his features relaxed in a smile, for young as she was his daughter-in-law had proved herself a far better manager, far more parsimonious, than he was himself. It was rumoured in the village that Tung Chang-tzu had not disclosed his hidden hoard before he breathed his last, but that he came to life again to whisper its whereabouts to his daughter-in-law.

* The army of the peasant uprising which swept through more than half of China during 1850-1864.

As soon as Tung Chang-tzu was dead, Tung Yu-lin and his wife started managing affairs in their own way. Their first act was to reduce the old hired hand's wages from eight thousand cash a year to seven thousand. But in addition to cereals, they made him grow cabbages and turnips too. This meant extra work for him in winter, when he had to carry vegetables to market.

One day on Tung Yu-lin's way back from the district town, where he had been to sell maize, in a junk shop outside the West Gate he discovered an old net in fairly good condition. He bought it for a song, took it home and had it mended, and every evening after that they caught fish and prawns in the river. So sometimes, among the vegetables in the hired hand's load were eggs laid by Mrs. Tung's hens, or fish and prawns.

The custom in Tung Village was to have four meals a day during the busy summer season, and three meals of congee or rice in the more leisurely winter months. After Tung Chang-tzu's death, however, in the name of economy Tung Yu-lin reduced the four summer meals to three, and the three winter meals to two or two and a half — half meant left-overs which were eaten cold.

The year after Tung Chang-tzu died, the region around Tung Village was ravaged by flood in May and by drought during autumn. Many villagers were reduced to selling their children. Starvation stared them in the face that winter. While Yu-lin and his wife also put up a show of despair, as if not knowing where their next meal was to come from, they were secretly calculating how best to take advantage of the situation, how best to use the hoard left them by Old Tung.

The first tentative step was taken by Mrs. Tung with the loan of a few silver dollars to certain families who still owned some land but needed money badly before New Year. They promised to pay back double the amount in two months or to forfeit their property, including even their children, in lieu of the debt. This excursion into usury taught the Tungs a new and most expeditious way of making money. Thereafter, whenever New Year approached, their gate was thronged by peasants from near by, and they utilized other festivals as well as the hungry season between the consumption of the old crops and the ripening of the new to extract what little property still remained to the simple, honest countryfolk. A man who is parched will drink even brine.

Everyone knew the danger of borrowing money at high rates of interest, but there was no pawnshop in the village, no bank to give credit, and peasants driven to desperation had nowhere else to turn.

A monkey may let fall the fruit it steals, but not once did the Tungs lose out on a loan—they recouped capital and interest every time. A few examples should suffice to demonstrate their skill in this respect.

In the temple to the tutelary god in the northwest corner of the village lived a nun of around sixty, who sold paper ingots to burn for the dead and performed other little services for the Buddhists. It was generally thought that she must have some savings tucked away. One day she was taken ill and, because she was alone in the world, Mrs. Tung decided to have a try at appropriating her property after she died. She called several times at the temple, bringing occasional gifts for the nun, which cost her nothing. The old nun grew steadily worse, but when some elderly Buddhist women in the village urged her to buy medicine she assured them that she could not afford a doctor. They were arguing this point one day when along came Mrs. Tung. Hearing the other women's advice, she did not hesitate to produce two dollars from the pocket of her cotton skirt.

"Why pretend to be so poor, mother?" she cried. "If you grudge the money, let me advance it for you!"

She handed the money to a devout old woman, who went off to fetch a doctor and buy medicine. All present praised Mrs. Tung's generosity, and took it in turns to look after the old nun. But the medicine proved unavailing: after another fortnight the old nun died. When the news reached Mrs. Tung, she dropped the pan she was holding and rushed to the temple. First she made a thorough search of the corpse and bed, then she ransacked the whole shabby room. When she realized, after searching until the evening, that the rumour of the old nun's savings was false, she was too infuriated to leave the temple. The next morning some good souls in the village contributed ten or twenty cents apiece to buy a simple coffin. But before they could stop her, Mrs. Tung made off with the lid. When they overtook her and demanded an explanation, she said she had taken it in lieu of the two dollars still owed her. The villagers talked it over and

chipped in to make up this sum to redeem the lid. But when the corpse was laid out she came back again to claim her two weeks' interest, and snatched a tattered padded jacket off the corpse. So the old nun was buried in nothing but a ragged shift.

Another pathetic yet ludicrous example was the case of Ah-teh, an old bachelor who had earned a pittance in his younger days by farming and herding for others or working as a hired hand in nearby villages. By skimping for years on food and clothing, he contrived to put by between twenty and thirty dollars with which he bought two *mou* of sandy land adjoining Tung's property. Too old for heavy work now, he built himself a hut on his small plot, meaning to spend his last years there. But soon coming to the end of his meagre savings he borrowed a silver dollar from Tung Yu-lin for the Mid-autumn Festival. At the end of the year Tung went to Ah-teh's hut to dun him for both principal and interest, and since payment was not forthcoming he insisted on buying the old man's two *mou* of land. When all Ah-teh's pleading fell on deaf ears, the old fellow shed tears of rage and rushed to the river.

"If you drive me any further, damn you!" he sobbed, "I shall jump in!"

Tung Yu-lin snatched up a long pole, ran after him and shoved him over the bank. Pushing Ah-teh out into deep water with his pole, he ground his teeth and swore:

"Die and be done with it! You won't pay me back and yet you dare talk about ending your life. I'll do it for you, you dog!"

This commotion had drawn the villagers from far and near. They heard Ah-teh, really terrified now, call out:

"Don't drown me! I'll let you have it! You can have it!"

The upshot was that for less than twenty dollars Tung bought the two *mou* of land that Ah-teh had been counting on to provide for his funeral.

The Tungs combined their flair for usury with remarkable thriftiness. To them, smoking was a luxury, but they needed the solace of a pipe during the long evenings when they sat making up their accounts by lamplight. To cut the cost of tobacco, they dried and chopped up some mugwort or artemisia and mixed this in with it. And when they bought a box of matches they care-

fully selected the thicker ones and split them into two or three, to make one box go as far as one and a half or two.

Naturally the Tungs' property grew from day to day till the fields, hills, oxen and implements they had acquired by forced purchase or trickery came to four times as much as Tung Chang-tzu had owned. But children cannot be bought or seized by force, and in the seven years of their marriage all five of the infants born to them had died. Ill-wishers in the village, toasting themselves before a brazier in winter as they gossiped about their neighbours, would say with a snigger:

"Those skinflints have sucked us clean, but they've done for themselves as well. Just see! They've no children to enjoy their ill-gotton gains!"

The taunts of these peasants whose land they had seized reached the ears of Tung Yu-lin and his wife; and late at night, tired out from devising new economies or writing up their accounts, they would often fall silent as they looked round their home, conscious of something missing. Then Mrs. Tung decided that she would pray to Buddha to send her offspring. And her husband agreed that Buddha alone could help them gain their desire.

They did not make their long pilgrimages without careful preparation, however. In the first place they would make ready for six months in advance, accumulating a boatload of local products to be sold near some far-famed temple. In the second place, they always hired a boat that was going back to its base, because that cost two-thirds of the normal price. And after beating the charge down as low as they could, they sometimes recruited other passengers to contribute to the fare. Whereas other pilgrims spend money on a pilgrimage, the Tungs usually made a tidy profit out of it, increasing their capital for usury. Moreover, their frugality extended to the alms they offered Buddha. Thus if the image in some famous temple needed a new embroidered silk gown, more often than not the pious Tungs would head the list of subscribers. If the cost of the gown was estimated at fifty dollars, they would collect seventy, and the tailors were particularly accommodating when it came to serving this charitable pair. A gown for which others paid fifty cost them no more than thirty to thirty-five dollars. Furthermore their familiarity with current prices, no rare attribute in itself, was turned to good account when they purchased

an equally handsome but less durable material at half the estimated price. The amount too would be less than stipulated. Of course this made it difficult for the monks to put the gown on the Buddha, but these economies covered the pious Tungs' travelling expenses as well as board, lodging and alms.

Since the Tungs were given to good works on this scale, they made many friends among the rich gentry and landlords in the vicinity, who every winter gave this charitable couple handsome donations in the shape of rice-tickets, clothes and money to distribute amongst the poor. So not only the Tungs' relatives but even their hired hands and temporary helps benefited every winter from their charity. Their very live-stock was fed on husks obtained from the rice shop in exchange for rice-tickets. As for the padded garments, some underwent a transformation and turned into quilts for the Tungs, others took the place of wages for the day-labourers who worked for them in busy seasons.

The most talked of act of charity undertaken by this virtuous couple occurred during an epidemic of plague in the village. After drawing funds from the Philanthropic Association in town, Tung Yu-lin hired men to make a dozen or so coffins, which he stored in readiness in the family temple. The pine wood was felled at no expense on the nearby mountains, and the carpenters were village men who received food but no wages. Anyone could have one of these coffins for a nominal fee, but shortness of stature was a prerequisite for the occupant, for without exception these coffins were unusually small. A large corpse could not fit inside.

So Tung Yu-lin and his wife contrived to feather their nest while doing good works and worshipping the spirits. Naturally Buddha could not fail to protect them, and so a daughter Wan-chen was born to them and had grown up a healthy girl. She was followed a few years later by Ta-fa, a son to carry on the family line.

2. Storm and Stress

The sun, rising higher, flooded the wintry fields on both frosty banks with a brilliant, rarefied light. Not the russet of late autumn but the deep sombre green retained even in sere, yellow

winter by the country south of the Yangtse. This was particularly true of the old trees, circled by birds or wreathed with wisps of straw, which could be seen from time to time through the cabin window standing out boldly against the clear blue sky. Wan-chen, who had come home on holiday from Hangchow a fortnight earlier, was reminded of the university student from Chuchow who had travelled with her for one day and one night on his way back from Shanghai.

Boat travel is slow and uneventful, and she was lucky on the steamer to have the company of this lively young man, who explained to her the stranglehold imperialism had on China and the need for a great social revolution. Wan-chen was already eighteen, and although this undergraduate used many terms she could not understand, his enthusiasm, his piercing eyes and his flushed cheeks when he was carried away by emotion convinced her that everything said by this promising well-read youth must surely be true. She had two meals with him on board, and they put up in the same hotel that night. Their parting the next morning on Lanhsi jetty filled her with an indefinable regret, as if by fading moonlight under wind-tossed willows she were saying farewell for ever to a gallant knight.

Back home with her parents and mischievous younger brother, she soon forgot the journey. She did not think of the young man again till disquieting rumours of the probable fighting in the neighbourhood agitated their household, and they decided to move out of harm's way.

"If he were here, that rabble of northern soldiers would never dare to touch us!" she thought. "How well he spoke about a social revolution and overthrowing the status quo! And how helpfully and admirably he behaved when we boarded and left the boat, or went to the hotel!"

In the intervals between packing she had recalled him. Now on the river her memories took a more vivid shape, as sometimes happens when you visualize scenes from a book you have once read. And finally her thoughts turned to a photograph she had seen in a Hangchow studio of a girl in a veil, holding flowers, beside a dashing handsome young man dressed in a western suit.

Wan-chen was considered not bad looking by her classmates. True, the shape of her face resembled that of her father, but in

place of his pug nose she had her mother's aquiline features; and the result was a pleasant but ordinary face, neither specially attractive nor in any way repulsive. But after all, her age is a girl's chief charm. When the gawky Tung family bone-structure was clothed in the flesh of eighteen, although her skin was not notably white and her clothes quite unremarkable — she wore the jacket and black skirt of a schoolgirl — this could not disguise the natural magnetism of a young girl, the attraction she has for the opposite sex. The afternoon sun was sinking as the Tung family's boat put in at Lanhsi, and Wan-chen's wholesome good looks drew the eyes of all the noisy idlers on shore.

Tung Yu-lin had rented an old house in a small lane in the southwest part of town. It had three rooms upstairs, another three down, and the rent was less than ten dollars a month; but even this struck the Tungs as so excessive that barely had they settled in than they started looking round for tenants sufficiently well-to-do to rent the ground floor. Family after family, refugees like themselves from neighbouring villages, came to see the rooms but jibbed at the high rent asked. Meanwhile the news from outside became daily more alarming, until all business virtually came to a stop. And then, one cold winter's evening, the army withdrew from the front and the harbours south and west of the town were filled with crowded troop transports.

Tung Yu-lin had just picked up his bowl at the supper table when the sound of bugling outside the town made his blood run cold and he hurried to bolt the gate. That evening the five of them dared not go upstairs but spread mattresses on the ground floor and passed an uneasy night there. The next morning they made Ai-ngo slip out through the back door to buy some beancurd from a shop in the side street. She came back after a long time white as a sheet, her bowl empty. As soon as the back door was bolted she caught hold of Mrs. Tung and whispered, trembling:

"Mercy on us! They were looting and raping women last night outside the south and west gates. They're press-ganging men on the streets and stopping all boats. There's not a soul about and not a shop open. When the beancurd seller saw me through the window, he called me in quickly and scolded me for taking such a risk. Then he scared the wits out of me, saying there's going to be fighting here in Lanhsi!"

For two days and three nights the family had next to nothing to eat and huddled fearfully on the floor downstairs. Then suddenly they heard footsteps in the street. At about ten in the morning firecrackers went off, there was pounding on the gate and someone shouted:

"Open the door! The warlord Sun Chuan-fang's bandit troops have gone! This morning the National Revolutionary Army marched into town. You're invited to attend a mass meeting at the foot of Big Cloud Hill to welcome them."

Tung Yu-lin opened the door a crack and peered out. He saw a Lanhsi youth in a grey jacket and leather belt, holding a Kuo-mintang flag. Observing Tung's fright, the young man stopped to explain that the National Revolutionary Army was a people's army and would make no trouble for the common folk. Wan-chen and Ta-fa went out while he was talking and stood behind their father, and Wan-chen was instantly reminded of the undergraduate she had met on the boat, for both young men spoke the same language. Presently the lad moved on to the next house. They heard later that he was in charge of propaganda in the west part of the town.

So came the strenuous high tide of revolution. A party headquarters was set up in Lanhsi, the whole administration was re-organized, the crimes of many local magnates were exposed and not a little land was confiscated. One day at a concert to entertain the troops, Wan-chen was surprised to meet one of her classmates in the Hangchow Normal School whose family lived in Lanhsi. This girl, who had always shone in school debates, was now an executive member of the Women's Association affiliated to the Lanhsi party headquarters.

Having chatted very briefly, they exchanged addresses. Then the other girl had to go off to attend to some business. That evening when Wan-chen went home she told her parents about the encounter, concluding:

"She was very keen for me to join the party and take up some work in the Women's Association or party headquarters."

Since the revolutionary army entered the town, Tung Yu-lin had seen enough red and green slogans, heard enough speeches and witnessed the arrest and punishment of enough landowners to turn him against the Kuomintang, for he feared it would reach out

a powerful hand to clutch him. His daughter's talk of joining the party made him see red.

"You want to join the revolutionary party? It's not as if men of property were thieves, damn it all! That riff-raff is just making trouble. What do they mean by ill-gotten gains? What's this talk of confiscation? They're swindlers, the lot of them!"

Tung Yu-lin had never lost his temper with Wan-chen or spoken to her harshly, and since she went to school in Hangchow he had shown her even more consideration. This sudden outburst so frightened his wife that she did not know what to do. The three of them sat in silence round the lamp until crafty, shrewd Mrs. Tung hit on a way of smoothing things over.

"Times have changed," she said. "If this is the way things are in town, there's likely to be trouble in our village too. I'd let Wan-chen join her friend there and get to know more people — such contacts may come in useful. So long as she's on her guard you needn't worry."

Since she was his trusted helpmate and had his interests at heart, Tung Yu-lin after thinking it over let himself be persuaded by his wife. So this small family dispute was settled without more ado.

3. Confusion

Wan-chen did indeed join the party and start work in the propaganda section of the county party headquarters. It was a resolution passed by the Tung Village Peasants' Association that prompted her to act so quickly. The peasants wanted to confiscate all Tung Yu-lin's land and forbid his family to return to the village to fleece them again. Resolutions from local peasant associations had to be ratified by the county party headquarters, and as soon as this news reached Tung Yu-lin he urged his daughter to establish connections with the party headquarters. She had in fact been given a job in the propaganda section before this resolution reached the county.

The chief of the propaganda section, Chien Shih-ying, was a young man of twenty-five who had come from Canton with the revolutionary army. A capable member of the revolutionary party,

he had been left in Lanhsi to direct the party work here during the confusion following the fighting. His native province was Hunan but he had been brought up in Anhwei, graduated from a normal school in Wuhu, and gone to Canton two years before this to join the army. Chien was quite a veteran, having been among the first batch to complete the party's course of political training.

Chien Shih-ying, while not tall, was powerfully built and looked as steady and solid as a rock. Being full-fleshed, his long face seemed oval. He was short-sighted and wore glasses, but although his black pupils were not large you felt they could see right through you. As a rule he spoke little, but in an emergency he went straight to the heart of the matter and could explain even the knottiest problems and find a satisfactory solution for them. His frequent smile was not the usual artificial smirk but a frank, unaffected smile from the heart, which seemed to illumine the darkness all around.

Wan-chen worked at a desk opposite Chien Shih-ying, and at first his presence made her so nervous that she hardly knew what to do. Later, when she made some ridiculous mistakes in copying out slogans and he corrected them in a friendly way, she felt he was quite approachable after all, though her colleagues seemed to look up to him as if he were a god.

That winter was exceptionally warm in the south, but one Saturday in spring there was a heavy fall of snow. When Section Chief Chien came back at five that afternoon from a meeting of county delegates, his face was distinctly clouded. He put down and picked up his brief-case several times and cast sidelong glances at Wan-chen, as if he had something important to say to her. Finally he looked at his watch, picked up his case and left. He turned in the doorway with a smile to tell her:

"Comrade Tung! Tomorrow's Sunday and a holiday. Will you come with me to Mount Heng to look at the snow? There's a lunch party in the county government, but it should be over by three. Do you mind waiting for me at the jetty outside the West Gate?"

Wan-chen flushed and hung her head as she murmured her assent. The next instant she brightened and looked up with a smile at Chien. When their eyes met he was the one to seem

taken aback. His smile gave way to a look of doubt, but after a momentary hesitation he left the office. All the others had gone and dusk was rapidly falling. The faint light reflected from the snow lit up Wan-chen's rosy cheeks and dancing eyes.

All the way home her heart beat fast as she recalled Chien Shih-ying's steady, experienced manner, his smile just now, and their date for the next afternoon. She could hardly forbear from proclaiming the good news to passers-by on the road. So absorbed was she by her thoughts that she took the wrong turning, heading east instead of west, down the narrow lane which led to the hostel for workers in the party headquarters where Chien Shih-ying lived. She toyed with the idea of calling for him and finding somewhere nearby to spend the night instead of waiting till the next day. But that would not do. Too many other people lived there, and Chien Shih-ying would be embarrassed if they knew. Snowflakes were stinging her cheeks now and a piercing wind recalled her to her senses. She turned and took the road home.

The night dragged past as slowly as if she were a prisoner newly confined. As she tossed and turned on the bed, her fancy ran riot. As soon as there was a glimmer of light she threw on her jacket and sat up in her quilt. It was not the dawn that she saw through the window, however, but the gleam of the snow. Unable to sleep, she dressed and lit the lamp. She would have gone downstairs to wash, but as the maid was still in bed the water would be icy cold. In desperation she took up a book and opened it at random to choose some characters which would indicate whether she were to be lucky or not. She could make no sense of the first four words she hit on, "constant," "also," "has" and "end." However, at last she heard movement downstairs and knew Ai-ngo was boiling water and getting breakfast. She tried again and relaxed when this time she picked "then," "profit" and "arrive," for surely "profit" augured well for today.

She went downstairs to wash and comb her hair and had barely finished breakfast when her classmate from the Women's Association called. Wan-chen was as pleased as a child with a new toy, for it was this friend who had recommended her to join the party and work in the propaganda section. Yesterday the section chief had made a secret appointment with her, and today her sponsor had called — there must be some reason for this. She entertained

her most hospitably. Judging by the other's manner and certain hints she let fall, there was something on her mind which she found it hard to put into words. Guessing that this concerned Chien Shih-ying, Wan-chen tried to stop her from coming out with it, for she meant to ask this friend to broach the subject formally to her parents after she had seen the section chief that afternoon. When the other girl left after an hour or so, Wan-chen waited impatiently for three o'clock.

She urged Ai-ngo to expedite lunch. The meal ended, she changed and prinked herself. It had not yet struck two when she set out in her new grey gown to the jetty by the West Gate. The day was fine, although slushy underfoot, and the sky above glowed an enchanting blue. After walking up and down on the bank to kill time for half an hour, she accosted an old boatman and arranged to hire his boat for the trip to Mount Heng. At first she thought she would sit in the boat and wait. But then, afraid Chien might miss her, she gathered up the skirt of her gown and went ashore to pace the muddy path in the sunlight for another half hour. At three exactly, she saw Chien Shih-ying approaching, a smile on his face. And the fact that he was wearing a black serge padded gown instead of his usual uniform pleased Wan-chen, who saw in this a deep significance.

Once aboard the boat Chien remained silent, smiling light-heartedly as he looked out across the snowy countryside in the slanting afternoon sun. Wan-chen watched him with expectant, eager eyes. When the boat reached midstream he met her glance. At once his face grew grave and gazing at her steadily he said to her, "Comrade Tung!" Wan-chen's cheeks burned, she looked the picture of confusion. Her heart pounded and she trembled as the young man continued gently:

"Comrade Tung! People who work for the revolution shouldn't do anything underhand, you know. . . ."

This only increased her confusion. Her brimming eyes shone, her breath came in gasps, her lips quivered. She was shaking like a leaf.

"But what else could I do?" he went on. "Yesterday at the county meeting the delegate from Tung Village presented a resolution. At first I didn't realize it dealt with your family, but when they passed it to me for ratification I saw your name. Down

in black and white was an account of the land and property your father had seized, his usury and embezzlement of public funds. It stated correctly too that your father was hiding in the county town and that you had got a job in the party headquarters. I didn't like to bring this up in the office, that's why I asked you to come out today. . . ."

Wan-chen had been so keyed up that this sudden blow reduced her to helpless despair. She lost all control and will power. Before Chien Shih-ying could finish she tumbled into his arms, too distracted to care about appearances, and gave way to a fit of weeping.

Chien Shih-ying was a young man, hot blood coursed through his veins. The warm helpless girl in his arms and her utter distress aroused in him both pity and desire, undermining his level-headedness and good judgement. Holding her close, he murmured, "Don't take it so to heart!" And before he knew what he was doing he had lowered his head against her burning cheek. They clung to each other, their lips met. But then he came to his senses with a start and recoiled in bitter remorse, self-reproach in his eyes. Heaving a long sigh, he stood there motionless. He had invited Wan-chen out solely to settle this business, with no ulterior motive, meaning to advise her to resign and persuade her father to return some of his property to its rightful owners. He had intimated as much the previous day to the classmate who had introduced Wan-chen, asking her to prepare the girl and tell her not to lose heart—other work would be found for her. But his carefully thought-out scheme and comradely consideration had degenerated into such a base impulse! This was as bad as taking advantage of another man's danger to abduct his wife or daughter. Such conduct was morally indefensible, especially since he was a party member in a position of authority. It was up to him now to atone for his mistake. He would have to go through with this. Once the two of them had come together, he could gradually set things right. This resolution brought him a faint gleam of hope. Laying a hand on Wan-chen's shoulder, still bowed in weeping, he softly urged her to sit up and tidy herself. By the time the boat reached Mount Heng, a smile had dawned again on her tear-stained face.

4. A Bleak Outlook

This heavy snowfall had made Mount Heng lovelier than usual. Although most of the snow had melted on the path by the river where their boat moored, it still sparkled on the ridges on both sides, the thatched roofs of mud cottages and the branches of trees. The sun, sinking, plunged the east side of the mountain into shadow and empurpled half the river, like a Chinese landscape in ink and water colours. Chien Shih-ying helped Wan-chen up the stone steps to the temple and, as they looked back at the little town of Lanhsi, each was happy for different reasons.

The clustered roofs of the town were powdered with spring snow, while encircling the high masts of the junks in the harbours was the arched dome of the sky, blue as an indigo flower, bringing a lift to men's hearts. The white-capped mountains near and far, the two towers rising sheer from the hillsides and the confluence of the three streams east, west and south of Lanhsi combined to form a snowy landscape of incomparable beauty.

Wan-chen for her part felt that it was this snow that had brought her and Chien Shih-ying together, that this cloak of white over the earth was a happy omen that they would live together until their hair was white. Her parents' difficulties, her own future and present status had all been settled when Chien Shih-ying bent his head. As for the young man, he pitied Wan-chen because although healthy and well-educated she lacked training. He believed that if somebody would guide her along the right path, a girl like this could do useful work for the revolution. And another consideration, underlying his legitimate concern, was the thought of his lonely bachelor life in the hostel, the natural appetite of a young man of twenty-five.

The scene before him was entrancing, the ardent girl beside him was longing for love. As Chien gazed round at his surroundings, Wan-chen's childish preoccupation with the pleasure of the moment and lack of anxiety about the future helped to stifle the remorse he had felt in the boat.

Leaning over the stone balustrade and pointing out various landmarks in Lanhsi, they suddenly found themselves gazing into each other's eyes. Wan-chen flushed and turned her head away

with a smile; but her eyes swivelled back to survey the young man's whole person and scrutinize his face. Chien, smiling, was regarding her as intently as if at a first encounter. The second time their glances met, he felt constrained to speak and asked with a laugh:

"Are you game enough to climb up to the top?"

"I'll go wherever you do!"

"Good! Let's see who's the best climber."

After entering the temple to ask an old Taoist the way to Orchid Shade Shrine, they struck up a side path towards the summit. The sun had melted most of the snow, but although the narrow path did not look too wet it was difficult to climb. After slipping twice, Wan-chen let Chien put his arm round her supple waist, and so they proceeded slowly, chatting as they walked. By the time they reached the top, the talk had veered to the question of their future.

"We must keep this secret for a while. The first thing to do is to deal with that resolution from Tung Village. Revolutionaries mustn't do anything dishonest. There's clear evidence that much of your land and property was wrongly come by, and of course that must be returned to its rightful owners. Besides, since you and your father are accused of deceiving the party, you'll obviously have to resign, or it won't look good. After I've dealt with this case, we can find you another job. . . . It was to tell you this that I asked you out today. But the way things have turned out rather complicates matters. My plan, after sorting out the party affairs here, is to take you away to some place where there'll be no fingers pointed at you. Please explain this to your parents when you go home. We won't talk about marriage until the case is settled. . . ."

Wan-chen listened with a sinking heart. If she really resigned tomorrow, what chance would she have of seeing him? Of course she was concerned about her parents' property, but she also revelled in working with young men, going out early, returning late, attracting glances as she walked down the street. And still more essential to her happiness was the love of this sturdy Section Chief Chien, which she was hoping to enjoy to the full. What would become of that if she had to resign?

Chien guessed from her clouded face what was in her mind. So he added:

"We must always take the long view. Putting your own individual comfort before the cause is a most unrevolutionary attitude. You're not a child any more, you should understand that."

A passionate embrace and ardent kisses smoothed away the worried look on Wan-chen's face. They had now reached Orchid Shade Shrine and could see the sunset over the River Chu, the snow drifts in the western fields, the smoke rising from villages nestled in trees far and near. Dusk was falling and it was time to return. Side by side, their faces shining, they gazed at the breath-taking loveliness of the snow-clad village below the hill in the splendid evening light. Then they hurried down the broad pathway from the West Peak.

Sleep evaded Chien Shih-ying on his return from Mount Heng, just as it had Wan-chen the night before. His thoughts strayed to Huang Lieh, a girl who had studied with him in Canton. They had never spoken of love, but after knowing each other for a year and going through difficulties and dangers together they had come to think and behave alike, to share the same ideals. When he compared Huang Lieh with Tung Wan-chen, the one was a fine woman comrade with a mind of her own, the other just a healthy specimen of the opposite sex. Yes, more dispassionate reflection led to a return of the regret he had known earlier in the day.

Most people marry sooner or later. Unfortunately life had been so strenuous and rushed in Canton that he and Huang Lieh had simply remained good comrades with no chance to develop a closer relationship. One evening shortly before she left for Hunan with the Northern Expedition Army, he saw her back to her hostel after a farewell party and caught a new note in her voice as she said:

"Comrade Chien! Revolutionaries like us shouldn't feel any regret at parting, but somehow or other these last few days the farewell parties given us by the comrades staying in Canton have made a weakling of me. I couldn't sleep for a long time last night. Have you anything to say, any word of advice, encouragement or warning to help raise my morale?"

As he recalled that evening, he could still hear how her voice had trembled at the last words. But he was just planning to set out himself with the contingent going east and had no thought to spare for anything else. He merely repeated the cheering words that were on everybody's lips: "We must go all out till we meet again in Wuhan!" So, after a warm handshake, they parted in the dark in front of her hostel. A few days later he caught a last hurried glimpse of her in the crowd when he went to see her off at the station.

Unrequited love is bitter, but unsolicited love is embarrassing. Chien was now in the unenviable position of having to accept Wan-chen's love, and this put him in a dilemma. He could of course run away. Many of his comrades indulged in love as a sport, but this was beyond him. Besides, Wan-chen was not a girl who could be trifled with. Immature as a child, she was taking her first risky steps in life and her future development, for good or for evil, depended entirely on her reaction to this first experience.

"Oh, well, I must put up with it, I suppose! It's the duty of a revolutionary to change someone whose character's still unformed into a fighter able to serve society. There's no going back now that I've taken the first step. Besides, it's by no means certain that the way ahead lies through quicksands."

He decided at length that he had no alternative. Turning over towards the wall, he was just composing himself to sleep when the cocks at the foot of Big Cloud Hill started crowing to announce the dawn.

5. Poisoned Wine

After an investigation by the local party branch, Tung Yu-lin's case was settled surprisingly easily. The reason was that many peasants like Old Ah-teh, whose property he had seized, were dead; others had left the village to find some means of livelihood outside, and their whereabouts was unknown. Those ruined by his high rates of interest had no proofs to offer, no witnesses to produce, hence they let the matter drop. And those still in debt

to Tung were humble folk who dared not offend him for fear they might need to borrow from him again at a pinch. Not having to pay any interest more than satisfied them. Hence the party headquarters decided simply to confiscate a few dozen *mou* of Tung's land to support a primary school in Tung Village. This was done to compensate for overruling the last clause of the resolution forbidding the Tungs ever to return to the village.

In stirring times people's memories are short. In little over a month the case was forgotten. Then Tung Wan-chen, whose resignation had not been accepted but who had been granted one month's leave, went back to work in the party headquarters. And Tung Yu-lin became well known in the county town as a philanthropist eager to found schools and raise funds for good causes. Chien Shih-ying, the propaganda section chief, started to visit the Tungs quite openly, and the local gentry were loud in their praise of Section Chief Chien and Miss Tung, who neither neglected the revolution for love, nor love for the revolution.

When the warm spring wind reached this county town by the river and the brassica and rue were in full bloom, the marriage between Chieh Shih-ying and Wan-chen was formally celebrated, for at last the time had come when it could be made public.

The evening of the wedding, the east room on the ground floor was prepared as a bridal chamber, while the other two were hung with pictures and complimentary scrolls and filled with ten banquet tables at which sat all the notable figures in the party and administration. A speech by the county head, as Chien Shih-ying's sponsor, was followed by an account of this love affair from the executive member of the Women's Association who had introduced the young couple. Then came the turn of the bride's father. And what public spirit and self-sacrifice Tung revealed as he described his past career, his present sentiments and his resolves for the future! Since boyhood he had been a revolutionary, he declared, whose chief concern was regulating the local economy and fearlessly doing good. Not for an hour did he ever forget the injunctions of Sun Yat-sen* but always strove to

* Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) was the leader of the Chinese bourgeois democratic revolution, who co-operated with the Chinese Communist Party in the common fight against warlords.

put them into practice. He had contributed lavishly to the relief of victims of flood and famine, in the year of the plague he had given with both hands. The envy of the local gentry accounted for the previous year's attack on him. He was utterly determined to take his stand under the banners of the Three People's Principles* and struggle for revolution. The peasants and workers were the backbone of China. He intended to return to the village to devote his last years to serving poor tenant farmers and workers. . . . This zealous revolutionary, who had studied for no more than three years in a village school, unctuously mouthed so many new terms he had picked up from Chien Shih-ying and his own daughter that some guests from Shangtang and Tung Village could hardly believe their ears. "See what a stay in the county town does for a man!" they whispered to each other. "Here's Yu-lin after barely six months talking in a way none of us can understand -- in front of the county head too!"

By midnight the guests had scattered. But no sooner had the newly-weds sat down on their bed when in walked the hero of the evening, Tung Yu-lin, eager to discuss the future. How much would Chien pay a month for board and lodging? Could Wan-chen's salary be increased and made over as before to her parents? When he returned sooner or later to Tung Village, could he be put in charge of the party branch there? These and other related matters completely staggered Chien Shih-ying, who was eager to go to bed. The situation was saved by Wan-chen, who after all understood her parents better. Seeing the confusion and dismay on her husband's face, she ruthlessly cut short her father's flood of questions.

"It's late now, father!" she said. "You ought to get some rest. We can discuss all this tomorrow, can't we?"

Wan-chen after her marriage displayed all her hereditary cunning. She knew where to buy the cheapest, prettiest yet most durable materials to dress herself smartly; she knew how to ingratiate herself with their most influential colleagues. Owing in

* The doctrine evolved by Sun Yat-sen, namely: nationalism, democracy and the people's welfare.

part to fondness, in part to indolence, Chien Shih-ying let his bride have her way in these respects. Even when she overstepped the proper limits, he behaved for the most part with the admiring indulgence of a father to a favourite child. In consequence, Wan-chen's methods of managing the home and her reputation outside led to an effrontery and foolish self-conceit which soon reached alarming proportions, becoming second nature with her.

Her first success was in the management of their combined salaries. After disbursing an exorbitant sum for board and lodging to make the old couple happy and expending as much on entertainment and clothes as was needed for her husband's comfort, she managed to save money the very first month, something Chien Shih-ying had never succeeded in doing. Her second success was in the skill with which she harried their servant. As a young bride, she felt she owed it to her parents and to her own prestige in that neighbourhood to hire a domestic. So, quite unnecessarily, she found a maid fresh from the countryside and in her training of this unfortunate girl gave full play to the gifts inherited from her forbears. In the morning, for example, before it was light she would shout to the maid to get up. In the evening, not begrudging extra oil for the lamp, she would not let the maid go to bed before midnight, setting the time on the alarm clock which was one of their wedding gifts. When the loud alarm grated on her nerves by startling the newly-weds from their sweet dreams, she not only swore at the servant's stupidity but sacrificed a square of calico to make a cover for the clock. During the day when they were out, she set the maid some heavy, difficult tasks like picking out the sand and husks from the rice or removing all stains from the floor, to prevent her from having a single moment's peace. And when they were at home, she insisted on being waited on hand and foot. The least fault or delay was a pretext for her to ask leave from work and spend hours abusing the stupid, ill-bred country girl, making the poor creature's life a hell on earth.

When it came to acquiring desirable connections Wan-chen was infinitely more skilful than her husband. She it was who made the advances and flattered their superiors and equals. Subordinates or country folk, however, tried the patience of the section chief's wife, who often abused them roundly.

So it came to pass that less than two months after their marriage Wan-chen's reputation was established throughout the county as an exemplary wife. Meanwhile Chien Shih-ying was attending fewer public functions and appeared oddly apathetic and depressed. At home he had little to say to his worthy wife, but sat with bent head drafting innumerable letters or going through documents of one kind or another.

Then there came the split in the party,* the upheavals in Wuhan, the provincial headquarters, Kiangsi, Kwangtung, Kwangsi and elsewhere, and finally the massacres. Chien Shih-ying had already earned his comrades' contempt for letting marriage undermine his enthusiasm for the revolution. Now he suddenly resigned from all his party posts.

That afternoon, as Wan-chen was returning complacently from a meeting of the Women's Association, she ran into her husband looking strangely pale and distraught. She knew at once from his clouded face that something was amiss. Her smile vanished and, raising her eyebrows, she asked him where he was going.

"Good thing we've met. I've something to tell you. Let's go home!"

His mumbled reply dispelled all the enthusiasm and cheerfulness she had felt at the meeting. Especially when he added under his breath, "I've resigned. . . ."

She stared into his face in amazement and repeated mechanically:

"Resigned?"

His listless manner as he trudged silently along made her amazement give way to indignation, then to coldness and contempt. After accompanying him in silence for a while, she muttered to herself:

"Well, who cares? So long as you can support yourself."

In this comment he recognized all her contempt and hate for him. Having delivered herself of this remark, she set her face grimly and strode furiously along, raising her head reflectively

* Chiang Kai-shek, commander of the Northern Expedition Army, openly betrayed the revolution after the preliminary victory over the warlords, and started a reign of terror against the Communists.

towards the sky. He peered mistrustfully at her with his short-sighted eyes.

In silence they walked home, and a deeper silence prevailed throughout their evening meal and preparations for bed, for neither uttered a word. The maid, accustomed to being treated like dirt, was so unnerved by the tension in the air that while putting the lamp down in front of the alarm clock she broke its chimney, already mended with white paper. This precipitated the storm that had long been brewing. Her mistress screamed abuse at the top of her voice.

"Want to set the place on fire, do you, damn you! You're too useless to live! Go and jump into a well! You're driving me frantic. What face do I have left? . . ."

So she went on spitting out vituperation intended for her husband until her strident voice was hoarse. Her parents and brother upstairs were so used to these tirades that they would not have dreamed of interfering. In any case, they seemed to be sound asleep. Chien Shih-ying swallowed his rage while his wife was screaming abuse, venting his feelings with a few deep sighs. After the alarm went at twelve and the maid crept quietly to bed, he listened to his wife's even breathing and found her snoring louder than usual after the excitement earlier that evening. Then at last he groaned and tore his hair.

Their small house in a lane in the southwest part of the town was wrapped in a silence like the tomb. When Chien Shih-ying could hear the maid snoring too, he rose noiselessly, put on a long gown and groped his way to the desk. He heaped all the letters and documents he found there and in the drawers on to the floor, then poured the paraffin from the maid's broken lamp over the pile. Having rolled some long paper spills, he struck a match and lit them. A flame flared up in the darkness, but he promptly blew it out, leaving only a few sparks smouldering. The bolt of the outer gate was softly drawn, and a burly figure hastened east along the dimly lit street leading out of town, soon disappearing from sight.

One evening a week or so after this, a man of twenty-five or twenty-six, of medium height but powerfully built, sought admittance at a small hotel in Shanghai. He had an Anhwei accent and the glasses he wore for short sightedness made him

look something like a student. As soon as he had been shown his room, he asked the attendant to bring him all the newspapers of the past week, which he started reading. When he saw in a column of news from the provinces that a fire breaking out in Lanhsi had burned an entire family to death, a frank, unaffected smile dawned on his face.

September 1935

Translated by Gladys Yang

About the Author: Yu Ta-fu, one of the most influential writers in modern Chinese literature, was born in Fuyang County, Chekiang Province, in 1895. As a young man he studied in Tokyo. In 1921 he helped the poet Kuo Mo-jo and the literary critic Cheng Fang-wu to organize the Creation Society and publish *The Creation Quarterly*. While they emphasized that "the search for beauty is the nucleus of art," there was much that was positive in their writings for they rebelled against the society of that time, and the Creation Society became an important romantic school in modern Chinese literature. It was during this period that Yu Ta-fu began his career as a writer.

His first novel *Fallen*, written in 1921, describes the loneliness of a petty-bourgeois Chinese student living abroad. The discrimination and slights he experiences depress him and make him homesick for his weak, backward country, while he is also frustrated in his ardent search for love. This is a realistic portrayal of a typical young intellectual of those days, who loves his motherland dearly but who despairs and can find no way out. The bold descriptions of sexual repression and the stultifying effect of that age upon the young aroused strong opposition from the defenders of feudal morality.

Yu Ta-fu's rebellious stand came out again in *Intoxicating Spring Nights* (1923), a story about women working in a cigarette factory, and *A Humble Sacrifice* (1924) about the lives of rickshawmen. (Both appeared in *Chinese*

Literature No. 3, 1957.) These two stories expose capitalist exploitation and oppression and the unjust social system, revealing deep sympathy for the underdogs in that society. They mark a big step forward from earlier romantic works like *Fallen* which dealt only with the troubles of single individuals.

In 1930 Yu Ta-fu joined the China League of Left-wing Writers led by the great writer Lu Hsun. That same year he wrote *Arbutus Cocktails*. The hero of this story studied chemistry abroad but after his return to China he is unable to put his knowledge to any use under the reactionary Kuomintang regime. Reduced to poverty, despair and misanthropy, he drowns his sorrows in drink. His failure as an individual is closely bound up with the social background of that time when Chinese industry was crushed by the two-fold oppression of foreign imperialism and comprador-bureaucratic capital.

Soon after this came the Kuomintang reign of terror, when progressive writers were ruthlessly suppressed by the Chiang Kai-shek reactionaries. Yu Ta-fu left Shanghai to live in seclusion by the beautiful West Lake in Hangchow. However, the sharpening of the social struggle made it impossible for him to withdraw from the outside world and remain unmoved. In 1935 he wrote *Flight*, his last story and one of his best. Its background is the northern expedition in which the Communists and Kuomintang co-operate against the common enemy the northern warlords in 1927. Chien Shih-ying is a political worker in the expeditionary army who is given the task to set up a new administration in a freshly won district. Because he is primarily a young petty-bourgeois intellectual unsteered by struggles, he loses his revolutionary stand and is won over and utilized by the landlord class even before Chiang Kai-shek betrayed the revolution. In the end, when he begins to realize his mistake, he can only resort to personal revenge. This type of man was fairly typical among Chinese revolutionaries of that very early period. Yu Ta-fu shows strong disapproval of this character but sympathizes with him too and considers him an object-lesson for others. At the same time he brings out sharply the selfish greed and heartless cruelty of the landlord class. This story shows his closer approach to the people.

After the outbreak of the War of Resistance Against Japan in 1937, Yu Ta-fu played an active part in the resistance. Then he went to Singapore to work on the *Singapore Daily* and wrote many political articles urging the overseas Chinese and local people to unite to combat Japanese imperialism. After the fall of Singapore he changed his name to Chao Lien and went to Sumatra. He was finally discovered by the Japanese military police, who killed him on September 17, 1945.

Yu Ta-fu's best-known stories and essays are in the collections *Cold Ashes*, *The Chicken Rib*, *The Past*, *Left-overs*, *A Worn-out Brush*, *The Tare*, *The Broken Thread*, *Regret* and *Frivolous Writing*. He also wrote *The Lost Sheep*, *A Frail Girl* and other novels.

Selections from the Classics

LI HO

Poems

Li Ping's Harp (李憑箏篋引)

Silk strings from Wu, plane wood from Shu,*
Music that swells the vaulted autumn sky!
On lonely hills the clouds freeze and are still,
The river nymphs** weep in their bamboo grove
And the white virgin*** aches with envy
When Li Ping in the Middle Kingdom starts to play.
Jade shattered in the mountain, the cry of the phoenix,
Dewy tears of lotus, the chuckle of fragrant orchids;
This music melts the icy light at the twelve imperial gates,
These strings move the Purple Emperor**** himself;
And where Nu Kua patched the sky with molten rock
It cracks, startling heaven, hastening the autumn rain.

* The lower Yangtse Valley (Wu) was famed for its silk, and Szechuan (Shu) for its fine wood.

** The wives of the legendary sage king Shun, who grieved because he died in exile.

*** The legendary Yellow Emperor's daughter, credited with the invention of the harp.

**** The Emperor of Heaven in Taoist legend.

I dream that on holy mountain he teaches a witch to play
While old fish leap in the waves, gaunt dragons dance;
The man in the moon leans, sleepless, against his cassia tree,
And the slanting steps of dew spray the frosty hare.

The Governor of Yenmen (雁門太守行)

Black clouds bear down upon the tottering town,
Mail glints like golden fish-scales in the sun,
Bugling invests the sky with autumn splendour
As crimson forts freeze in the purple dusk;
Red flags half furled withdraw to the River Yi,
Our drums roll faint, muffled in heavy frost,
And to repay honour conferred from the golden dais,*
I draw my Jade Dragon Sword to die for my lord!

A Dream of Heaven (夢天)

The hoary hare and frosty toad have washed the sky with
tears,**
Half open the cloudy pavilion, its wall slanting white,
And the jade wheel grinding dew wets its orb of light;
Wearing phoenix pendants they meet on a path sweet with
cassia,

* The dais from which the governor received his appointment from the emperor.

** Legend had it that a hare and toad lived in the moon, described as a pavilion of clouds or a jade wheel.

Those to whom the magic isles below are but yellow dust
and clear water;
A thousand years flash by like galloping horses,
The nine continents far away seem nine wisps of smoke,*
The vast ocean no more than water spilled from a cup.

Song of the Bronze Statue (金銅仙人辭漢歌)

In the eighth month of the ninth year of the Ching-lung era, during the reign of Emperor Ming of Wei, the court ordered a palace officer to ride west and bring back the gilded bronze figure of an immortal holding a disc to catch dew made in the reign of Emperor Wu of Han, in order to set it up in the front court. When the palace officer removed the disc and took the statue to his carriage, the bronze figure shed tears. So Li Chang-chi, descended from a prince of the House of Tang, made this song.

Gone that emperor of Maoling,
Rider through the autumn wind,
Whose horse neighs at night
And has passed without trace by dawn.
The fragrance of autumn lingers still
On those cassia trees by painted galleries,
But on every palace hall the green moss grows.

* Referring to the nine regions of China in old maps.

As Wei's envoy sets out to drive a thousand *li*
 The keen wind at the East Gate stings the statue's eyes. . . .
 From the ruined palace he brings nothing forth
 But the moon-shaped disc of Han,
 True to his lord, he sheds leaden tears,
 And withered orchids by the Hsienyang Road
 See the traveller on his way.
 Ah, if Heaven had a feeling heart, it too must grow old!
 He bears the disc off alone
 By the light of a desolate moon,
 The town far behind him, muted its lapping waves.

The Old Man Quarrying Jade (老夫採玉歌)

Quarrying, quarrying,
 For green translucent jade
 To make pendants for beautiful ladies,
 The old man goes cold and hungry
 And the dragon chafes in his pool,
 For the once clear waters of the Lan are troubled.*
 On rainy nights on the hill he feeds on acorns,
 His tears endless as the nightingale's anguished song;

* The Lan was a stream at Lantien near Changan, in the bed of which good jade was found.

The Lan is surfeited with human lives,
 Haunted by ghosts of the drowned for long centuries.
 Wind and rain shriek through the cypress trees on the slope,
 Ropes stretch green and sinuous down to the bed of the pool;
 He thinks of his little ones in the poor, cold hut,
 When on the steps leading up to the ruined terrace
 He sees the vine called Heart-break.

The Toast (致酒行)

A cup of wine for a vagabond:
 My host wishes me a long life.
 "Chufu Yen* was hard put to it to return from the west,
 While his family snapped the willows at their gate,
 So long did they watch for him.
 And Ma Chou,** living as a protégé at Hsinfeng,
 Thought he would go unrecognized for ever;
 But a couple of lines he wrote on a report
 Went straight to the throne and won him imperial
 favour. . . ."
 I fear my spirit has strayed beyond recall,
 Yet one crow of the cock will flood the world with light;
 A young man should aspire to reach for the sky,
 Who will care for one who sits in the cold and sighs?

* A scholar of Chi who went to Changan and was finally recommended to Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty so that he became a high official.

** A poor scholar in the Tang dynasty. He presented a memorandum to Emperor Tai-tsung, who made him an imperial censor.

Heigh-ho! (長歌續短歌)

Heigh-ho, singing rends my clothes!
Heigh-ho, singing thins my white hair!
Kept from the presence of the emperor,
Day and night consumed with longing,
I quench my thirst with wine from the pot
And stay my hunger with millet from the fields,
Lonely as May slips by
Though all is green for a thousand *li* around.
The mountain looms clear at night,
The bright moon shining down to its foot,
But when I grope through boulders towards that light
It floats high above the peak,
And debarred from approaching
I sing as my hair turns white.

A Satire (感諷)

No pearls left in Hoppo,
No oranges in Lungchow!
It seems the Creator himself is powerless
To meet all the demands of the governor!
The women of the south have not started to weave,
The silkworms are still curling on the leaves,
When up gallops the magistrate,
Grim-faced, with curled purple beard,
Displaying a square placard,
On the placard a written order.

"If you had not angered the governor,
Would I have come to your house?"
The woman curtsseys to the magistrate.
"The mulberry leaves are still small,
Not until the end of spring
Can I set my loom whirring."
While she pleads with him
Her sister-in-law cooks a meal;
Barely has the magistrate bolted the food and left
When the bailiff is in the hall.

Song of the Sorceress (神絃曲)

Now sinks the sun behind the western hills,
The eastern hills grow dim,
And horses lashed by whirlwinds
Trample the clouds;
Plain pipes and painted strings
Make a medley of music
And she dances with rustling skirts
Through the autumn dust.
Cassia leaves swept by the wind
Let fall their seeds,
Dark hyenas weep tears of blood,
Foxes shiver and die;
The gaudy, gold-tailed dragon
On crumbling wall
Is ridden by rain-makers
To the autumn pool;

The owl in its hundredth year
Is transformed into a spirit of the wood,
And as it hoots with laughter
Green flames spring up from its nest.

The Tower by the River (江樓曲)

The stream before her tower flows to Chiangling,*
A monsoon blows, the lotus is in bloom,
And dressing her hair at dawn she tells the south wind:
"Coming back with full sail
Would take him no more than a day."
Alligators weep by the bank in mizzling rain,
A fresh blue linen sign hangs before the inn,
The choppy waves have white crests, the clouds hang low,
This is the season to send him a cape for showers.
New wine mutters in the press but still tastes thin,
The whole South Lake is mirror-bright;
As she gazes, her thoughts already far away,
Her maid draws back the screen and distant hills can be seen.

A Drinking Song (將進酒)

Rich amber brims the crystal cup,
Red pearls drip from the little wine-press,
The jade fat of roasted dragon and phoenix sizzles,
And silken tapestries hold wafted fragrance. . . .

* Then an important trading centre in the upper reaches of the Yangtse.

Blow the dragon flute, sound the crocodile drum!
Ah, singers with the dazzling teeth,
Slender dancing girls!
Now our time is running out, spring slipping past,
The peach blossom whirling down in a crimson rain,
I urge you to drink and be merry the whole day long,
For no wine will moisten the earth on a drunkard's tomb!

*Translated by Yang Hsien-yi
and Gladys Yang*

CHEN YI-HSIN

Li Ho, a Poetic Genius

Li Ho or Li Chang-chi (A.D. 791-817) was a famous poet of the Tang dynasty. Although he died at the age of twenty-six, in his short span of life he produced many marvellously brilliant poems, more than two hundred and forty of which are still extant. These poems were a rare new flower in the garden of Tang poetry. Li Ho introduced outstanding innovations in poetic form and these, together with his use of imagery and other advances in poetic technique, had a considerable influence on later poets.

Li Ho was descended from an uncle of the first Tang emperor at the beginning of the seventh century. But this prince of the imperial house had died nearly two centuries previously, and by Li Ho's time his family's relationship with the reigning monarch was so slight that they lived as commoners with none of the special privileges of the nobility. His father served as a minor official at the border and died early, leaving Li Ho, his elder sister and younger brother in straitened circumstances with their widowed mother. According to the poet, his family owned only "one *mou* of poor land," his clothes were as "shabby as a quail" and his horse "like a dog." Even if we allow for poetic exaggeration, this gives us some idea of his poverty.

Tradition has it that by the age of seven Li Ho was already well known for his poetry, which was praised by his great contemporary

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the essayist Han Yu (A.D. 768-824). However, like many talented men of those days, Li Ho was marked out for misfortune. According to the Confucian tradition, a good scholar should put his learning at the service of the country, and this could be done only through being an official. To consolidate their feudal rule the first emperors of Tang had instituted a system of examinations which scholars must pass if they wished to become officials. The most important of these examinations was known as the *chin-shih* and Li Ho naturally wished to take this, but he fell a victim to the ridiculous rule that any candidate who found any part of his father or grandfather's name in the title of the examination essay must withdraw from the hall on the pretext of a heartache, as evidence of his filial piety! Some scholars who envied Li Ho's gifts pointed out that since his father's name was Chin-shu, if he took the *chin-shih* examination he would be offending against the moral code. When Han Yu heard this he came out indignantly in Li Ho's defence. In an essay entitled *On the Taboo of Names* he wrote: "If the father's name being Chin-shu precludes the son from taking the *chin-shih* examination, does a father's name Jen, with the same sound as man, make the son less than human?" However, so powerful was the moral code in feudal society that not even the championship of a prominent figure like Han Yu could win Li Ho the right to take the examination.

Inevitably Li Ho brooded over his disappointment. Many of his poems, like *Heigh-bo! The Toast* and *A Drinking Song* in this issue, deplore this waste of his talent or voice his indignation. *Heigh-bo!* begins:

Heigh-bo, singing rends my clothes!

Heigh-bo, singing thins my white hair!

These paradoxical lines have their own logic, for the poet is so eager to see the emperor that his song vibrates strongly enough to tear his clothes to shreds and make his hair fall out. This hyperbole brings out the intensity of his grief. One early summer night all is dark and misty on the boundless plain, reflecting the poet's loneliness and loss of bearings. The moon symbolizes the ideal he seeks, which lies beyond his grasp, making him despair. Thus these images convey the social contradictions of the times and the de-

pression of a man who seeks light in a dark world, so that here the individual takes on a universal significance.

The Toast describes Li Ho's poverty and wretchedness in the capital, while the splendid images in *A Drinking Song* express his resentment at the lack of recognition for his talents. There is strong feeling in this second poem but his protest does not come across so clearly, for he emphasizes in rather a negative way that men should enjoy themselves while they can because life is transient. The description of earthly pleasures throws into relief the tragedy of death, and the final advice to men to drown their sorrows in wine shows the futility of life as well. This expresses a painful dilemma. Death is sad but life is equally meaningless, so it seems there is no way out.

The Governor of Yenmen is not a direct expression of Li Ho's feelings but it conveys them indirectly by describing a general who risks his life for his country. It opens with a concise but vivid picture of the approach of a powerful enemy, the tension before the lonely outpost falls, and the defenders' consciousness of impending doom. When the garrison comes out to fight and is defeated, the scene of desolation heightens the atmosphere of tragedy and the governor's determination to fight to the death. This poem hints at Li Ho's reluctance to die unrecognized, his longing for a chance to lay down his life for his country.

In addition to these lyrics voicing the poet's aspirations, Li Ho wrote poems like *A Satire* and *The Old Man Quarrying Jade* which light up social injustice and the corruption and cruelty of the ruling class, speaking out for the suffering toilers. *A Satire* forcefully presents the ruthless exploitation of the officials who have impoverished the people and made even Nature unable to satisfy their insatiable demands. Li Ho gives a graphic sketch of the contemptible, overbearing magistrate who comes with the governor's order to demand taxes; and at the same time with a few delicate strokes he conjures up his deep sympathy for the honest village woman subjected to such vile treatment.

The Old Man Quarrying Jade is the story of workers forced to risk their lives to make trinkets for the wives and concubines of the rich. The end is particularly moving when the sight of a clinging vine makes the old worker think of his children and tremble lest he die in an accident. Li Ho died too young to have

much experience or a deep understanding of life. That is why he did not produce many poems reflecting social truths, nor were those he wrote very significant. However, these few examples show that whenever he came into touch with suffering he was on the side of justice. He did not hesitate to expose the crimes of the ruling class and to appeal for sympathy for the people.

Li Ho is noted for his amazingly fertile imagination and splendid imagery, characteristics clearly seen in poems like *Song of the Bronze Statue*, *Li Ping's Harp*, *A Dream of Heaven* and *A Song of Heaven*.

The *Song of the Bronze Statue* was based on the following legend. In the third century, Emperor Ming of Wei sent a carriage to Changan to bring back the bronze statue of an immortal holding a disc to catch the heavenly dew, which was supposed to have the property of prolonging life. This figure, made in the second century B.C., was wanted for the palace in Loyang; but when the bronze statue was dismantled and taken to the carriage it shed tears. Li Ho weaves fresh romance into this moving legend. He describes how one night at the tomb of Emperor Wu in Mao-ling there are heard sounds of horses neighing and the tramp of feet, yet at dawn there is not a trace of men to be seen. Evidently the spirit of Emperor Wu is restless when he knows that the statue which he had made in the hope of prolonging his life is to be taken away the following day. The desolation of the Han palace suggests the sadness of the statue, who is forced to leave the once splendid court in ruins. Naturally it sheds tears, and its tears are arrestingly described as "leaden." Withered orchids see it on its way, and if even inanimate objects feel such grief, how much more must a human being in such a situation! Li Ho lived during the decline of the Tang dynasty, and he used this legend to express his deep concern for his country's fate. The superb imagery of this poem should not blind us to its underlying significance.

Li Ping's Harp has no hidden meaning but contains extraordinarily evocative descriptions of the beauty of music and the power of a brilliant musician to move heaven and earth. The splendid, daring images of this poem give it a unique distinction. For instance, the goddess Nu Kua in Chinese legend melted coloured stones to mend the broken sky, and Li Ho imagines that the music of the harp makes the sky crack again so that the autumn

rain drips through. And finally he draws on another legend about the man in the moon, who was eager to become an immortal but because of some sin was condemned to remain in the moon and cut down a cassia tree. Each time he raised his axe, however, the gash in the tree healed over so that he could never fell it. The poet imagines that this sublime music makes the man in the moon forget his task and lean against the tree all night, watching the lonely hare in the chilly dew. This strangely naive fancy has tremendous evocative power.

Other poems like *A Dream of Heaven* and *A Song of Heaven* describe the life of immortals in a somewhat similar way. The fairyland in *A Song of Heaven* is the world of men idealized and made more beautiful. The sparkling stars in the Milky Way seem white pebbles in a clear swirling stream, and the nebulae gurgle like water. There is no sorrow or ugliness here, only beauty, a kindly climate and happiness. The immortals, for ever young, enjoy love and friendship; and their sole labour consists of plucking cassia and orchids, herding and driving dragons, planting green plane trees and herbs of immortality. The poet draws on his imagination to create a fairyland of infinite beauty yet credibility — a brilliant artistic feat. Of course, such an ideal world was unattainable in his time, but the poem reflects his loathing of Tang society, his longing for a glorious and happy life, and his desire to find some way out.

According to Li Ho's sister, when the poet lay dying he had a vision in broad daylight of a red-robed envoy on a crimson dragon who brought a tablet covered with hieroglyphics to summon him to write an inscription for the white jade pavilion newly built in heaven. This delusion just before his death shows how Li Ho's frustration throughout his life forced him to embody his aspirations in dreams. This is why he succeeded in writing such magnificent poetry.

Li Ho wrote a number of love songs and poems about the unhappiness of women. Most of these depict the looks, movements and thoughts of young women and have a freshness and vividness all their own. They improved on the qualities of popular love songs from earlier dynasties and pointed a new way forward for later poets. *The Tower by the River* in this issue is one of the best of these love songs. Delicately and movingly it expresses a

young wife's loneliness in spring and her longing for her husband's return.

Li Ho was a thoroughly original poet who opened up new realms of poetry and evolved a new style known as the Chang-chi style. Poets of this school who were inspired by some specific happening in history or everyday life gave free rein to their fancy, transcending time, space and the bounds of reality. But all their astounding visions had to be based on real life to achieve veracity and vividness. Their poems displayed this unity of opposites. Art for art's sake made an undue appeal to Li Ho, who aimed too much at bizarre, unexpected effects and produced some poems with a weird unearthly flavour. One example of this is the *Song of the Sorceress*, which describes a witch's sacrifice and the descent of deities to vanquish demons. Because poems of this type sometimes went to extremes in creating an atmosphere of mystery and the poet lost himself in these descriptions, former critics dubbed Li Ho "a ghostly genius."

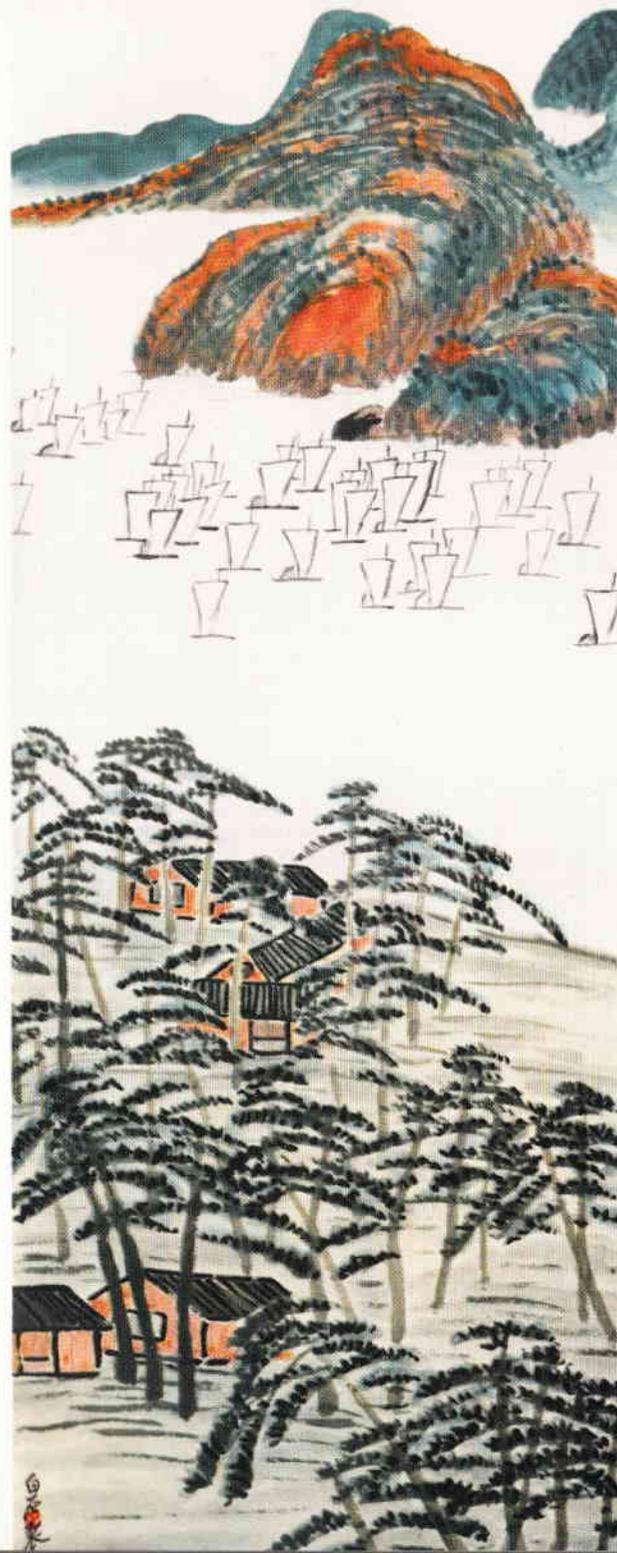
An apt appreciation of Li Ho's poetry was made by Tu Mu, another famous poet towards the end of the Tang dynasty, who said: "Not even changing clouds can match his infinite variety, nor flowing water his inexhaustible passion. His sense of harmony outdoes the balmy spring, his clear and succinct style the translucent autumn. Billowing sails and galloping steeds cannot measure up to his impetuosity; ancient tombs and bronze vessels inscribed with pictograms fall short of his flavour of antiquity. His perfection of form surpasses flowers in bloom and beautiful ladies, just as his grief and frustration surpass ruined palaces and fields laid waste. No leviathan, sea monster, hobgoblin or ogre could rival his fantastic imagery. His poetry follows the tradition of the Chu poems,* and although it may fall short in argument there are times when his language surpasses these in splendour. The poems of Chu voice some discontent and satire, and their criticism of state policy gives readers food for thought. Li Ho's poems appear to contain similar ideas."

* Poems of the kingdom of Chu in the 3-4th century B.C. The central figure of this school was the great poet Chu Yuan (circa 340-277 B.C.). Modern scholars trace the origin of romantic poetry in China to these poems of Chu.

In conclusion, mention should be made of Li Ho's serious attitude to writing. Another Tang poet, Li Shang-yin in a biographical account of Li Ho wrote: ". . . He often went for donkey rides followed by a servant boy carrying an old, shabby silk pouch. When an idea struck him, he would write it down and put it in this pouch. On his return in the evening, his mother would tell a maid to empty the pouch and once, when she found he had written a good deal, she remarked, 'This boy will never stop until he has poured out his heart!' After the lamps were lit and supper was over, Li Ho would take the notes from the maid and prepare ink and paper to complete his poems, which he then put away in another bag. This was his daily habit, except on those occasions when he was drunk or in mourning." Obviously Li Ho cannot have written all his poems in this manner, but this anecdote illustrates how he looked for inspiration in everyday life, and his persevering application is extraordinary for a genius.

A Landscape by Chi Pai-shih ►

For details about the artist see the article on the next page.



Commemoration

CHI PAI-SHIH

Passages from an Autobiography

This year marks the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Chi Pai-shih (1863-1957) whose long life covered nearly a whole century. Chi Pai-shih painted excellent figures and landscapes but his birds, flowers, plants and insects were particularly popular. In his early years he was much influenced by folk art; later he studied classical masters and the work of contemporary scholar painters. He succeeded in capturing the best points of both: the concise generalization of the academic school and the simplicity of folk art. His paintings have a fresh lyrical quality, many of them show his deep love for the beauties of nature, others reveal his attitude towards society and his love and hate for certain social phenomena. Liberation came when he was already in his eighty-sixth year, when he was honoured with the title of people's artist. In 1957 he died at the age of 94, leaving behind a vast store of paintings.

The following excerpts, which mainly show his growth as an artist, are taken from *The Autobiography of Chi Pai-shih* published in 1962 by the People's Art Publishing House. The old master related the story of his life to Chang Tzu-chi, who recorded and edited it. It is a pity that the narrative ends at the year 1948. Chi Pai-shih is being commemorated throughout the world this year as an outstanding cultural figure.

I was born in Hsiangtan County, Hunan Province on the twenty-second day of the eleventh month in the second year (1863) of the reign of Emperor Tung-chih of the Ching dynasty. That was the year of the pig and my family lived at Fallen Star Pool



near Apricot Vale. All my forefathers were peasants who worked on the land; none of them was ever an official or made much money. If they managed to fill their stomachs after working hard and honestly for a lifetime, they considered themselves fairly lucky. In those days, peasants remained peasants for generations and generations and the poor were always poor.

My elders named me Ah-chih. I remember that when I was still very small my grandfather would carry me in his arms and play with me whenever he had time. His only decent garment in winter was an old gown lined with black sheepskin, probably bought with the savings of a lifetime. Though the sheepskin was stiff and the wool rubbed flat from constant wear, he used to unbutton his gown and tuck me inside to keep me from feeling cold. Holding me like this he would squat by the stove and with a poker trace the word "Chih" in the pinewood ashes. This was how he taught me to read. To tell the truth, my grandfather's written vocabulary probably amounted to no more than three hundred characters at the most, and with some of these he had only a nodding acquaintance. Nevertheless, he taught me a character every two or three days and so we went on for

three years. Sometimes I too traced words on the ground with a stick and my characters began to turn out quite well. Sometimes instead of writing I drew a face with round eyes and a rounded chin rather like the fat little boy next door. When I added a moustache, it resembled the local storekeeper.

I went to the village school taught by my maternal grandfather when I was eight. In those days the only subjects taught were reading and writing. Reading meant learning lessons by heart and reciting them with fluency, no stuttering allowed. Writing was to fill in the red characters printed with wood-blocks, and we had to follow the red lines with our brushes, stroke by stroke. That was my first experience of writing with brush and ink. It was more interesting than tracing lines on the ground with a stick. But I sometimes got so tired of filling in the red characters like this day in and day out that I began to draw pictures on the sly.

*

One day the aunt of a school friend who lived next door had a baby. It was the custom in our part of the country to post up the portrait of the God of Thunder outside a lying-in woman's room, supposedly to keep off evil spirits and demons. These portraits were usually roughly drawn in vermilion on yellow paper by village craftsmen. The more I looked at this one the more fascinated I became and I longed to copy it down. My friend and I arranged to meet outside his house after school and I took along my brush and ink-slab to sketch the picture in my copy book. Soon I realized that I was doing very badly. The God of Thunder was an extraordinary sight for, after all, no one knew where this god was or what he really looked like. I could only copy the thin lips and features of the portrait and the result of my efforts was a bird-like head. I was far from satisfied. The portrait was high up on the door but I had a brain wave. By fetching a high stool and standing on it, I was able to cover the portrait with a used piece of thin bamboo paper which my friend gave me and on this I traced the outline of the portrait. When completed this proved a close replica of the portrait on the door. From that day on I took a great interest in drawing.

When this became known, my schoolmates all came to me for drawings and I used to tear pages out of my copy book to make them. My first subject was the old fisherman who frequented the streets of Fallen Star Pool. I tried many times until I achieved a fair likeness. I then drew flowers, plants, birds, animals, insects and fish. As a matter of fact I sketched anything and everything within sight. I was particularly fond of drawing oxen, horses, pigs, sheep, chickens, ducks, fish, shrimps, crabs, frogs, sparrows, magpies, butterflies and dragonflies, for these were things which I was always seeing. The only trouble was my copy book of red characters would get thinner and thinner until I had to be given a new one. But before long I would tear most of the pages out of that also.

My maternal grandfather was well-schooled in the then popular Chu Po-lu's *Maxims for Ruling the Household*, and he liked to quote: "A bowl of rice or gruel should remind you that it was not easy to come by. Half a strand of silk or cotton should recall the difficulty of obtaining such things." When he noticed how fast I used up my copy books he began to look into the matter and very soon discovered my secret. He was very much displeased, regarding my childish scrawls as a sheer waste of paper, a sign that I was forgetting the more important task of writing. For this I was taken to task more than once. But by then I was so deeply in love with painting it was impossible for me to stop. I went on searching high and low for odd scraps of paper to draw on when no one was looking.

That autumn the harvest was poor. Our family had barely got by at the best of times and now it was even more difficult to manage. "Things are so bad, it's all we can do to fill our stomachs," my mother told me. Since we were short of hands, I had to stay at home and help with odd jobs. So my schooling stopped after barely a year. We had planted a small plot with taros and now my mother sent me to dig them out. We ate the bulbous roots after roasting them over a fire of cow dung. Years later whenever I painted taros I could not but remember those times and once I inscribed the following verse on a painting:

*A nip in the autumn air, and a plot of taros,
Makes a good store of grain for the family that's poor;*

*You will savour the taste after many years have passed,
Taros are delicious roasted over cow dung.*

When we had finished the taros I collected wild herbs for food. Later in my life I inscribed these lines on a painting of herbs: "They fill the stomach as well as six months' grain; those who have prospered should not forget this taste." The bitterness of poverty can be understood only by the poor and is something the rich and noble can never fathom.

*

When I was fifteen my father apprenticed me to a carpenter, realizing that I was not robust enough for strenuous work in the fields. But a year later, my grandmother and mother decided that even a carpenter's job was too much for me as it sometimes involved climbing on to high roofs. They persuaded my father to switch me to a trade which required less muscle. I told them of my wish to learn wood-carving and they approved of the idea. My father heard that a certain wood-carver by the name of Chou Chih-mei was looking for an apprentice, and this looked like a good chance for me. When a friend of ours approached him, he agreed readily.

Master Chou lived not very far from us. He was then in his thirty-eighth year and known throughout our district as a fine craftsman. He used the level-blade method and was especially adept at human figures. He was very patient with me and, strange as it may seem, the two of us hit it off extremely well. As I admired his skill and was fascinated by the craft, I proved an enthusiastic pupil. Because he was childless, he treated me like his own son. The favourable opinions I won after finishing my apprenticeship were due to the good teaching my master gave me. I shall remember his kindness all my life.

The rules of our trade stipulated that an apprenticeship should cover a period of three years and four months. Because I was delayed for some time by illness, I did not complete my apprenticeship until the second part of my nineteenth year. Even then I continued to travel about with Master Chou, whose craftsmanship was well known for over a hundred *li* around, and gradually my



Sparrow

name too became known. I was called Carpenter Chih, but to be polite people addressed me as Master Chih.

In those days a wood-carver worked on the same old patterns year in and year out. A traditional flower-basket design had been carved in the same way so long that everybody was all too familiar with it. As for figure work, this dealt mostly with hackneyed themes like "the unicorn bringing a son" or "a scholar coming first in the palace examination." Sure that people must be tired of looking at the same old pattern again and again, I tried to vary the flower-basket design by adding different fruit or flowers. For figures I took my themes from the illustrations of old historical

novels and I also made use of birds, animals, plants, insects and fish, adding background scenery to balance the design. In this way I made up many new patterns and people praised the results. This encouraged me to improvise even more boldly. That was a very busy period for me, with hardly a single day idle.

In my twentieth year I was still going around with my master, a wood-carver's tools kit slung over my shoulder when in the house of a patron I happened on a copy of the *Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual** reprinted during the reign of Chien-lung (1736-1796). This was a coloured wood-block edition in three series, and although one book was missing, I found this manual extremely practical and useful with its detailed illustrations of how to paint the first brush stroke and how to go on until the

* This work, also known as the *Mustard Seed Garden Painting History*, got its name from the villa of the seventeenth-century man of letters, Li Yu. Together with his son-in-law, Li Yu gathered together several artists to compile this book on the technique of painting for use as a teaching manual.

complete picture was done. After studying it carefully from beginning to end, I began to see that my earlier attempts at painting were quite hopeless. The proportions of my figures and flowers were wrong. They all had one fault or another when checked against real life. Now that I had seen this manual I felt like a man who had happened on a treasure trove. I wanted to start learning from scratch and to copy the illustrations at least a dozen times. On second thought, I remembered that the book did not belong to me and I could hardly borrow it for keeps. Buy a copy for myself then. But there was none on sale in the nearest town, Hsiangtan. I might be able to get one in the bigger city of Changsha but the price would probably be prohibitive. The best solution was to borrow this manual and copy the pictures as I had copied the portrait of the God of Thunder in my childhood; then I would be able to study them carefully at leisure. With my mind made up I borrowed the book. I arranged with my mother to use part of my wages on thin bamboo paper, paint and brushes. After work in the evenings, I traced the paintings one by one by the light

Prawns



of a pine-wood torch. I went on steadily for about six months until I had copied the complete manual with the exception of the missing volume and I bound my thin sheets of paper into sixteen books. Thereafter I followed the instructions in the manual when I carved. My designs were fresh yet in line with old traditions; they were now up to standard and no longer wrongly proportioned.

Since I had now accumulated a pile of sketches, our neighbours found out that I could paint and often came with paper in their hands to ask for a painting. Sometimes when I had finished carving woodwork in the house of a patron, I was asked to stay on longer to paint something for him. By degrees my fame as a painter began to spread also in that vicinity and whenever people mentioned Carpenter Chih they added that they liked his paintings.

One day in my twenty-sixth year, a neighbour told me that Hsiao Hsiang-kai was coming to his brother's house to do some portraits and asked if I would like to learn portrait painting from him. I had of course heard about Hsiao Hsiang-kai, who began life as a craftsman in paper figures but by dint of hard work taught himself the classics and poetry. He was the best portrait painter in the next town and turned out good landscapes and figure paintings too. A few days later when he arrived in our village I sent over one of my paintings and asked two neighbours to tell him that I would like to be his pupil.

My neighbours were successful in their mission and Hsiao taught me to the best of his ability. In our village we called portrait painting "taking a likeness." The rich of course always had a few portraits made during their lifetime and another on their deathbed for the family to keep as a souvenir. In our parts the white mourning worn by women usually had wide turned-up cuffs painted with different patterns, and it was usual for the artist working on the last portrait to do this cuff painting for the dead man's family. After I had been doing this

Sbeat-fish



kind of work for some time, I discovered a way to make the pattern of flowers and dragons on the clothes of my subjects come out through the gauze outer garment. They all said this was one of my unique skills.

In my twenty-seventh year I went to do some carving in Lai-chialung some forty *li* or so from my home. One of the local gentry Hu Shen-yuan, a cultivated man and something of a poet and artist, saw my paintings and thought I showed promise. "Would you like to do some more studying and learn to paint?" he asked me. I told him I was more than willing but my family was too poor to afford a teacher. He offered to teach me painting free of charge and recommended his children's tutor, old Mr. Chen, to teach me poetry. I immediately bowed to these two men and acknowledged them as my teachers.

After this I sometimes stayed in Hu Shen-yuan's house. He was a good calligrapher and painted flowers, birds, plants and insects in a painstaking, decorative style. He often said to me, "Rocks must be gaunt, trees gnarled, birds lively, and the hand sure. In order to do a good painting you must follow the proper rules and show sound judgment in putting over your idea, as well as in composition, brushwork and the use of colour." He made me analyse and copy all the good paintings and calligraphy by ancient and contemporary artists in his collection. He also recommended a friend of his to teach me landscape painting. Meanwhile old Mr. Chen taught me the *Three Hundred Tang Poems** and *Mencius*** and encouraged me in my spare time to read classical novels and stories such as *Strange Tales from Liao-chai*. Sometimes he expounded the essays of the Eight Great Writers of the Tang and Sung dynasties. During this period I studied the classics and practised painting every day, and felt that life could hold no greater happiness. Since that time I have made a living by selling my paintings.

* An anthology of Tang poetry for children and beginners selected and edited by a man called Heng-tang-chu-shih of the Ching dynasty.

** Attributed to Meng Ko, a great thinker of the fourth century B.C. This book was one of the Confucian classics and required reading for scholars.

Before I passed my fortieth birthday I had never been far from home, though I travelled a great deal in the vicinity of Hsiangtan. That autumn a friend and former neighbour invited me to visit him in Sian. "Whether you are writing essays or poetry, making seals or painting, you must travel if you want to improve," he said in his letter. "A painter, especially, needs to travel before he can understand the meaning of art. This is what the ancients called 'drawing inspiration from mountains and rivers.' A painter who can only copy old masterpieces, albums and manuals is a third-rate artist at best; and if he depends for knowledge solely on hearsay, his pictures will be far removed from the truth and he will not achieve anything. Travel not only broadens your outlook but elevates your mind. . . . You can see the great difference between a seasoned traveller and those stay-at-homes whose feet always tread the same old path. . . ." With this prompting from my friend, I got permission from my parents and started north for Sian in the beginning of the tenth month.

In those days travelling whether by land or water was a difficult affair, and my journey over that long distance was extremely slow. But I was glad of the opportunity to gather material for painting. Whenever a good scene or object of interest appeared, I made a picture of it. Only then did I understand the good grounds for the methods of composition and techniques down to painting the "wrinkles" of the hills described in the manuals left to us by old artists. I painted a great deal during this trip and one of the two works I liked best was that done when we passed Tungting Lake, *Sun over Tungting*. Twenty years later I added the following inscription:

*I passed Tungting of old
When carp thronged the river;
Great waves well-nigh swamped the boat
And heavy fog shrouded the water.
A light sail skimmed the waves in the mist,
The sun behind it like a copper drum.
Raising the pole to strike the drum, I paused
For fear the noise disturb the dragons and serpents.*

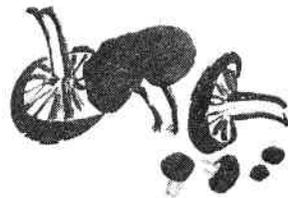
The other work, painted as we were approaching Sian, I entitled *Snowstorm at Pa Bridge*.

After a short stay in Sian I accompanied my friend and his family to the capital. We passed through Huayin County in Shensi and mounted Long-life Pavilion to gaze at Mount Hua, one of China's five sacred mountains. Peach blossom flanked the way for dozens of *li* and the scenery was some of the most beautiful I have had the pleasure of seeing in my whole life. That night by lamplight I completed *Mount Hua*. The mountains here rise at such a precipitous angle that the cliffs look as though they have been sliced by a knife. When we had crossed the Yellow River we stopped at Hungnung Stream for a look at distant Sungshan, another of the five sacred mountains. It was magnificent sight. Borrowing a small table from the inn nearby, I placed it by the stream to paint a picture. This painting and *Mount Hua* are both in my volume of *Mountain Scenes*.

In the eight years that followed I made five trips and travelled through half of China, seeing the famous hills and rivers of Shensi, Hopei, Kwangtung, Kwangsi, Kiangsu and even the border between Viet-nam and China. These were some of the most memorable events in my life and remembering them now in my old age I am still stirred by pleasant memories of those days.

I went home in my forty-eighth year. My teacher Hu Shen-yuan used to quote the old saying, "Travel ten thousand *li* and read ten thousand volumes." Although I had travelled widely I had not read very much. Back home now I realized that I was still lacking in book knowledge. I decided to study seriously and began with the ancient classics and poetry. Sometimes my friends and I wrote poems using the same rhymes or collaborated to make up a verse. We went at this conscientiously, often revising a line again and again to correct one word that we thought inappropriate.

勝北地
塵茹
自石
若人
平生
所嗜
畫
美
遠



Mushrooms

I also painted new landscapes from the sketches I had made during my travels and collected fifty-two of these into an album entitled *Mountain Scenes*. But friends borrowed thirty of them and failed to return them, so now I have only twenty-two!

In my spare time I planted different kinds of fruit trees near the house, making use of the space round the vegetable patch and by the rocky hillside and fences. I also kept fish and shrimps in the nearby ponds. My sons and grandsons helped me to tend the flowers and trees, dig up bamboo shoots, pick vegetables and look after the fish ponds. I found this life pleasant and carefree. A friend of mine selected twenty-four titles for the beauty spots round Shihmen and asked me to paint them. I gave careful thought to each and revised my sketches several times, taking more than three months to complete the twenty-four paintings. My friends told me that my travels had broadened my outlook and that this was very evident in my work.

I always devoted much thought to the composition of a landscape and the idea I meant it to convey, not wanting to duplicate the work of others. After fifty I was loath to rack my brains so much and for some time refused to do any more landscapes. Indeed I have done only a few in the past decades. I have always disliked following the strict rules of certain schools of painting and once said, "I am ashamed to hear people talk of Ching Hao and Kuan Tung,* and should blush to boast of belonging to a certain school." I also protested against slavish imitation, saying, "To paint pavilions beyond hills and peaks behind the clouds, only hack painters make them all alike throughout the ages." I scorned to make painstaking copies of the work of old masters. That is why I said, "Scenes conceived in my heart outshine real mountains and rivers. I have no use for hands that can only imitate." The first to agree with this view of mine was my good friend Chen Shih-tseng. There were also my pupils, the monk Jui-kuang and the artist Hsu Pei-hung.

*

When fighting broke out in our parts in my fifty-fifth year, I went to Peking and put up in the Fayuan Monastery. I hung up

*Two great landscape painters of the tenth century.

a price list for painting and seal-carving in a stationer's shop at Liulichang. When Chen Shih-tseng saw a seal I had carved, he came to the monastery to visit me. We soon became fast friends. His father was a well-known poet and he himself was an adept flower painter in the free style whose powerful brushwork was highly thought of in Peking. I brought out my *Mountain Scenes* and asked his opinion. He said the quality of my painting was high but there were points which left much to be desired.

Chen advised me to create my own style instead of trying to please the world, and this was exactly how I felt myself. I often went to visit him in his studio, Ash Hall, where we discussed art and the world in general. Our views were very similar so it was only natural that our friendship deepened. At that time I was following the deceptively simple style of the seventeenth-century painter Chu Ta (Pa-ta-shan-jen), and my paintings were not appreciated in Peking. Apart from Chen Shih-tseng, there was practically no one who understood them. I asked only half the usual price for my work, selling a painted fan for two silver dollars, yet not many customers came to me and my business was very slack. In a poem inscribed on my *Album of Fruit and Flowers* I said, "Though in style as good as that of Hsueh-keh, the wandering swallow is not prized."

Hsueh-keh was a pseudonym of Chu Ta and though I thought my paintings captured the spirit of their subjects in the manner of this great master, their worth was not recognized in the capital. Chen Shih-tseng advised me to branch out in a new direction and vary my technique, and so I started painting red flowers with ink drawn leaves. I had previously painted plum blossom in the style of Yang Pu-chih of the Sung dynasty (960-1279) but Shih-tseng told me that plum blossom executed in this meticulous style was difficult to paint but not pleasing to the eye. Again I accepted his advice and changed my technique. To be honest, he helped me in many ways and by acting on his suggestions I gradually overcame my various shortcomings. He also listened humbly to my immature ideas and never found my friendly comments irksome. I summed up our friendship in these words, "Without me you would not progress, without you I should fall behind."

The year I was sixty, Shih-tseng went south for his mother's funeral, contracted dysentery in Nanking and died. He was only forty-eight. I lost a friend who understood me, and there was such a strange emptiness in my heart that I could not hold back my tears. I wrote several poems to mourn him and in one of them I said, "From now on who will understand my thoughts and troubles? Only a few pines on the muddy slope."

*

I think it was one day in early September when Chi Ju-shan took me with him to meet Mei Lan-fang, the famous exponent of Peking opera. Lan-fang was gentle and considerate, a scholar in the best sense of the word. At that time he was living at Peilu Garden outside Chienmen Gate and he called his beautifully arranged study, "Studio of Decorated Jade." In his garden he had planted many flowers and trees, some of them rare varieties. There were nearly a hundred varieties of morning glory alone, some of them big as a bowl. I had never seen such a colourful sight before, and that was when I started to paint morning glory. The first time I visited him, Lan-fang asked me to show him how to paint insects and grass and himself spread out the paper and ground the ink for me. When I finished, he sang for me a passage from *The Drunken Beauty* which I found most enchanting. With us that day were two others: the artist who taught Lan-fang to paint plum blossom and his poetry teacher. Both of them became my friends too.

Once I was asked to a dinner given by some rich and influential man and attended mostly by the well-to-do. As I was shabbily dressed and knew practically no one there, everybody ignored me. I was just regretting going to the dinner at all when unexpectedly Lan-fang turned up. He came over to greet me and showed me such respect that the other guests were surprised and many began to talk to me. Afterwards I took great pains over a picture called *Sending Charcoal to a Friend in the Snow* to present to Lan-fang, inscribing it with the following lines: "Now that I am wandering unknown in the capital, it is lucky that Mr. Mei recognizes my name." I had nothing but contempt for the

snobbishness of vulgar society. Later on Lan-fang asked me to teach him how to paint plants and insects and he produced some good work after some time.

*

Looking back, I recall that I learned to paint in the meticulous style in my early years from my teacher Hu Shen-yuan. After my trip to Sian I found this style inadequate to express my sentiments and switched to free-hand painting. I chose my subjects from things in daily life. I think extraordinary objects which one rarely sees will inevitably turn out hazy and hard to grasp and will be unrealistic no matter how well you paint them. In a poem I inscribed on a picture of gourds I said, "Every time I want to change its shape I hesitate; it is hard for me to discard the realistic for the grotesque." To paint unusual things instead of ordinary things is to discard the real for the grotesque. When I paint an object I do not try painstakingly for a likeness but prefer to achieve a likeness without effort by presenting its spirit. Once I wrote, "In sketching I'm loath to seek a likeness; I would rather remain unknown until old age." That was why my paintings did not appeal to the worldly, for I did not care to cater to the taste of others. In one of my poems, I said, "I too have able hands, but I cannot bring myself to scratch someone else's back."

CHU TAN

The Painter Hsu Pei-hung

This year is the tenth anniversary of the death of the outstanding Chinese artist and educationist Hsu Pei-hung, who has left us more than one thousand works. These include oils, traditional ink paintings and sketches on a great variety of themes. Their message is clear and profound, revealing the unbending character of a patriotic Chinese intellectual in the long night of semi-feudal and semi-colonial rule.

Hsu Pei-hung was born in 1895 towards the end of the Ching dynasty, at a time of great suffering for the Chinese people, and his father was a poor folk artist in Yihsin, Kiangsu Province. As a child Hsu Pei-hung became interested in art, but his father died when he was ten years old and he was forced to make his own living very early. This helped to make him work hard. At that time it was very difficult for a young man without connections to earn a living, especially if he was an artist. Yet at the age of twenty Hsu Pei-hung was supporting himself by painting in Shanghai, and although he received some hard knocks he never laid aside his brush. During this period he experienced so much social injustice and witnessed so much suffering that he had nothing but hatred and contempt for the old society. When he dedicated

Chu Tan was born in 1916 in Hsuehchow, Kiangsu Province and studied painting under Hsu Pei-hung. In 1938 he went to Yenan, the cradle of the revolution, and since then he has done much literary and art work. He is at present the director of the China Art Research Institute.



his life to art he did so with the intention of using it to arouse the people. From the start he opposed art for art's sake, and emphasized the artist's social role.

In 1919 Hsu Pei-hung had the chance to go to France, where he studied the rudiments of painting under famous masters and laid a good foundation for his future career. A multitude of carefully drawn sketches and drafts show us how painstakingly he applied himself, and he always insisted upon the importance of sketching as the first step in painting and art education.

Because he was short of money and often had to work on an empty stomach, he contracted stomach ulcers. His unhappiness while living under these conditions in a strange land appears in various sketches of his models, and we sense his sympathy for these poor people. Once when sketching a girl he had painful cramps in his stomach, but he went on working and wrote on the sketch, "When people see this, they will not guess the agony I am in. As long as breath is left to me, I must not stop." On a painting of a young labourer he wrote:

*I thank heaven for the straits which strengthen my will;
Though poor, ill and unskilled, I have unlimited strength!
With the sharp point of my brush
I paint this pitiful figure for men a thousand years hence.*

Hsu Pei-hung's perseverance and sympathy for the poor went hand in hand. Keen perception and a strong sense of justice enabled him to create many truthful and moving portraits. In this period he also visited Berlin, Milan, Rome and other famous art centres of Europe to study relics of classical European art. In Rome he saw the famous sculptures of St. Paul's and the frescoes of Sistine Chapel, in Venice he admired Titian's *The Assumption of the Virgin*, and in Greece the ruins of the Parthenon to which he often referred. He studied the civilization of the Renaissance and the works of Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael, as well as Rembrandt, Rubens, Goya, Menzel and other painters of the period when the bourgeois culture was in the ascendant. In France he learned the techniques of the realist school and the democratic ideas of the bourgeoisie. His eight years of study in Europe had a profound influence on his later creative activities and attitude towards life.

In 1927 Hsu Pei-hung returned to China. The reactionary Kuomintang regime then had its capital in Nanking and was trying to recruit well-known men of all professions to help give an appearance of success to their newly set-up government. He accepted a professorship in the Central University there. But the Kuomintang government became daily more corrupt, Chiang Kai-shek showed increasingly clearly that he was a stooge of foreign imperialism, and civil war broke out. Naturally cultural and educational work was ignored to the great indignation of a democratic patriot like Hsu Pei-hung, who had returned from abroad hoping to do something for his country in the field of culture and art. Quickly disillusioned with the Kuomintang, he chose a story from the *Historical Records* by Ssuma Chien, the second-century B.C. historian, as the subject for an oil painting entitled *Tien Heng and His Five Hundred Men*. This story dates from the third century B.C., when the first emperor of Han asked Tien Heng, a noble of Chi who had lost his estate and fled to an island, to surrender. Tien Heng refused and killed himself, along



Flying Eagle

with all his five hundred gallant men. The artist chose the tense moment of farewell between Tien Heng and his men to show their different emotions and gestures and create a tragic atmosphere, bringing out the heroism of the central figure and his determination to kill himself rather than surrender. In his followers we see mingled the emotions of regret at parting, indignation and mutual trust. The composition is strong and well-knit, the colours simple and restrained, the whole painting a dramatic and noble work.

While working on large oil paintings, Hsu Pei-hung also produced a figure painting in the traditional Chinese style based on the legend of Chiu Fang-kao in *Lieh Tzu*, a philosophical work interspersed with fables attributed to the fifth century B.C. Chiu was a horse expert who could detect a horse's inner vigour and spirit regardless of its outer appearance. Hsu Pei-hung used this theme to satirize the society of his time. This painting is both concise and original. The king and his attendants do not appear,

only the horse expert—the traditional Chinese method of letting one part suggest the whole. The simple colours suit the style of an allegory, while the vivid portrayal of the shrewd old horse expert testifies to Hsu Pei-hung's skill in portraiture and is a model for modern Chinese portrait painting. The contrast between the ordinary horses and the superior horse helps to emphasize the theme.

By the early thirties, the Kuomintang regime was beset by sharp contradictions and the nation was in a critical state. Between 1930 and '33 Hsu Pei-hung produced an oil painting reflecting the current situation. It was called *May Our Lord Come Soon* after a sentence from the *Book of Documents* which reads, "May our lord come soon, then we shall live again." The artist compared his contemporaries to the people under the last tyrant of the Hsia dynasty, who longed for a good ruler to come to rescue them from their sorrows. This is a large canvas and on parched land a crowd of hungry, weary peasants wait for the storm to break.

His early oil paintings made a strong impression, the more so since Chinese artists had only been working in this medium for twenty to thirty years, and none before Hsu Pei-hung had attempted large compositions or complex historical scenes. Hsu Pei-hung's positive themes, his realistic and mature technique and serious attitude towards creative work won a respected position for large historical oil paintings in Chinese art.

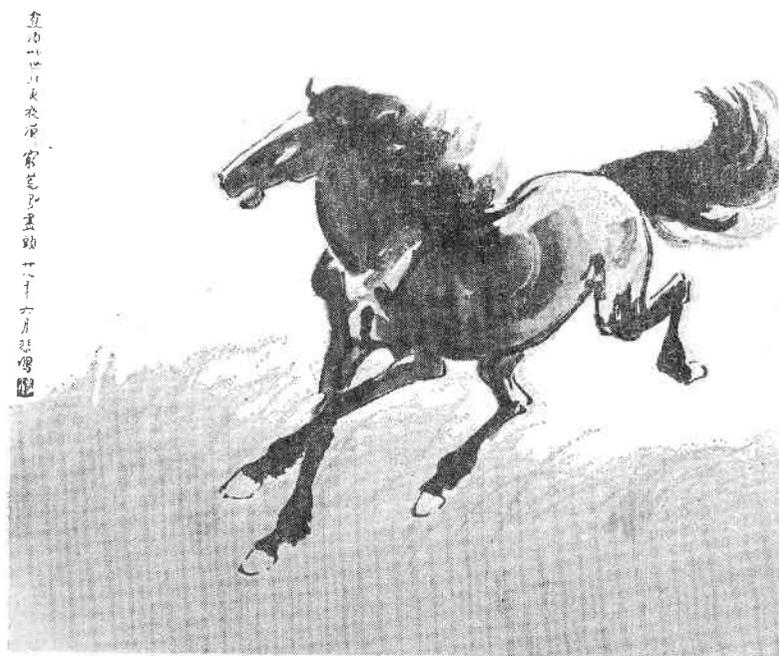
Most of his work, however, was traditional painting in ink, although in this he also adopted certain European techniques. He consistently opposed mere copying and the reluctance to introduce innovations; but he paid serious attention to tradition and made a careful study of dozens of masters from the Tang and Sung dynasties who painted in the realist tradition and had original styles. He believed in the old method of "taking as master the natural world outside, and following your own bent." He urged other artists to carry forward this tradition.

In 1929 Hsu Pei-hung met Chi Pai-shih and was most impressed by his work. He compiled a collection of paintings by Chi Pai-shih, whom he described as an artist who could boldly recreate nature on the base of the realist tradition. Hsu Pei-hung was moreover an enthusiastic admirer of Chinese folk art. In Tientsin

he saw the clay figures by an artist named Chang, and in a Taoist monastery in Nanchang, Kiangsi Province, he discovered wood-carved figures by the folk artist Fan Chen-hua. He was full of praise for both men, indignant that their remarkable talents were not highly considered in that society. He said with emotion, "What I admire most is the fact that these unknown heroes stick to their work with no care at all for high position. This is really wonderful!"

The Kuomintang's submission to foreign imperialists and cruelty towards the people formed a glaring contrast during the early thirties. This aroused the artist's indignation more strongly and his outlook and technique became more mature. He took to using bold strokes to express his indignation and combined the techniques of the traditional schools of painting meticulously and painting with spirit. He also began at this time to specialize in studies of horses to express his feelings. He depicted the large

Galloping Horse



Ferghana breed running wild, and tried to convey the vigour and unbridled spirit described by the Tang poet Tu Fu in these lines:

*Galloping freely into space,
Here is a steed you can trust with your life.*

In the past many Chinese painters specialized in horses, but for the most part they painted the plump, tame nags, saddled and bridled, kept by noble families, quite unlike these dynamic wild steeds of Hsu Pei-hung.

Hsu Pei-hung's horse paintings owed something to his views on art and politics. Some of his horses were his own thoughts and feelings personified. To many of these paintings he added poetic inscriptions, and a number of these expressed his own ideas. During this period when China suffered in silence, his choice of galloping horses as a subject naturally had a hidden significance.

Hsu Pei-hung's horses show clear imprints of the age and their galloping hooves advanced with the changes of history. Inevitably these horses also reflected the changes in the artist's outlook. The earlier ones have the look of despondent heroes, while the later ones seem ardent warriors. Their proud bones stand out and they have remarkable vigour, for the artist endued them with the spirit of the age.

Hsu Pei-hung liked to paint other animals, usually choosing robust creatures with distinctive characteristics like lions, eagles or cocks. He painted plants too with bold brush strokes, often tall, vigorous old pines and cypresses, knotted and gnarled like rocky cliffs braving the waves in midstream. His bamboos were painted thick and straight with a slanting brush, and some critics complained that this style of execution was dull and lacking in variety; but actually his clumps of bamboo could not twist into all manner of shapes like trees, and only by this use of bold strokes could he show their indomitable spirit. Lu Hsun once said, "Only when writers and readers are full of vigour will there be 'powerful' art. Paintings with bold strokes probably could not exist in a decadent society which is petty-minded."

Hsu Pei-hung detested the decadent, petty-minded society in which he lived. He was for struggle and vitality, as he indicates in the small painting *Braving the Wind*. This work in the traditional style strikes a lyrical note. Some small sparrows are



flying in the teeth of a keen wind strong enough to blow large sprays of bamboo leaves to one side. The spirit and verve of the little birds is quite awesome, and the painting blends poetic beauty with serious thought in a harmonious way.

On the eve of the War of Resistance Against Japan, Hsu Pei-hung left Nanking, the capital which he detested, and went to Kweilin in Kwangsi, where the scenery is extraordinarily lovely. He painted many distinctive landscapes there. During this period he worked hard, made many draft paintings and developed new modes of expression. He experimented with the Chinese brush and paper and introduced western water-colour techniques to create a new style of traditional Chinese painting in order to bring out the special features of Kweilin scenery. He combined the Chinese use of ink with the western water-colour use of water, and combined Chinese concepts of landscape with western perspective and methods of composition, creating a fresh school of Chinese landscape painting. His well-known *Spring Rain on the River Li* and *Boatmen on the River Li* date from this period. In these new landscapes, apart from technical virtuosity, the artist showed a deep feeling for nature. Perhaps this was what he meant when he said that a man who learns from nature must have a glimpse of the truth. During this period he also experimented with new themes in his animal and flower studies, choosing subjects on the spot and producing original paintings, for example, of water buffaloes in south China and bright subtropical plants full of distinctive features and very varied in style.

The outbreak of the war of resistance in 1937 gave Hsu Pei-hung a great stimulus. His strong patriotism took him to Chungking, the wartime capital, and on the way he gave exhibitions to raise funds for the war effort. He lectured on art and wanted to train young artists for the resistance, travelling through Southeast Asia to collect funds for this.

Hsu Pei-hung was in Southeast Asia and India at the time when the war of resistance had reached a stalemate. Understanding the arduous nature of a protracted war, he painted *How the Fool Moved the Mountain*, taking his theme from the ancient Chinese legend of how an old man tries to move away the mountain in front of his house, going with his sons and grandsons to start moving the earth with hoes and shoulder poles. The moral is that

any difficulty no matter how great can be overcome by hard, persistent effort. In view of the special features of this story, Hsu Pei-hung did not follow the traditional method of composition in figure painting, but showed a close-up scene of men in a row, using exaggeration to emphasize their strength. The picture as a whole has a strong direct impact, like a clarion call or stirring slogan to mobilize the masses. It is clear that because of the need of the time he was trying to produce the effect of a poster.

After his return to China with a mass of material and many sketches and studies, Hsu Pei-hung felt the need for direct contact with the people. It was difficult for an artist to remain in close touch with the masses in the Kuomintang-controlled area, yet he often went sketching in the streets and countryside, collecting material from the labouring people for his painting. The result appears in his *Washerwomen*, *Woman Carrying a Basket* and the famous *Water Carriers*. In earlier works like *Tien Heng and His Five Hundred Men* or *May Our Lord Come Soon*, some

Portrait of a Peasant



figures are hazy and not too true to life, lacking vitality, while certain images are repeated; but the many figures he drew in this period were taken directly from life and by now his technique had improved considerably. These new figures show his skill in sketching, and being taken directly from life they are more truthful too.

After the victory of the war of resistance, Hsu Pei-hung returned to Peking and became pres-

ident of the National College of Art. His experience during the war and the influence of progressive ideas convinced him that he must break through the fetters of the old educational methods and style of work, and cease doing things in a backward, academic manner. He recruited a number of progressive professors and introduced certain reforms in teaching method. His teaching helped to train many new talents, and many noted artists active today were his pupils.

Hsu Pei-hung lived only four years after the establishment of the Chinese People's Republic. His unsettled life and wanderings from place to place had irreparably injured his health. Nevertheless he whole-heartedly accepted the direction pointed out by Chairman Mao Tse-tung that literature and art should serve workers, peasants and soldiers. He wrote in his notes: "The best way to make progress is by serious criticism of one's own weaknesses and shortcomings, by bold correction of them through constant practice." He went enthusiastically to construction sites to experience life and draw labour heroes among the workers, peasants and soldiers. He was preparing to start on a large work, for which he had made many sketches and drafts, when unfortunately he fell ill and died.

Hsu Pei-hung is an outstanding figure in the history of modern Chinese art. His work is now on permanent exhibition in the Hsu Pei-hung Museum, which includes the house in which he used to live. His achievements are warmly praised by Chinese and foreign visitors alike.

From the Writer's Notebook

KO LING

Truth, Imagination and Invention

Let me start with an anecdote about Cheng Pan-chiao, who painted bamboos in the eighteenth century.

Cheng was noted for his paintings of bamboos and orchids, and is said to have filled his garden with bamboos—"three thatched rooms, the spring breeze for ten *li* around, quiet orchids within and tall bamboos without." And he wrote about his painting as follows:

In my riverside lodge I rise at dawn in the clear autumn weather to watch the bamboos. Mist, shadows, sunlight and dew play about the slender stems and massed leaves till my heart is stirred and I feel the urge to paint. Actually the bamboo in my mind is not that before my eyes. Nor, when I spread out paper, grind ink and set to work, is the bamboo that takes shape under my brush the same as the bamboo in my mind.

I think these words give us food for thought, because they describe so concisely and graphically the process of creating a work of art, from the impact made by life to the urge to create and the artist's handling of his subject. They confirm the truth that a work of art is not copied exactly from life.

Ko Ling, born in 1909, is a well-known writer of film scripts, poems in prose and short stories. His most popular scripts are *For Peace*, *Corruption* and *Night Inn*.

A stream must have its source and a tree its root, but a great river which flows for thousands of miles and a giant tree which aspires towards the sky have ample freedom of movement. The same holds true of the relationship of art to life.

"Beauty is life," said Chernyshevsky in his famous definition of aesthetics. However, in the artist's studio life is just crude raw material. An indispensable process must take place before the raw material of life becomes the finished work of literature and art, and that is the process of artistic generalization, of making characters and events more typical. The quality of the artistic generalization determines the success or failure of the work.

And, as I see it, an active part is played in artistic generalization by imagination and invention.

Just as history records men's class struggles and battles against nature, literature and art depict men's thoughts and emotions in the course of these struggles. The former is a faithful record of actual events, the latter something imagined on the basis of reality. As Gorky has pointed out, "Art cannot exist without fancy. Science turns fancy into fact. It is fancy and speculation that make humanity superior to cattle, whereas worms and oxen will always remain the same precisely because they have no reasoning power, no power to imagine or speculate." Gorky said more than once that without imagination and invention there would be no art.

Does this vitiate the quality of truthfulness?

Marxists have always emphasized truthfulness in literature and art; for without truthfulness art would have no power to move men, and naturally it would lack cogency. But artistic truth is different from the truth in life.

Art always seeks in every way for typification; but although the source of art is life, the separate events in real life are seldom fully typical.

The playwright Tien Han has said, "Typical events and characters in life may not be types in art. When we describe something as typical in life we are referring to its social significance, whereas types in art are the result of the writer's artistic generalization and concentration of events and characters taken from life. Typical events and characters in life serve as excellent

models and clues, as it were, for types in art, but the writer must go beyond the limitations of real individuals and events and put in a good deal of work on them before they become typical circumstances and characters in art."

We can find many cases of this. Literature and art are rich in successful works based on reality, but the artists starting from real life did not restrict themselves to reproducing real people and events. We all know that literature affords no example of life supplying the artist with something ready-made and perfect, typical stories and characters which need no refashioning. This is true of all literature, whether past or present, Chinese or foreign.

Let us turn for examples to works everybody knows. The *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the eighteenth-century novel describing the prosperity and decline of a noble family and the tragic love of two young people, is to some extent autobiographical; however, the scanty records we possess make it clear that the hero Chia Pao-yu was not exactly the writer Tsao Hsueh-chin, and the novel was not merely based on the Tsao family. Shih Nai-an's *Heroes of the Marshes*, a fourteenth-century novel about a peasant uprising, has little actual basis in fact, and the splendid story it unfolds was the fruit of the author's hard work and imagination. Again the fourteenth-century *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* by Lo Kuan-chung, although it uses much historical material to describe the contest among warlords of the third century, also introduces many fictitious episodes.

Lu Hsun's family and friends have given us some of the background material of certain of his short stories, and this proves that while Lu Hsun used some real persons and incidents in *The True Story of Ab Q*, *The New Year's Sacrifice* and *The Misanthrope*, for instance, these stories were essentially the result of distilling and amalgamating material from life. Similarly Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, Gogol's *The Inspector General* and Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*, all based on real events, were quite different from the circumstances which inspired them. It is true that the broad outlines of *Resurrection* closely resemble actual happenings, but it was by dint of long and painful effort that Tolstoy rid his first draft of the commonplace events of the true-life story, transforming it into something with a new life.

Art permits exaggeration, even fantasy, and often resorts to these to heighten the effect. Thus the poet Li Po drove home the immensity of his grief by saying that his white hair was thirty thousand feet long. Many old story-writers used hyperbole to describe a woman's beauty, which they said "caused the moon to hide her face, flowers to blush, fish to sink to the river bed and wild-geese to alight." To disclose the secret thoughts of some character, film directors frequently use close-ups so that the whole screen is covered with a face or with two enormous eyes, to make a strong impression on the spectators. Such examples could be multiplied indefinitely.

To reveal life's contradictions forcefully, some writers try to create gripping or complex stories which have an intenser life than life itself. Other works appear as quiet and restrained as the slow, steady flow of a river in spring; yet these have their own inner strength and power to move men, showing that they are the result of the artist's hard work in crystallizing life's raw material. Whatever the form he chooses, an artist must emphasize specific aspects of his subject and have a correct standpoint. He must express love or hate. As the proverb says, "We want what we love to live, what we hate to die." The artist always presents what he likes and finds beautiful as even lovelier than in real life, and what he hates and finds ugly as even more repulsive than in real life.

Sometimes an artist transcends the bounds of reality and laws of nature to enter a world of fantasy. Shakespeare brings a ghost into *Hamlet* and fairies and spirits into *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. *The Peony Pavilion* by the Ming dramatist Tang Hsien-tsu makes a girl fall in love with a young man whom she only meets in a dream; she pines away and dies but is brought back to life and finally marries her lover. Obviously this could not have happened in real life, yet this happy ending truthfully expressed the longings of many women fettered by feudal morality. In the same category are some of the films describing the society of the future and space travel.

So artistic exaggeration and fantasy are perfectly acceptable to the public.

In the history of literature we may note an interesting phenomenon. When some work proves exceedingly popular,

naive scholars will always try to unearth facts to prove that certain episodes and characters in it are based on real life. Often they go to impossible lengths in reading a double meaning into words and putting forward most subjective theories. It is fantastic, for instance, how many scholars have made this sort of study of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, insisting on identifying all the characters with historical figures. *The Peony Pavilion* is generally considered as fictitious, yet even here pedants have tried to prove that the characters and plot of the play were based on real persons and events. However, most ordinary people pay no attention to such "researches." So long as the story is convincing and the characters lifelike, they accept the work as truthful. The heroes and heroines of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *The Peony Pavilion* have cast such a spell over many young people that some girls actually pined away and died after reading these books.

Everyone in China knows the folk legend about the Butterfly Lovers who could not get married as marriage could only be arranged by parents, and died a tragic death. Of course, intelligent, fearless Chu Ying-tai was not a historical figure, but many places claimed the site of her grave or the school where she studied, where pairs of butterflies flitting through azalea blooms were taken for the spirits of the two lovers.

Again, the cunning and cruel Tsao Tsao (A.D. 155-220) on the stage is not the brilliant and wise statesman that Tsao Tsao really was in Chinese history; yet playgoers accept the stage character as a truthful portrait. Kuo Mo-jo in his play *Tsai Wen-chi* has created a different Tsao Tsao who is closer to historical fact. This is all to the good. But there will always exist another Tsao Tsao, for the Tsao Tsao in Chinese opera still lives in people's hearts. He has become evil personified on the stage, a typical character having nothing in common with the real man.

There is a saying, "Without coincidence there is no story." Art does not shy away from coincidence. Certainly, the life expressed in literature and art need not consist of the most common happenings in everyday life; but since art strives to be more truthful than actual events, it must cut fortuitous elements down to a minimum in order to show what is essential in life.

In the film *This Is My Day Off*, a Chinese policeman makes a date with his girl friend, but many unforeseen things happen to prevent their enjoying the holiday together. In the film *Five Golden Flowers* the hero finds four other model workers called Golden Flower in the same commune before he finally traces the girl he loves. Is this not stretching coincidence too far? Apparently not, for the audience accepts these things because the films show the fine, selfless qualities of our police and the honest, faithful love of young peasants. Since these vivid characteristics are true to life, the incidents in both films appear credible.

Shakespeare is a great master of plots, with a superb skill in developing action. But his plots are always subordinated to the characters, made to serve his affirmation of life and expression of the spirit of Elizabethan England. This is why Engels praised Shakespeare's realism so highly. Thomas Hardy, too, the last great English novelist of the nineteenth century, introduced many dramatic coincidences to bring disaster upon his characters at some turning-point in their fate, making his readers hold their breath in suspense. These novels on the one hand reflect the cruelty of the moribund capitalist system, on the other they reflect Hardy's pessimism; hence it is no accident that he wrote as he did.

Many happenings in real life are even stranger than fiction. But since they often contain fortuitous elements, if written up as stories they would seem to lack truthfulness and a realist significance.

Realism demands strict truthfulness but not an exact replica of life.

According to Engels' classic definition, realism means not only truthfulness of detail but typical characters in typical circumstances. Lu Hsun gave his views on depicting Ah Q to the *Theatre Weekly* as follows: "To my mind, Ah Q should be about thirty years old, quite ordinary-looking, with a peasant's simplicity and stupidity combined with a dash of low cunning. You can probably find shades of him among Shanghai rickshawmen and carters, but he is no tough or scavenger." And he warned: "If you put a round skull-cap on his head he will cease to be Ah Q." For Ah Q must wear the black felt hat worn by Shaohsing

peasants. Here we see the importance Lu Hsun attached to truthfulness of detail.

Strict adherence to truth does not mean reflecting everything indiscriminately. The artist is at liberty to choose, add or cut out. In Tsao Yu's play *Thunderstorm*, when the storm that has been brewing in the Chou family for thirty years breaks, a number of dramatic changes take place in a single day and virtually all in the sitting-room of their house. Things might not happen that way in real life, but in the context of the play the whole action looks quite truthful and natural. When the dramatist Hsia Yen used *Under the Eaves in Shanghai* to expose the seamy side of family life in Shanghai in the thirties, he bisected a house on the stage just as a biologist dissects a specimen, disclosing all the families living there to the audience, so that their various adventures and fates could be seen at the same time. And the audience did not feel this incredible but were intrigued rather by this novel treatment.

A mechanical view of truthfulness in art will impair both art and truthfulness. A naturalistic reflection of life with detailed descriptions of everything trivial and superficial in it will turn art into a garbage dump and lead to a distortion of life. This is something which we all know.

Imagination and invention are important because all man's creative activities are based on imagination, including productive labour, science and art. If not for the imaginative faculty, we should have no telephone, wireless, lathes, tractors or artificial satellites let alone poems, novels, music, painting, sculpture, drama, films or other treasures of human culture.

Artistic creation is a form of labour that calls for acute perception, sensitivity and intelligence. No one can create a work of art without accumulating much experience, but imagination and invention are equally indispensable if an artist is to build a fanciful structure in full circumstantial detail. Many novels describe death scenes, and although of course the writer cannot have experienced death himself, he must be able to share his characters' death agony. It is related that once a friend of Balzac called on him and found him in a bad way, as if in the throes of a serious illness. Asked what the matter was, Balzac said that old Goriot had just died.

Artistic talent is often manifested in rich imagination, the imagination that enables readers to escape from their limited world to take a wider, more magnificent view of life. According to Chernyshevsky, the purpose of literature is to kindle men's imagination, to arouse noble thoughts and feelings in readers' minds.

Imagination and invention are also important because art's aim is to achieve a higher truth.

Imagination is not empty fancy, nor invention mere fabrication; both are firmly rooted in reality. The richer the experience accumulated, the greater the scope for imagination and invention. Cut off from the soil of life, the greatest talent must wither. Imagination is born of experience and grows from the seeds of memory in men's minds. The role of imagination and innovation is to distil the essence from the aggregate of reality, discard the dregs and reflect life more faithfully, "subjecting the abundant perceptual data to a process of remodelling and reconstructing—discarding the irrelevant and keeping the essential, eliminating the false and retaining the true, inferring one thing from another, and reaching the inner nature through the outward appearance." (Mao Tse-tung: *On Practice*) Many masterpieces of literature and art prove that rich imagination and a high degree of truthfulness often go hand in hand.

Imagination and invention are also important because the purpose of literature and art is not simply to reflect real life but to remould it. An artist must inevitably express his own attitude towards life and his ideals in his work.

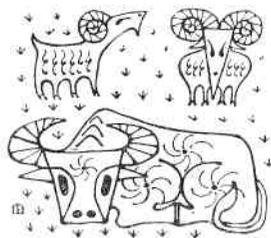
The cultivation of the imaginative faculty helps us to achieve genuinely scientific foresight and to give free rein to our fancy.

"We should dream," said Lenin emphatically, and voiced his agreement with Pisarev on this question. "My dream may run ahead of the natural march of events or may fly off at a tangent in a direction in which no natural march of events will ever proceed. In the first case my dream will not cause any harm; it may even support and augment the energy of the working men . . . if man were completely deprived of the ability to dream in this way, if he could not from time to time run ahead and mentally conceive, in an entire and completed picture, the product to which his hands are only just beginning to lend shape,

then I cannot at all imagine what stimulus there would be to induce man to undertake and complete extensive and strenuous work in the sphere of art, science and practical endeavour."

Whether imagination can surpass the process of natural events or not depends on the artist's grasp of reality.

Imagination and invention are the two wings of art, essential if a work is to soar high, if the life reflected in literature and art is to be higher, more beautiful, more intense, more typical and more ideal than actual everyday life.



Recent Publications

Flames of Vengeance Vol. II *by Wen Chieh*
Writers' Publishing House, Peking

In *Chinese Literature* No. 5, 1961 under New Books we introduced *Tumultuous Years*, the first volume of a long narrative poem *Flames of Vengeance* by the well-known poet Wen Chieh. In our twelfth issue that year we published *Grassland Wedding*, an excerpt from the sequel to *Tumultuous Years* which recently came out in print. In this new work, the characters familiar to readers of Volume I are further developed.

The action of *Tumultuous Years* starts in 1949, immediately after the peaceful liberation of Sinkiang. We are shown the entry of the People's Liberation Army into Sinkiang and the armed rebellion in 1950 plotted by the American vice-consul MacKiernan who had sneaked into the Barkul Steppe to conspire with the bandit chief Usman. In outlining this complex struggle the poet devotes much attention to the tortuous road travelled by the young Kazakh herdsman Bakhai, an outstanding rider of the Barkul Steppe. His love for Sulia is frowned on by her father, the tribal chief Abelmagen. Later, Bakhai learns from the old herdsman Uncle Bugbai that Abelmagen is not Sulia's real father but the murderer of her parents and he treats the girl badly. Wanting to free Sulia and take her away, Bakhai steals into the chieftain's tent one night but is caught and condemned to death. However, Abelmagen changes his mind on the execution grounds when news comes that the People's Liberation Army has entered the steppe. He releases Bakhai and promises to let him marry Sulia. Overwhelmed with gratitude, the young man agrees to work for him. Soon after, when Abelmagen joins the armed rebellion organized by Usman and MacKiernan, Bakhai follows him against Sulia's wishes.

In the second volume of *Flames of Vengeance* the rebellion in the Barkul Steppe unfolds dramatically. The tranquil steppe is disturbed by rifle shots as the bandits plunder the herdsmen and set fire to tents. But Usman and the rebels are routed in no time by the People's Liberation Army and forced to retreat to Alighting Eagle

Gorge in the Tianshan Mountains where they keep up a stubborn fight.

By then some of the herdsmen tricked into following Usman to the hills gradually come to see the true character of the bandits. Moved by the lenient policy of the People's Liberation Army, they start returning to the steppe. Usman's gang is disintegrating. Meanwhile Bakhal, who has seen how the bandits plunder and kill the herdsmen and is disgusted with their dissipated life, begins to doubt the wisdom of following Usman.

In May 1950, with the support of the Kazakh people the People's Liberation Army starts out to clear up the last of the rebels in Aighting Eagle Gorge. A cavalry unit led by Regimental Commander Baimbet makes a frontal attack while a detachment of light cavalry led by Divisional Commander Jen Jui scales the snow-clad mountains to advance on the bandits from a small path.

The rebels, taken unawares by the attack from their rear, are thrown into confusion. Usman knows that he can hold out no longer and tries to break away, while MacKiernan sets off for the border on the pretext of setting up a supply station there. Usman is beginning to lose faith in the U.S. agent but still he orders Bakhal to head five other cavalymen as guide and escort for MacKiernan.

All the way, Bakhal is tortured by the thought of having to leave his country. Although he has no idea what will happen if he returns to his own tribe, he cannot bear to leave the steppe where he was born and bred. In the end he abandons MacKiernan, who gets lost without a guide and is devoured by a pack of wolves.

Volume II of *Flames of Vengeance* ends here. How does Bakhal return to his home and people? What happens to the bandit chief Usman? The poet has left these questions to be dealt with in the third volume of his long poem.

Although Bakhal, Sulia and Uncle Bugbai are depicted in the first volume, their characters are not fully developed there. They begin to take fuller shape in the second volume, where the poet probes deeper into their souls, portraying their inmost feelings and thoughts in all their complexity. Bakhal's doubt, loneliness and distress when fighting in Aighting Eagle Gorge and his misery as he escorts MacKiernan towards the border are fully and meticulously depicted.

Though little space is given to lovely, fearless Sulia in the second volume, the lines describing her longing to go to Aighting Eagle Gorge one starry night are moving:

*Bravely let me enter the gorge tonight,
To call back to the steppe the man I love.
I will face the dagger with head raised
Rather than let my youth be thrown away. . . .*

The depiction of Sulia's true and deep love, seen against Bakhal's loneliness and misery in the gorge, makes a great impact on the reader.

Bakhal's sister Yerna and her lover Sarebai represent the new generation on the steppe. These fine young people long for the day when the bandits are wiped out and they can build up a happy homeland free from oppression, slavery and plunder. They are lovable figures, full of confidence.

Uncle Bugbai is a kind-hearted old man with a sense of justice who realizes after decades of humiliation and insults that revolution is the only way to break away from serfdom. The song he sings on his deathbed is profoundly stirring.

*All night long I sing,
Sixty years and more I have roamed the Barkul Steppe,
I sing of the shame and sorrow of slaves,
And my own despairing groans.*

*Who could tell that at the end
My dombra would sing the happiness of the slaves,
Would turn into music my own life's final splendour!
Rejoice for me, my children. . . .*

The poet completes his portrayal of Bugbai's heroic character in the second volume, and the old man's fine qualities leave an indelible impression on readers.

A successful negative character is the crafty brazen U.S. vice-consul MacKiernan, whose low cunning and spiritual emptiness are well portrayed.

The poet's talent is seen in his vivid, colourful descriptions of the Sinkiang steppe and the customs of the Kazakh people. He presents unforgettable pictures of wrestling, riding contests, dancing, a Kazakh wedding, the snow on the Tianshan Mountains and the sun rising over the grassland. These delightful genre paintings and landscapes enrich the characters and action, giving both a local and a national flavour to this long poem.

— Wu Shan-hsiang

The Wild Swans Fly North by Lin Yu
Writers' Publishing House, Peking

A large tract of virgin land in Heilungkiang, a province in northeast China, is known as the Great Northern Wasteland. This is how the place has been described in ballad:

*You will run into roebucks wherever you turn,
When you go for a drink there's a fish in your pail;
And just pick up your rice bowl intending to eat —
Whirr! it's knocked from your hand by a pheasant's long tail!*

Although this region is rich in natural resources, since it is frozen and snow-bound for half the year and the climate is most uncertain, it remained virtually uninhabited until the spring of 1958, when the young writer Lin Yu went there with tens of thousands of demobilized officers and men of the People's Liberation Army to start a state farm. After four stirring and arduous years spent in opening up the wasteland, he produced this novel *The Wild Swans Fly North*.

The chief characters in the novel are the ex-servicemen who had barely laid down their weapons in 1958 before they went to this wasteland to start a new battle against nature. Their tremendous resolution enabled them to overcome well-nigh incredible difficulties: freezing cold, isolation from the rest of the world, sudden downpours of rain and flood, attacks by wild beasts, and treacherous marshes and bogs. But they proved worthy sons of the Chinese people who are striving to build up their land by their own efforts. The book describes the new human relationships and comradely feelings among these men fighting against nature, and their fine moral qualities.

One of the chief figures is Yang Hai-tung, director of the state farm. After taking part in the world famous Long March of the Red Army in the thirties, he fought in the War of Resistance Against Japan, the War of Liberation and the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea. He was seriously wounded in Korea and returned suffering from shell-shock, so that now whenever he is tired after work he gets a splitting headache. However, this veteran division commander refuses to give up the fight and leads many cheerful, confident men to the new battle-field of the Great Northern Wasteland.

Former regiment commander Chang Hsin-hua, who had worked under Yang for many years in the army, is another hero of the novel. A man with high ideals and the courage to act he is in charge of a branch farm. Sometimes, it is true, he behaves like a

rough soldier, but by dint of enthusiasm for the job and intensive study he becomes quite an expert on farming. He makes a point of choosing the heaviest assignments and bearing the brunt of any hardships, and his utter loyalty to the revolution has its effect on all the men around him.

Other memorable characters are Lo Hai-ming, who never spares himself and gives his life to protect the fish pond during a flood, and honest Jen Kuang-ming whose face is covered with ugly napalm burns from the Korean war, but whose concern for his comrades is as warming as a stove in the bitter winter. It is ordinary soldiers like these, eager to work hard for their motherland, who sow the first seeds of happiness on this desolate plain.

The author has deep admiration for the soldiers brought up in the revolutionary army and he makes it clear that these men understand how to make their lives truly meaningful. When the people were living under the exploitation and oppression of the reactionary ruling class, they risked their lives to join the revolution. When China was invaded by imperialists, they came forward to defend her. Now that they are called upon to transform their motherland from an economically backward country, they devote themselves wholeheartedly to the glorious work of construction.

However, there are a few people of a different type, like Chang Hsin-hua's old comrade-in-arms Su Chao-fan, another leader of the branch farm. This veteran from the revolutionary ranks has years of experience in managing a state farm and opening up wasteland, but his ideas lag behind actual developments so that his past experience and knowledge become a burden which impedes his progress. Upon arrival in the Great Northern Wasteland he is overwhelmed by the difficulties and turns conservative, while professional pride makes him subjective and high-handed. The enthusiasm of the others irritates and depresses him and he keeps clashing with those who have brave ideals and are pushing forward.

During discussion of the state farm's plan, Su proposes that the first year be devoted to surveying, the second to building roads and communications, the third to capital construction, the fourth to opening up the wasteland and the fifth to sowing. This conservative plan is opposed by most of the rest headed by Chang Hsin-hua. On the base of the experience of other farms and of those local peasants who have tilled virgin soil and reaped a harvest the same year, they propose undertaking production and construction at the same time.

The novel unfolds around this central conflict, and in the struggles that ensue the different characters and their views are presented. After a heated debate and a period of testing by practice, Su's plan is found to be infeasible while Chang's is proved to work. And finally this latter plan with the support of Director Yang Hai-tung is adopted. Su Chao-fan himself is eventually convinced by the facts and learns a good lesson in this struggle against nature.

The novel is set in 1958, the year in which China embarked on her Big Leap Forward in socialist construction. This novel reflects something of the enthusiasm and heroism of the Chinese people in this one field of endeavour characteristic of the time.

— Chao Hsueh-ling



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