

CHINESE LITERATURE



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The Bright Road

The Bright Road, a novel in several volumes, deals with the co-operative movement in agriculture during the early fifties in China. An excerpt from the first volume, published in 1972, was presented by *Chinese Literature* No. 1, 1973 under the title *The First Step*; excerpts from the second volume, published in 1974, will appear in this and the next issue.

In the novel the author tackles the important question of what road to take in the countryside after the system of feudal land ownership was overthrown in the land-reform movement. The villagers of Sweet Meadow in northern China where the story takes place are confronted with this problem. Kao Ta-chuan, secretary of the Party branch, Chu Tieh-han, a member of the Party branch committee and others carry out Chairman Mao's revolutionary line and lead the liberated peasants to take the co-operative road.

The first volume describes the difficulties they meet with in their struggle to set up Sweet Meadow's first mutual-aid team, the fairly good harvest they reap that year by relying on their collective strength, and the help they give the peasants short of manpower and draught animals to overcome difficulties in production and livelihood. Thus they demonstrate the advantages of the mutual-aid team.

Chang Chin-fa, village head of Sweet Meadow who strongly opposes the movement and advocates individual farming, implements the wrong line of "building up the family fortunes", with the result that signs of new exploitation and polarization begin to occur in the village again.

The second volume describes the deepening struggle. As the co-operative movement develops, Chang Chin-fa is compelled to change his tactics and set up a bogus mutual-aid team. However, taught by facts, the broad masses of the peasants finally break with the restrictions of old habits and the narrow-mindedness inherent in small production and take the bright road of socialist agricultural co-operation.

— The Editors

It was an afternoon in the spring of 1952. After taking part in an enlarged conference of the county Party committee, District Party Secretary Wang Yu-ching and Village Party Secretary Kao Ta-chuan went together to Sweet Meadow Village to implement the decisions of the Party Central Committee on mutual aid and co-operation in agricultural production.

On their arrival, without pausing for breath, they told Chu Tieh-han, a member of the village Party committee, to announce through the loud-speaker that all Party and Youth League members and activists were to go to the former landlord's house, now the village administration office, for a meeting. Because they had to explain the decisions clause by clause, it was dark by the time they finished reading the document. Then they split up into small groups to discuss these instructions and make sure they understood them.

Ever since the formation of the village Party branch, each time a meeting was held the village head Chang Chin-fa had sat in a corner. Today, however, for the first time he was sitting in a conspicuous position near the table, smoking as he watched the proceedings and sized up the situation.

Gazing at Wang Yu-ching who was gravely reading the document, he thought: Originally District Head Tien Yu always came down to our village to help with the movement; but now you've come instead. I wonder why? If you've completely changed your tune, of course I must do the same. But what's going to be your attitude to me? Will you respect or ignore me? Keep close to me or steer clear of me?

Then his eye fell on Kao Ta-chuan, recently elected secretary of the Party branch because of his support for mutual-aid teams and eagerness to take the collective path. Kao was beaming and greeting people right and left. Chang Chin-fa thought: You're sitting pretty. You've made some political capital and taken power. Like it or not, I have to tag after you. Are you going to let bygones be bygones or hit a man when he's down? Leave me some footing here or squeeze me out?

Next he glanced at Chu Tieh-han, Chou Chung, Chou Li-ping and Chu Chan-kuei, all of whom were listening intently. All these fellows have been helped by Kao so they're his men, he reflected. He's relied on them to climb up and sit firm in the saddle. Seems to me I must try to get hold of some people too. Without a following I won't have any position.

Because his thoughts were wandering, Chang Chin-fa heard very little of the decisions and his understanding of them was far from clear. But at least he learned one thing: Kao was not the only man keen to promote the mutual-aid and co-operative movement. County Party Secretary Liang Hai-shan was equally keen; moreover these decisions came from the Central Committee; so in future, like it or not, he must at least make a show of supporting them. Otherwise even such higher-ups as County Head Ku or District Secretary Wang would drop him, and he might even lose his Party membership. Once more his contradiction with the Party put him in a quandary and he cast about for a way to solve the problem.

The meeting broke up. Laughing and chatting together, people got up and left, going out into the sparkling starlight and fresh spring breeze.

Only the district Party secretary and three village cadres stayed behind to talk over the meeting.

Chu Tieh-han proposed: "Let's first decide where Secretary Wang's to stay."

"I've already fixed it," Chang Chin-fa rejoined promptly.

"Where?" asked Chu.

"In the west room of my house." Chang darted a glance at Wang and Kao as he spoke.

"Your place isn't central enough," Chu objected. "It's so far from most people, they'd find it inconvenient going all that way to find Secretary Wang."

"It may not be all that central," retorted Chang, "but if everyone goes there it'll become the centre. It's within the village anyway, so it isn't all that far."

In fact, the district secretary's arrival had caused Chu some misgivings. For both Wang and Chang Chin-fa had been ardent supporters of the capitalistic slogan "Build up the family fortunes", and Chu had a shrewd idea of where the district secretary's sympathies lay. Now Wang had come to the village in Tien Yu's place to help carry out the decisions of the Central Committee and organize mutual aid and co-operation. This might mean that he had revised his views during the last two years. Chu certainly hoped that like Tien Yu he would whole-heartedly support their wish to take the socialist road. But Chu had his doubts. He was afraid that if Wang stayed with Chang he would listen to him and be biased when it came to solving problems. Furthermore, if Wang stayed there it would help boost Chang's position and cause confusion in the villagers' minds. As Chang was obviously trying to win Wang over, Chu did not like to object too openly. In his dismay he thought of an idea.

"I tell you what, Secretary Wang," he suggested. "I'll fix up a bed for you here in the office, and you can keep me company. You can hold your meetings here, do your office work here and rest here. That will be simplest for you and for us all. How about it?"

Wang was just putting the document back into his bag. When he heard this he hesitated, on his guard. He knew about the contradictions between Chu and Chang, which put him in a difficult position, liable to offend and antagonize both sides. Under the circumstances he had better shift the decision to someone else. Smiling at Chu he said: "I don't mind where I stay. Let Old Kao decide."

Kao Ta-chuan said without any hesitation: "I think Secretary Wang may as well stay in Chin-fa's place for a few nights. Chin-fa didn't attend that conference in the county, and he hasn't organized

mutual-aid teams himself, so he's lagged behind in his understanding of policy and lacks practical experience too. If Secretary Wang stays in his place they can talk things over in the mornings and evenings; then Chin-fa can straighten out his thinking and catch up on what he's missed. Wouldn't that be good?"

"Quite right," agreed Chang, much relieved. "My idea exactly. In the past Secretary Wang gave me a lot of help. I certainly don't want to miss this chance to learn from him." He reached out to take Wang's bag. "Let's go home, Secretary Wang, and have some supper."

"Just a minute, Chin-fa," put in Kao. "There's still something I want to say."

Chang halted, glancing suspiciously at Kao.

"We've just studied the Central Committee document and the district secretary's here too, so I'll make it brief," Kao continued. "From today on, I hope you'll deepen your understanding and take a more positive stand, working harder for mutual aid and co-operation. You're a member of our Party branch committee and the administrative head of our village. If you don't join a mutual-aid team yourself, how are you to help lead the movement?"

Inwardly relieved, Chu at once expressed complete agreement. Waving his big hand, he boomed: "I'll just repeat what I said last spring: If a man doesn't want to go the socialist way, he'd better not call himself a Party member."

Chang was well prepared for this type of "attack". Actually, when listening to the decisions and the ensuing discussion, he had felt that all those who spoke with enthusiasm and looked so jubilant were attacking him. So he answered calmly: "Come, Tieh-han. You mustn't always take such a low view of other people, considering them so hopeless. . . ."

Chu blurted out: "Well, look at the way you behaved."

Turning towards Chu but glancing at Wang, Chang hedged: "What's the matter with my behaviour? I've followed wherever the leadership led. Every step of the way I've followed. What's wrong with that?"

Wang could no longer keep silent. Sawing the air he cried, "Stop bickering! What good does it do raking up the past all the time? From now on, let's have no more attempts to settle old scores. All that's past and done with."

"We can forget old grudges," agreed Kao. "Our most important, most vital problem now is what path to take in future. The Party Central Committee has issued instructions. Do you support them or not, Chin-fa? Yes or no? This is no time for hedging."

His face livid, Chang countered: "You don't have to worry. I'm a Party member. Of course I support the Central Committee's decision. What else do you expect?"

"Does that come from your heart?" Chu demanded. "If not, it's just empty talk."

"From my heart, of course!" Chang glared at him. "Think I'm talking through my hat? Those aren't empty words, they're backed by facts. In the land reform two years ago, didn't I take the lead? In last year's drive to boost production by self-reliance, didn't I go all out? For two years now I've been longing day and night for definite instructions from the Central Committee. Today we've got them at last. Why shouldn't I work hard?"

Chang's retort, refuting the correct criticism of his former mistakes, was also aimed at winning support for the new course of action he had now decided to take, and justifying his sudden change of stand. This was killing two birds with one stone, he plumed himself.

Chu wanted to argue the matter out, but at a repressive glance from Kao he swallowed back the words on the tip of his tongue. It cost him such an effort that his bronzed face turned purple and he clenched his big fists hard.

Kao was well aware that Chang was simply blustering. He had not deepened his understanding at all of his past mistakes, nor had he made any progress towards the revolutionary path. However, Kao remembered District Head Tien Yu's advice to be prepared both to unite with Chang and to struggle against him. He foresaw that patience and careful surveillance would be needed to unite with such a man and remould his outlook. So he said calmly:

"I think it's very good to bring out openly what's in our minds. We must keep this up, practising more criticism and self-criticism. Whatever our disagreements, we mustn't consider them as personal issues. When a suggestion's correct we must act on it, no matter who makes it. And if we're wrong we must correct our mistake. In this way we can pull together and make a good job of our work here."

"That's it," approved Wang. "There's strength in unity. In future you must put unity first and work together with one will, not pulling in different directions."

Chang stepped forward then and opened the door for Wang, who took his leave of Kao and Chu and went out, followed by Chang.

Chu at once plumped down on a chair, making it creak.

Kao ignored him to dust the desk, sweep the floor and straighten the stools and chairs. This done, he brushed the dust from his clothes and prepared to go out.

Chu could not contain himself. "Stop!" he exclaimed.

Kao explained: "I want to go and see how the propagandists' meeting called by Chun-chiang and Wen-ching is getting on. This time we need a real fanfare to push mutual aid and co-operation, to sow the seeds of socialism in our people's hearts."

"Seems to me you'd better first clean up this headquarters of yours," retorted Chu. "Your Party committee members are pulling different ways. How are bedfellows having different dreams going to lead the masses forward?"

"I agree with you there," said Kao. "Still, as County Secretary Liang says, we can't clean up our Party organization without a mass movement. Once the masses are aroused, they can push the Party committee forward. Then if anyone doesn't act in accordance with the decisions of the Central Committee, the masses will spot it and speak up against it. If he insists on going his own way, he'll find himself isolated, unable to do a thing."

Chu grunted. "If only Comrade Tien had taken my advice and cleaned up our Party committee! But you agreed to having Chang Chin-fa on it. Wasn't that just asking for trouble?"

"Nothing in the world can be as clean as you want it, I'm sure of that — it's a fact. So be prepared for struggle," Kao rejoined.

Meanwhile Chang, leading his guest through his brick gateway and into his new tiled house, warmly invited the district secretary to take a seat on his *kang* which was spread with a rug. He then produced a half-filled packet of cigarettes from his chest of drawers and offered one to Wang. While Chang's wife Hsiu-hua prepared a meal, the two men started chatting.

Wang had been sent by County Head Ku Hsin-min to Sweet Meadow to help with the movement. During the past year he had either suppressed or reacted half-heartedly to the new mutual-aid and co-operative experiments in this village, his attitude being influenced by Ku's own ideas and stand. However, in the recent conference of the county committee he had seen for himself how Ku, both county head and vice Party secretary, had made a clean breast of his mistakes when helped by Party Secretary Liang Hai-shan and other comrades, coming out in favour of the new mutual-aid and co-operative movement. Naturally that had made Wang modify his own views.

The day before the conference ended, he was sitting in Ku's room at noon when the latter held forth enthusiastically about mutual aid and told him to go immediately to Sweet Meadow to study the situation there, urging him to make good his loss of prestige by taking the right line now. So though Wang did not fully understand his mistake, he was ready to speak and act quite differently.

Tapping the ash from his cigarette with one finger, he congratulated Chang: "Today you made a good showing at the meeting. Fine. Before I came, I heard some damaging comments about you and was afraid you wouldn't be able to change your views all at once. The way you spoke has cleared away my doubts, and the leadership can feel relieved."

Very pleased by this approval from the district Party secretary, Chang replied: "All I can say is: I owe everything to the Party. I shall always obey the leadership's instructions, always follow the leadership."

Wang said: "We must first of all admit that we've lagged behind in our understanding and haven't kept up with new developments. County Head Ku has set us an example. You must also see that you won't lose out by taking the lead in mutual aid. If fellows like Liu Hsiang hadn't joined a team, how could they have coped with their difficulties? The idea, anyway, is to increase production; and the state needs more grain and raw materials. So just take the lead in doing anything that brings good results. This is according to the needs of the Party, and the way a good Communist should act."

Chang smiled and nodded, then asked suddenly: "Secretary Wang, last year Kao said that organizing mutual aid meant building socialism, that the mutual-aid team would lead to socialism. Is that correct?"

Apparently Wang had given some thought to this problem, for he answered readily: "The county head's discussed this with me and helped me to understand. We must build socialism, that's for sure. The mutual-aid team is the first step towards that goal, but we have a long, long way to go before reaching it. He told me mechanization is the way to socialism. But now, see, we're still farming by the old methods handed down by our ancestors. How long will it take to produce all the machines we need? A hell of a long time! It's no use going from one extreme to another, no use being too impatient. The fact is, no one can say for sure what socialism in China will be like. For the time being, at least, leading the masses to organize mutual aid and co-operation so as to solve our temporary difficulties and ward off natural calamities can only do good, not harm. So let's go ahead with the experiment while waiting for new orders from above."

Wang's words and behaviour encouraged and comforted Chang, increasing his confidence in his ability to break with the old line.

2

That night the Party members had a discussion and a meeting was held to mobilize the propagandists, after which the members of the

Party committee stayed behind to work out their plan to go from door to door to arouse the masses. It was nearly cock-crow by the time Kao reached home, and he had barely fallen asleep when he was wakened by his little boy.

Seeing her husband turn over and open his eyes, Jui-fen wrapped the child up in a little red quilt and said: "Go back to sleep. I'll take baby to the outer room and get him to sleep again while I'm lighting the fire."

Kao put a hand on the baby's quilt. "Don't go out," he said. "It's draughty there; he might catch cold. It's time I got up."

His wife darted a glance at him. "How can you do without sleep? Better have another nap."

Kao stretched and stifled a yawn. "We won't have much time for sleep in the days ahead. We must be prepared to lose weight."

"However tough it is, it'll be better than last year. What the document says is exactly what we've been doing. This time we've firm ground to stand on. No one can topple us."

"Still you must see that there are plenty of people in Sweet Meadow going counter to these instructions. Look at Jujube Village. Everyone there has joined long-term mutual-aid teams, and last winter one of those teams even changed into an agricultural co-operative. Then look at us. Half of us haven't joined any team, including one Party member, a member of our Party committee who's still going it alone. As for my younger brother Erh-lin, he's working hand in glove with a fellow like Feng Shao-huai, for all that I'm the Party secretary. Well, now that I'm back, I must alter this situation and get things moving quickly. We must overhaul and consolidate our existing mutual-aid teams; at the same time we must try to get more people to join the long-term mutual-aid teams before the spring ploughing, and get all the villagers organized before the end of the year. Above all, I must win our Erh-lin over. The mutual-aid teams' success in the past year may have convinced him of their advantages, and he may be sick of running around with Feng; so perhaps he'll change his mind."

Unwrapping the quilt from the baby, Jui-fen said: "You look at things from more sides than I do. We'll do as you say. You

don't have to worry about things at home. Even if I can't help you in your work, at least I won't be a drag."

Kao smiled and said nothing but dressed and slipped off the *kang*. As he walked out of the room, he stretched and took a deep breath of air, fresh and cool as peppermint. He was about to fetch a basin of water when he heard a noise outside their wicker gate. Looking up he saw a shadow flitting past. At once he went over and opened the gate. There stood Wen-ching, the younger son of the well-to-do peasant Chin Fu whose nickname was Pinchfist.

"Why are you strolling here so early?" Kao asked.

Wen-ching stepped forward, on his face a look of suppressed excitement.

"I've been waiting for you quite a while," he answered cheerfully. "Your place was so quiet, I didn't like to call out."

Kao waited for him to go on, wondering what the cause of his excitement could be. This youngster, who had tried to be progressive, had been through sharp mental conflicts recently. He had been stirred by the success of the mutual-aid and co-operative movement in the village the previous year, the good harvest, and the fact that his young friends Chou Li-ping and Lu Chun-chiang had been admitted to the Party while several other youngsters had been chosen as model workers in the river project. . . . All these circumstances had made him more and more worried about his own family. Now instructions had come down from the Central Committee and a meeting of propagandists had been held. The movement in this village would soon reach a new high tide. Was this the reason for Wen-ching's anxiety and impatience?

Wen-ching continued: "Something very queer's happened. After supper yesterday, I was notifying people about the propagandists' meeting when I knocked into the village head on the road. He ran after me to tell me that he's going to organize a mutual-aid team and he wants me to help him, to be their accountant. Feeling fed up I said, 'My dad won't even join a team, so how can I be your accountant?' He said, 'Others can't persuade your dad, no matter how hard they try; but if I say the word he'll agree to it.' I thought that was just big talk and didn't take it seriously. But that night

when the meeting ended and I went home, my dad and my elder brother were still up as if they'd been waiting for me. My dad said, 'You always like to be in the swim. This time we'll do as you want and go with the tide.' He went on, 'From today on, our family's joined a mutual-aid team. When you go out you can spread the news and let the Party secretary know.' Now what do you make of that?"

Kao took this announcement quite calmly. After a second's thought he said: "Your father may be backward, but he's worked all his life, so he's a realist. He can see that the situation has changed and it's against his own interests to go against the tide. A few days ago I reckoned he wouldn't give up his old ways easily, but the general enthusiasm these last few days may have helped him to take a step forward. Anyway, whether he's convinced or not, it's a good thing if he joins a team. You should be pleased."

Wen-ching said: "If you can spare the time, why not come to our place and strike while the iron's hot, getting him to join your team. It shouldn't be hard."

Kao smiled. "If I urge him it won't work. He's bound to back out. It's the village head who's been stringing him along, so he won't take a step without Chang giving the word. My guess is that Chang's already spoken to him, otherwise he'd never have switched round like that. So my advice is: you watch his behaviour at home while I keep an eye on him outside, before we make any move."

Wen-ching nodded, then frowned. "I'm feeling bucked, but I don't want to hitch up with the village head."

"Whether you want to or not, you've no choice in the matter. So go ahead and join them. If Chang runs the team right, you can help him; if not, you'll be in a position to oppose him."

Wen-ching thought this over and agreed to do as Kao suggested. Torn between joy and worry, he went home to cope with his father and elder brother.

Kao washed his face then went out, and at once caught sight of his brother's back as Erh-lin went towards the road carrying his buckets. Kao thought: Last night we arranged that Uncle Chou Chung and I should both have a talk with Erh-lin. Here's a good chance to catch him at the well.

By this time the two loud-speakers at both ends of the road were broadcasting the decisions of the Central Committee on mutual aid and co-operation, as well as the county committee's plan to implement these decisions. The willow twigs swaying in the breeze were turning green, while wild geese in formation flew across the clear blue sky and the air was filled with the tang of moistening earth. The coming of spring gladdened the peasants' hearts.

As Kao walked on he saw Chu Chan-kuei of his mutual-aid team chatting with Chu Jung, a peasant who worked on his own.

Chu Jung was a hefty fellow of about forty. His cotton jacket slung over his shoulders, he leaned on his mattock and nodded at Kao with a smile.

Chu Chan-kuei told Kao eagerly: "Party secretary, Chu Jung's come round in his thinking. He wants to join a mutual-aid team."

"Fine, fine," said Kao. "Mutual aid is the right road for us peasants."

"I was never against it," said Chu Jung. "I just didn't think it all that important. Now Chan-kuei's just explained the thing to me and told me that the Central Committee has issued instructions. It's the Communist Party that saved us. Of course we must do whatever the Party says."

Chan-kuei chimed in: "When I mentioned the Party's decisions to my neighbour on the west, he said the same thing and wanted to hand in his name at once. I told him not to be in such a hurry. This is a big thing which he must discuss with his whole family. They must all be willing. You go on home, Jung, and talk it over. If all of you agree, you can send in your names. There's plenty of time."

"Yes," said Chu Jung. "I must think about this and talk it over with the others. I've made up my mind to join, but I want to choose a suitable team. Have I freedom of choice, Party secretary?"

"Sure," said Kao. "Choose for yourself. Only remember one thing: don't just keep your eye on carts and horses, it's people that count. Find some people who've got the right ideas to work with."

"Yes, that's very important," added Chan-kuei. "Just now I forgot to say that. Mind you remember."

Chu Jung nodded cheerfully.

When Kao approached the well, he saw old Chou Chung there deep in talk with Erh-lin.

Erh-lin had put down his buckets, already filled, and had the carrying-pole over one shoulder. He had seen his brother coming, but being ashamed to look him in the face he kept his eyes on the ground as he listened to Chou Chung.

At sight of Kao, Chou Chung threw him a meaning glance, then said in an encouraging tone: "Ta-chuan, Erh-lin's been making progress recently. After thinking things out he's coming to realize who's good and who's bad."

Kao stepped up to them saying: "That's fine. If you can't tell the difference between good people and bad, you'll be fooled and get into trouble. If you can't find the right path, there's no future for you."

Erh-lin threw a glance at him, then looked away. "Don't worry," he said gruffly. "I'm not a fool..."

"I never thought you were," replied Kao. "But you've been so set on getting rich that it's muddled your thinking. When you've time why not call on those families who've joined mutual-aid teams and hear what they have to say, learn from their ideas; then look at the clothes they're wearing, the food they eat, the grain they have stored at home. If you compare these things with their conditions before they joined a team and with the conditions of people like yourself who've taken the wrong path, you'll see the superiority of the socialist system and which is the bright path."

To lessen the tension in the air Chou Chung said: "Our chat has taken a big load off my mind. I'm sure Erh-lin will change completely one of these days and make really rapid progress."

Kao filled his pipe as he observed: "It depends whether he really wants to make progress and is willing to mix more with progressive people. . . . Erh-lin, the Party Central Committee has issued instructions, a call to us poor peasants and hired hands. You must do as the Party says, stride quickly forward. So many of your friends here are worried about you."

Erh-lin listened carefully, his mind in a turmoil, neither nodding nor shaking his head.

After Kao had said all that he wanted to say to his brother, leaving Chou Chung there to explain things in more detail he continued on his way. All he had just seen and heard pleased him. He thought: Now that the Party members and activists are taking the initiative to arouse the masses, the spirit of these decisions will soon spread everywhere and take root in people's minds; then the mutual-aid and co-operative movement is bound to go with a swing. He also reflected: It'll soon be time for sowing. We must make the mutual-aid teams a going concern, one by one; if we stop in the first stage of propaganda, once the busy season starts things will be too hectic and a good opportunity will have been missed. Many families might not want to join teams half-way, so they wouldn't change to the right path till after the autumn harvest. That would be a big loss. We must try to avoid that.

He decided to go straight to Chang Chin-fa's house to find District Secretary Wang and propose calling a meeting of the heads of the mutual-aid teams during the noon break, to discuss how best to carry on the work. When he reached the entrance to a lane east of the road, he saw a woman approaching.

This woman was in her thirties, short but stout, with jet-black hair and a ruddy face. Over her shoulder she had a heavy bag, and in one arm she was carrying a child two or three years old. Her other hand was grasping the mouth of the bag as well as a leather thong by which she was leading a big brindled cow. She was the wife of Liu Wan, a poor peasant who had bettered himself since Liberation. Because her small son's name was Hsiao-chu, she was known as Hsiao-chu's mother. Her father had died when she was young, and when she was twenty her mother had married her to Liu Wan, who having no house of his own came to live in their home. At first she and her husband did not hit it off, but after Liberation they gradually made it up and came to be on better terms. When Hsiao-chu was two she had become pregnant again, and it was clear that any exertion now cost her an effort.

Kao strode forward to greet her. "Where are you off to, sister," he asked, "loaded with a bag and a baby?"

Hsiao-chu's mother was slow in speech as well as in action. She answered: "I'm going to hitch the cow to the millstone, to grind some maize."

"Why not let Uncle Liu Wan hitch the cow for you?"

"He's gone off to the other side of the river to look for a cart. With that uncertain temper of his, you never really know where you are with him."

Knowing the terms they were on, Kao said no more. Instead he took the tether from her and offered: "I'll help you hitch the cow."

"How can I trouble you, busy as you are? No, I'll do it myself."

Kao took the bag of maize from her shoulder too. "This is easy," he said. "It won't take me any time."

Seeing that he really meant to help, she smiled. "That's splendid. I was worrying how to cope with this obstinate brute. No wonder everyone says you're always thinking of others. You really are kind."

Kao seized this chance to reply: "I haven't done nearly enough. For instance, I haven't yet got round to asking whether your family has any difficulties."

"Don't worry about us," said Hsiao-chu's mother. "We're doing all right since the land reform, and last year's harvest was good. We've no problems now."

"When you say you've no problems, you mean not at the moment. But if you look further ahead, you can't guarantee you'll never run into trouble. Individual farming is just like a lantern in the wind — there's no telling when the light may be blown out. Better look ahead and think of some way to be prepared for the worst. Don't just take a short-term view."

While chatting they had reached the mill. Kao put the bag on the ground, then took the halter and hitched it to the millstone. But when he turned to get the cow, it had wandered off towards a copse on the other side of the road and was craning its neck, its mouth open, to reach the dry leaves fluttering on the boughs. Kao gave chase but only succeeded in grabbing the tether after circling the cow three times. Even then, when he tugged, the cow refused to move, just glaring balefully at him. Kao not only had strength but expe-

rience in handling draught animals. He stood aside waiting for his chance, then leaped forward and suddenly seized the cow by its horns. When the beast tried to charge, he tugged it up to the millstone and in a second had it hitched up.

Hsiao-chu's mother had been watching from a distance, for fear lest her child get hurt. After Kao had blindfolded the cow with a piece of sacking she told him nervously: "This beast won't obey anybody but your uncle. It's lucky I met you; otherwise I could never have handled her."

Rubbing the dirt off his hands, Kao replied: "You were taking too big a risk. With your husband away, you should have found someone to help you."

"You know what he's like, the way he ignores other people. So how could I ask anyone to help?"

"Yes," said Kao. "Uncle Liu Wan likes to manage alone; he's too cocksure. That's just as risky, isn't it, as your trying to hitch the cow by yourself?"

Hsiao-chu's mother sighed.

Kao continued: "Did you hear the broadcast? The Party Central Committee calls on us to get organized. Your family should join a mutual-aid team too. Just figure it out yourself. Haven't all those families that joined teams done well?"

"Brother Liu Hsiang's suggested this to him many times, but he won't listen. Was it you who sent Liu Hsiang?"

"No, it wasn't. Uncle Liu Hsiang's concerned for you and wants to help you. I thoroughly agree with his suggestion. When your husband comes back I must have a good talk with him."

Scattering the maize on the millstone, Hsiao-chu's mother confided: "Ever since that business last year, when he urged Liu Hsiang to sell land to pay his debt to Feng Shao-huai, he's felt he did wrong and tried to keep out of your way."

Watching the yellow maize being crushed by the millstone, Kao replied with feeling: "Why should he keep out of my way? I didn't blame him at the time, and I'll certainly not rake up that business now. He should learn a lesson from it all the same. If you don't take the socialist road now, when you run into trouble you'll be like Liu

Hsiang — forced to sell your land and house. All poor peasants should unite and together protect the fruits of the land reform, not help rascals like Feng Shao-huai to fleece poor folk. Don't you realize, once the wolf's gobbled up other people it's going to eat you too?"

Hsiao-chu's mother nodded. "I know. When he comes back I'll tell him that, and try to make him listen to your advice."

Kao smiled. "Yes, together we must help him to see the truth, listen to the Central Committee and Chairman Mao, and take the right path."

With that he left. And Hsiao-chu's mother watched his receding figure with gratitude in her heart. When she first spoke to Kao she had merely been making polite conversation; but now, listening to the broadcast about the mutual-aid and co-operative movement, she was reminded of the time when they had been wretchedly poor and of the trouble Liu Hsiang had had last year. Recalling all the past year's happenings in Sweet Meadow, she began to change her views.

Kao went on towards Chang Chin-fa's house thinking over his previous friendship with Liu Wan, who was six or seven years his senior. At the time of land reform, Kao had seen a good deal of him and persuaded him to join in the struggle. Liu Wan had resolutely taken Kao's side and between them they had mobilized the other villagers. Unfortunately, after receiving his share of land and a cow, Liu Wan lost interest in all but his own affairs. When the revisionist slogan "Build up the family fortunes" was circulating, he started going the rounds of different villages with his cow, ploughing for other peasants to make money. Gradually he cut himself off from the other poor peasants and hardened his heart towards them too. Kao suspected that it would be most difficult to win him back to their side, but try he must.

The sun was rising now and the whole sky was crimson. Cocks were crowing, birds flying, smoke wreathing chimney-tops. Another day with all its joys and sorrows had started in the village.

As Kao neared the gate of Chang's house, he heard voices raised in argument inside.

"No need to get so het up," Chu Tieh-han was saying. "I've not come to pick a quarrel with you. Let's thrash this out calmly. . . ."

"If you've anything worth saying, out with it!" Chang shouted. "But why keep picking on me?"

Then District Secretary Wang joined in. "Cut it out, both of you! Can't you let the matter drop?"

"No, I must get this off my chest," Chu insisted. "He's a Party member and the village head, a member of our Party committee too; but all last year he opposed the mutual-aid teams. Now, as soon as instructions come from the Central Committee, he promptly changes his tune. Without any investigation or discussion, he's rushing here, there and everywhere. What's he up to?"

Chang retorted: "What evidence have you that I opposed the mutual-aid teams? True, I didn't take the lead in starting them last year. But, in the first place, we had no instructions then from the Central Committee; in the second, you were doing it behind my back, so how could I join in? Now the district secretary has brought us the Central Committee's decisions and I've just taken one step forward; but here you come picking fault again and asking what I'm up to. What's the idea?"

"Why organize a mutual-aid team in that sneaky way? Without telling the Party committee."

"In our Party secretary's team, they took in two new members in one night without talking it over with the committee either. Was that sneaky too?"

"What sort of men did he recruit?" demanded Chu. "What sort of men do *you* recruit? Why drag in a fellow like Feng Shao-huai who hates socialism? How are we to build socialism if we get skunks like that in our mutual-aid teams?"

"Why shouldn't Feng take part in the mutual-aid and co-operative movement?" countered Chang. "What's wrong with a middle peasant? Does the document specify that only poor peasants and hired hands can join the mutual-aid teams, not middle peasants?"

This outburst startled Kao. In view of Wen-ching's disclosure it was evident that Chang wanted to get well-to-do peasants like Chin Fu and Feng Shao-huai to join his team. That looked decid-

edly fishy. However, he could not simply oppose this in Chu's blunt way.

District Secretary Wang was now reasoning in a low voice with both disputants.

Kao walked into the house reflecting: County Secretary Liang estimated correctly: the new situation will force those who aren't keen on socialism to play new tricks. Judging by what's happening, the struggle's going to be more complex in future. We must keep on our toes and tread carefully, finding new tactics to cope with their ruses.

Looking up at Chang's window he felt fully confident of victory. However big the toad, he thought, it can't stop a cart wheel. Let them play all the tricks they want — they won't get anywhere.

3

Meanwhile Erh-lin by the well was mulling over his brother's criticism and old Chou Chung's advice. Like a brick tossed into a stagnant pool it had thrown his mind into a turmoil. And now Chou Chung, by comparing Liu Hsiang's position with his, had helped him to see light.

True, Liu Hsiang was a living example, and a most convincing one, his case being so clear that anyone could see it. Erh-lin thought: Last year Liu Hsiang was certainly much worse off than me. But someone told me that if I just left my brother, who was putting all his energies into the mutual-aid teams, I could easily replace my small donkey with a big draught animal, then buy a big cart and make my family's fortune. Liu Hsiang got a house and land in the land reform, but because he has so many children and his wife fell ill he was crushed by all sorts of calamities and nearly forced to sell his land. He was faced with ruin. However, after this one year of taking the path of mutual aid and co-operation all his troubles are at an end, he's doing fine. He's cleared his debts and can hold up his head. But what about me? Although in name I'm an individual farmer, in fact I'm a carter working as a hired hand. . . . He wondered ruefully: Why?

As Erh-lin remained silent, hanging his head, Chou Chung said: "Don't hesitate. Hurry up and join our mutual-aid team and leave Feng Shao-huai."

"Well, seems we must all go this way sooner or later," muttered Erh-lin. "Don't worry, uncle. I'll catch up some day."

"The sooner the better," urged Chou Chung. "You should be a vanguard. You're a poor peasant and the younger brother of the Party secretary. Besides, you've been exploited both in the old society and the new. Why haven't you seen the light yet?"

Erh-lin's lips moved but he said nothing.

"All right then," said Chou Chung. "Go on home with your water. Talk it over with your wife. Don't just listen to glib-tongued people like Feng Shao-huai. You must get your bearings, lad, and chart the right course."

Erh-lin nodded and picked up the buckets. He was thinking: Both my wife and I can work, so we should get good work-points and wouldn't lose out. Why not join a team? I'm only afraid she may not be willing, and Feng won't let me go.

His wife Tsai-feng, the cousin of Feng Shao-huai's wife, was just twenty-three this year. She had had a wretched life, for her mother died when she was only eight and her father's second wife ill-treated her. When she was seventeen, they married her off to a gambler and drunkard who kept abusing her and beating her.

After Liberation she managed to get a divorce, and many people urged her to marry again. She had suffered so much that she longed for a happy marriage, a life of comfort, but was reluctant to commit herself. She had come to Sweet Meadow to avoid the match-makers in her own village, never dreaming that Feng Shao-huai would try to marry her to Erh-lin for his own ulterior motives.

Feng Shao-huai had not much land of his own at the time of Liberation, but prior to that he had rented land from a landlord and employed hired hands; thus during the land reform he was nearly classified as a rich peasant. As the socialist system stopped him from climbing up and feathering his own nest, he had no use for it and instinctively opposed it. His chief opponent in the village was Kao Ta-chuan. Therefore, in order to corrupt Kao and win

him over, Feng and his wife did their best to interest Erh-lin in Tsai-feng. However, Kao was not so easy to corrupt. He stood firm. Then Feng threatened to break off the impending match and urged Erh-lin to leave his brother.

Knowing that both Tsai-feng and Erh-lin were eager to better themselves, one of Feng's baits was the promise that Erh-lin would be able to exchange his donkey for a big draught animal and a cart, and he virtually made them both his hired hands. The two young people were tricked by him into seeking something unattainable; for although they knew Feng to be crafty, they were completely in the dark as to his sinister designs on them.

When Erh-lin reached home he found the house locked and guessed that Tsai-feng had gone to see the Fengs. He decided to fetch her back. As he approached Feng's house, he heard angry voices inside. Then Feng's nephew Li Kuo-chu, who had previously worked for the Feng family, came out into the yard fuming.

Feng ran out after him, crying: "Don't go until you've had lunch here, Kuo-chu."

Ignoring him, Li made straight for the young elm tree where his grey donkey was tethered.

Once again Feng called him back.

As Li untied the donkey he answered: "I won't stop. Our mutual-aid team is holding a meeting this morning."

Feng halted and with a show of anger said: "If you act in such an unfriendly way, you can't hold me to blame."

Li drawled: "H'mm. I've seen through you. What's the point of putting up a phoney show?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know as well as I do. I don't want to bring it up again. As our Party secretary says, I haven't lost out these last two years. I've worked for nothing but it's opened my eyes to see you for what you are. I've learned a lesson..."

"You shouldn't listen to the nonsense people talk."

"I don't have to listen. Aren't all the facts enough to put me wise? You may be able to fool other people, but you can't hide your secrets from me,"

"Kuo-chu, you're not to talk rubbish like that outside!"

"As to that, we'll see when the time comes."

"Don't get me wrong, Kuo-chu. It's you I'm thinking of. Time will show you that I'm a true friend. If you get into difficulties and find you can't manage, come back to your uncle and see how I treat you then."

"I shan't be troubling you, thanks. I've the mutual-aid team to rely on. You won't catch me crawling back into your trap."

Li strode off as he spoke, leading his donkey. Outside the gate he came face to face with Erh-lin.

"When did you come, Kuo-chu? Why aren't you staying longer?"

"I've just come, to borrow some seeds. My uncle's been settling with me. After all his calculations, it seems that I've worked for nothing the last two years. He's kind enough not to ask me to pay him. And I didn't get a single seed, so I'm going back empty-handed. You'd better watch out. Don't end up like me, working all the time for nothing."

Erh-lin was taken aback. He looked towards the house and saw that Feng had followed Li out. "Why not come to my place for a meal before you go back?" he asked.

"No, thank you," said Li. "I've got some urgent business. I suppose you've had the decisions from the Central Committee relayed here too. As soon as I went back to my village I joined a mutual-aid team, and because I'd been in Sweet Meadow they said I must have more experience and insisted on making me deputy team leader. As they all trust me, I've had to take up the job. The only way to have security, Erh-lin, is by joining forces with other poor fellows."

Feng came up to them now and slapped the donkey's rump. "If you must go, Kuo-chu, then go quickly," he said. After that he turned with a smile to Erh-lin. "Lunch is ready. Come and have a meal with us."

Li mounted his donkey and as it trotted away Erh-lin looked after him with a sinking heart. Li's warning had set up a fresh turmoil in his mind.

Observing Erh-lin's dazed look, Feng turned and beckoned to Tsai-feng who was standing in the doorway. "Come over here. Let's settle that business together."

With a forced smile Tsai-feng came over. She looked at Feng, then at her husband.

Feng told Erh-lin: "I was just talking something over with Tsai-feng when we were interrupted by Kuo-chu's arrival. According to the Central Committee's new instructions, we're to go in for mutual aid and co-operation. So this is all the vogue now. Actually, we've already been working along these lines, only we haven't used this name. From today on we'll be a mutual-aid team. The village head will be our team leader. You and I will be members of the team, and so will Chin Fu's family."

Erh-lin, taken by surprise by this new development, did not know what to answer. He stole a glance at his wife.

Tsai-feng used this opening to force Feng's hand. "Yes, our cousin just promised we won't have worked for nothing," she said. "This autumn he'll give us five piculs of maize so that we can get a big draught animal in place of our donkey."

"That's right," concurred Feng. "This year, if the harvest is good, we'll help you to get a big draught animal. Then in two years time I'll get you a cart. How's that?"

Erh-lin thought to himself: I don't expect you to get a cart for me, but if you get me a big draught animal I shan't have worked for nothing. He asked Feng: "Are the village head and Chin Fu really willing to join this mutual-aid team?"

"Of course," said Feng. "The village head's been here himself to persuade me, and Chin Fu has told his son Wen-ching that he's joining. So how about you? It's entirely optional."

Erh-lin thought: If I join this team with a Party member as its head, I can go on working for Feng but it'll sound better; and if I stick it out till after the harvest, he'll give me five piculs of maize.

So he said: "If you're all willing, let's try it for a year."

Feng clapped his hands. "Fine. You're more honest and considerate than Li Kuo-chu. Cost what it may, I mean to help the two of you to get on."

Tsai-feng was pleased too. She said: "We're very inexperienced. We can only count on you to look after us, cousin."

On their way home, however, they had second thoughts.

"Think he'll keep his word?" Erh-lin asked.

"He's promised," said Tsai-feng. "How can he back out now?"

"But didn't you see how badly he treated Kuo-chu? He may let us down too, even though we're relatives."

"He wouldn't dare do that to me, don't worry."

They walked on in silence for a while. The sight of small groups of people on the road talking eagerly about the new decisions and the mutual-aid teams increased their uneasiness.

Erh-lin asked: "Does he really want to join a mutual-aid team? Or is this some trick?"

Tsai-feng answered: "Well, it seemed genuine enough. He even talked to my cousin about it, saying we must swim with the tide or we'll land up in trouble."

Glancing at the passers-by Erh-lin said with feeling: "Our Party's instructions really carry weight, causing such a change of heart!"

4

Liu Wan had gone to the fair to buy a cart, but all the carts there were beyond his means. He came back to Sweet Meadow two days later, quite worn out by his journey.

Liu Wan's father had been a doctor, so during his lifetime their family was well-off. After his death, Liu Wan and his mother had lived with his elder brother and sister-in-law; but the latter, a landlord's daughter, was a shrew. She made her husband work Liu Wan like a horse; and when her mother-in-law lay ill in bed she would not even take her a bowl of water. So they fell out and decided to split up. When they were dividing up the property, the elder brother and his wife got the ward chief and some relatives to take their side, and claimed that they owed various people money and grain; as a result, after these sums were deducted, all Liu Wan got was a small cottage and two *mu* of poor land. His mother was already ill and her anger over this made her illness worse. She took to her bed

and died after half a year. By rights, the cost of her funeral should have been shared equally by the two brothers; but Liu Wan being young and having no one to help him was no match for his elder brother. He had been forced to mortgage his two *mu* of land to meet these expenses.

After that Liu Wan had to live with his wife's family, and because he was poor they often quarrelled over trifles. Then he left home, first working as a hired hand for two years, then going as a pedlar to Peking, not returning to the village till shortly before Liberation. Land reform had enabled him to get back on his feet, given him a fresh start in life. He received more land as well as a brindled cow. His relationship with his wife also improved, and a son was born to them. After last year's good harvest they had added tiles to their roof. Thus like sorghum in summer their fortunes were in the ascendant. And when Liu Wan saw the mutual-aid teams and certain families increasing their income by carting goods, he longed to do the same. He had saved up to buy a cart in the hope of making more money.

Now haggard and dusty, a thick stubble on his unshaved chin, he had returned home hungry and tired out.

He found the door bolted and locked with a big iron padlock. His wife and baby were nowhere to be seen, but his home with its warm *kang* awaited him. Pulling a wooden peg out of the wall, Liu Wan inserted a finger and fished out a key with which to unlock the door. Once inside he looked around. Without stopping to dust off his clothes or to have a wash, he untied a white cloth bundle from his waist and undid this, disclosing something wrapped in a handkerchief, a paper packet fastened with thread. Undoing the paper he took out a bundle of bank-notes, which he counted carefully before wrapping them up again. Then stepping on to the *kang* and standing on tiptoe, he pushed the little packet into a crack in the beam. This done, he got down, dusted himself off and washed his sweaty face. Only then did he take from the pan a cornmeal flapjack which he began eating as if he were famished.

Just then a noise outside startled him, making him remember his big brindled cow. Hastily putting down the flapjack, he opened

the back door of the middle room and stepped into the backyard.

His cowshed, built the day after he got his cow during the land reform, was a make-shift lean-to with such a low roof that the cow seemed to fill it up completely. Liu Wan's heart was gladdened by the smell of dung and the sound of the cow munching. He looked with pleasure at its glossy hide, its big round eyes, curved horns, thick neck and sturdy hooves.

He was thinking: How good it will be when I've bought a cart and made enough money by carting goods for a year to buy another big donkey. Then I'll have two animals to pull the cart.

Hsiao-chu's mother came back at this point with their little son. When she saw her husband she beamed. Thrusting the baby into his arms she exclaimed: "So you're really back! I thought they were having me on. Was it very windy? Your face looks so sunburned."

Liu Wan smiled at her. "It wasn't too windy, but rather dusty," he said. "My nose and throat feel choked up."

"Where's the cart? Didn't you get it?"

Her husband explained what had happened, then asked where she'd been, locking the door behind her.

"I went to a meeting in your place," she said. "After supper there's to be a discussion too, and you'll have to go to that yourself. It'll help you see things more clearly."

Recently Liu Wan had been so preoccupied by his plan to buy a cart that he had hardly spoken to anyone else. Thus he had no idea of the momentous happenings in the country and in his own village, happenings that inevitably must affect his own life. He asked now what the meeting had been about.

His wife explained to him briefly that the Party Central Committee had issued a draft plan for mutual aid and co-operation; that District Secretary Wang Yu-ching had come to their village to help with the movement; that one meeting after another had been called, and many Party members and propagandists had been going from house to house every night to explain just what was involved.

This was the first Liu Wan had heard about this big new upheaval in Sweet Meadow.

His wife told him: "The Party secretary has come three times to talk to you about this. He asked me again at the meeting today when you were likely to be back."

Liu Wan realized then that this big upheaval was going to affect him too.

His wife continued: "The Party secretary has said more than once that, provided you're willing, you're welcome to join his mutual-aid team."

Liu Wan darted a glance at her. He could see that Kao and the other cadres had begun to win her over.

"Well, what do you think?" she asked. "You'll have to make up your mind."

Liu Wan gave the baby back to his wife, then turned and squatted by the manger to smoke. Usually he could make quick decisions, but now he was undecided. Puffing hard at his pipe he felt in a quandary.

Ever since Liu Hsiang's difficulties had been solved the previous year by Kao and the others, a whole series of dramatic incidents had happened, giving Liu Wan's wife an excellent impression of Kao and his mutual-aid team, which she kept praising to her husband. Since then Liu Hsiang had come to his house several times to urge them to join the team. Though his wife did not say they should join, neither did she oppose it. Now it seemed she was half convinced, and on top of that there was the pressure of this mass movement. If she insisted on joining and he refused, that would lead to another quarrel. They had split up before, then made it up again. Now that they had become more attached to each other, it would not do to have another estrangement.

Liu Wan knew his wife's temperament: she was an only daughter and rather self-willed. Normally she was easy-going, but if once worked up she was hard to cope with. He thought: We're no longer young, and a second child's on the way. I should seize this time while I'm still strong and active to make money for the family.

Because of these considerations, Liu Wan was reluctant to give up a course which he felt could ensure them a comfortable future. Why should he trail after others when their experiment might be a

flop? He puffed hard at his pipe, racking his brains for some way to avoid joining a team without offending his wife.

His wife stood beside him, sharing some of his feelings. She, too, did not want to spoil their present good relationship established only after such difficulty; at the same time, she admired and hankered after the cheerful comradely atmosphere of the mutual-aid teams. Although now very fond of her husband, she disapproved of his going it alone and keeping his distance from the other poor peasants.

Standing in the sunset light, she eyed her husband's black hair with a frown and secretly sighed to herself.

Finally Liu Wan said: "You must let me think this over."

"Keep an open mind, though. Don't be pig-headed about it."

"Well, it's no joking matter."

"We won't lose out if we join. The advantages of the mutual-aid teams are clear for all to see."

"Just tell me this. We've got labour power, we've got a cow; we lack for nothing. Why should we join with others in mutual aid?"

"Kao says, and rightly too: We should take the long view and look to the future."

"Even brothers or husband and wife don't always hit it off. They may fight or quarrel with each other. So how can different families work together? I'd like to live a few years in peace and comfort; I don't want to learn new tricks."

"Don't you appreciate Kao's concern for other poor peasants? Just take your case. You helped Chin Fu to buy Brother Liu Hsiang's land, causing all that trouble; but he never held it against you. He still wants you to join his team. . . ."

Liu Wan knocked the ash from his pipe and stood up slowly. "No need to say any more. Let me figure it out before making my decision. Kao's a good sort, and that's the truth. I admire him too. Still, I can't work the way he does, running around and putting himself out for others. What's the point of that?"

His wife had to give up. When her husband walked past her she said: "Look at your shoes. Your toes are sticking out. Do you want people outside to laugh at you? I've made you a new pair. As you're not working in the fields just now, why not wear them?"

Then they won't pinch when you go back to work and have to walk a long way."

Liu Wan, his heart warming, took the child from his wife's arms and kissed its tender cheeks. Then having put on the new shoes with cloth soles and black canvas uppers made by his wife, he went out, the sense of warmth surging right through him. Why not join the team and give it a try? he thought. After all, its aim was to improve people's livelihood. If he was too obstinate, it would make his wife and other people unhappy and that would only make him unhappy too. His mind made up, he spat on the ground and decided to go straight to see Kao to find out what new members his team was recruiting. If they were congenial, he could settle the matter.

So, wearing the new shoes his wife had made, he left. This was the third time he had worn such good new shoes made for him by his wife. The first time was when they married. The second, at the time of the land reform when they made it up after their estrangement. This third, now that he was about to embark on a new course in life. It seemed quite a coincidence!

If Liu Wan had walked straight ahead after leaving home, all would have been well. Unfortunately, when he saw Kao's cottage not far ahead, he hesitated again, afraid that if he acted on the spur of the moment he might do something he would later regret. Better take a little more time to think it over and work out the pros and cons. So he deliberately made a detour through a small lane, meaning to turn back presently to the Party secretary's cottage. But before he made the second turn, someone stopped him.

It was the village head Chang. After several days and nights of careful scheming, he had worked out a complete plan of action which he was now carrying out as fast as he could. With District Secretary Wang's support above and Feng Shao-huai's encouragement below, he was growing increasingly confident that he could stage a comeback in Sweet Meadow, regaining his lost prestige.

Chang had just been to call on Feng Shao-huai and was now on his way to see Chou Shih-chin, the head of another newly formed mutual-aid team. He wanted to encourage Chou to enlarge his team too by enlisting more members, so that later they could act in co-

ordination. As soon as he saw Liu Wan, Chang remembered Feng's surmise that Kao's team meant to recruit Liu Wan's family. Chin Fu had urged Chang several times to get hold of Liu Wan himself, but he had failed to do so because of Liu Wan's absence from the village. Now his chance had come, he would not let it slip.

"Ah, Liu Wan!" he greeted him warmly. "I haven't seen you about for quite a time."

With a problem preying on his mind, Liu Wan was in no mood for a chat. He rejoined politely: "Yes, I've been out on business. I've just come back."

Chang knew what the business was, but deliberately asked: "What important business were you on?"

Liu Wan smiled. "I'm no cadre or activist," he said. "What important business could I have? I just went to see some friends."

With an earnest look Chang said: "I want to discuss something with you. Which place would be more convenient, my house or yours?"

Puzzled by Chang's serious attitude, Liu Wan asked: "Why can't we just talk here?"

Chang agreed readily with a nod. "Sure. If you're busy, we'll just have a short talk."

They went over together to a well and stone trough where someone had been washing vegetables by the roadside. A luscious leaf of leek which had fallen into the mud glowed a vivid green.

Setting one foot on the trough and stooping to rest his arms on his knees, Chang launched into a long harangue. Starting with the Korean war, he then held forth on the reconstruction of the national economy before coming to the point. And all the new terms he used, which had never been heard on his lips before, sounded as fresh to Liu Wan as that leaf of leek.

"... Since the land reform," Chang was saying, "the peasants have shown two kinds of initiative in production: initiative in individual farming, and initiative in mutual aid and co-operation. Both initiatives are fine; they're important factors to help bring about the industrialization of our country. These two kinds of initiative are inevitable, and the state must protect and develop them both. They

should be allowed to compete, to see which gives the best and quickest results."

"If that's the way it is, we're all right," said Liu Wan. "We can choose whichever we like, whichever suits us." He shot a glance at Kao's cottage in the distance.

"As this is the first stage of the mutual-aid and co-operative movement, we have to stress its importance," Chang continued. "In our Party committee meetings, your name came up several times."

Liu Wan eyed him with annoyance, thinking: Why should you gossip about me behind my back?

Chang went on: "The others all said now that we're organizing mutual-aid teams we must rope Liu Wan in. I asked them why. They said because you have a big brindled cow, which is more than most people have. If only families without draught animals team up, how can they help each other? How can they co-operate?"

Very disgruntled, Liu Wan thought: So they all want to take advantage of me. They all have ulterior motives and are out to ruin me. Suppressing his feelings, however, he answered calmly: "I have a cow, that's quite right. But however big it is, it can't compare with that sturdy donkey of yours. Why don't you put your big donkey in a team, so that the others can all use it in turn?"

Chang grinned. "See, I didn't keep this back from you. When I heard this proposal, I told them it was no use trying to get your cow because this cow is your treasure, your very life, and you'd never part with it. I was right, wasn't I? Well, Liu Wan, don't try to pin the blame on me. As a Party member, of course I have to take the lead. So I'm giving them my big donkey. If they drive it to death, I'll keep the hide; if it lives, I'll try to nurse it back to health. As we're going in for mutual aid, we mustn't begrudge anything. We must be willing to make sacrifices."

These words sent a cold shiver down Liu Wan's spine. He thought: I'm not up to you, and I can't afford it. Actually, you're just talking big. If you had to act like Kao, you couldn't stick it even for one day.

Chang went on and on with his pep talk. "Going in for mutual aid and co-operation means doing without ourselves and shouldering

heavier burdens. Not begrudging our own property isn't enough. We must also change our nature. We must learn to keep our tempers, to let others take advantage of us, to unite with all sorts of people. We shall have to be like dough, ready to be kneaded into any shape." At this point he paused deliberately, then asked: "Well, Liu Wan, do you still have ideological problems?"

Liu Wan, now thoroughly galled, smiled bitterly. "Judging by what you say, this isn't mutual aid and co-operation — it's the hard labour a convict just out of gaol has to do when he's still under surveillance. What ideological problems can a gaolbird have?"

"This is no joke," said Chang gravely. "Suppose I guess at your problems. You're afraid because a mutual-aid team has so many members, all with different opinions, that before you've managed to help them you'll find yourself involved in some squabble. You're afraid of disunity, because even brothers sometimes fall out, and when you have seven or eight families together there are bound to be plenty of quarrels and endless trouble, until finally the team splits up again. Am I right? Are those your problems?"

Liu Wan did not know what to say. These problems had occurred to him, but after Chang's long harangue he had new doubts and felt even more down-hearted. He shook his head silently, his mind in a whirl.

Seeing Liu Wan's discomfiture Chang paused, then suddenly patted him on the back with a laugh. "Don't get so het up, Liu Wan," he said. "Maybe I've spoken too frankly, but it's the truth. Still, as long as I'm in this village I won't let you in for all that."

Liu Wan begged him: "Honestly, village head, as a member of the Party you have authority and your words count. You know me: I can work hard but I'm not clever. Do show me some way out."

Chang laughed. "Don't worry, Liu Wan. I have it all mapped out for you."

"How?" asked Liu anxiously.

Chang lowered his voice to reply: "If you really don't want to put all you've got into a mutual-aid team, I'll provide you with a shelter, a hideout."

Liu Wan was puzzled. "What sort of shelter? What hideout?"

"I myself have set up a model mutual-aid team. All its members are well-to-do men like Feng Shao-huai, Chin Fu and Kao Erh-lin who have plenty of labour power. If I get these households together, nobody will take advantage of the others and nobody will lose out. In our team we'll allow plenty of freedom of action. When we want to work together, we will; when we want to go it alone, we will. Nobody will interfere with anyone else. . . ."

Liu Wan's eyes gleamed. Without waiting for Chang to finish, he caught him by the sleeve. "My good village head, that's the kind of mutual-aid team just after my own heart. Will you let me join it?"

Chang studied Liu Wan's face, then nodded. "All right. If you trust me, we'll team up. But this is entirely voluntary, you know. Turn the matter over in your mind, then consult some close friends as well as your family. You can let me know your decision in two or three days."

Afraid to miss this good chance, Liu Wan blurted out: "Anyway I've applied. You must have me in your team."

Chang made a sweeping gesture with his hand. "Very well. Since you insist, it wouldn't be right for me to refuse. We'll count it as settled. Now go ahead with your business while I attend to mine. See you later." With that he went off.

Liu Wan, although over his alarm, was still flustered. But he congratulated himself on this outcome. It's really the perfect solution, joining Chang's team, he told himself. Nominally he would be joining a mutual-aid team, which should satisfy his wife and the others. At the same time, by joining a group stronger than himself he would surely not lose out but would be free to enrich his family in his own way. Still, he was afraid something might happen to dash his hopes if, for instance, they changed their minds or if Feng Shao-huai thought him no use and wanted to keep him out. He had better clinch the deal with Chang at once.

So instead of going towards the Party secretary's cottage, he took the other turn and chased after Chang.

5

While relaying the spirit of the Central Committee's decisions, the Party branch of Sweet Meadow made a good job of educating and organizing the villagers. This kept them hard at work for nearly a month. By the time the peach-trees were in bloom and willows were turning green, all the village's original mutual-aid teams had been enlarged, while some dozen new ones had been formed. More than ninety per cent of the peasant families had joined mutual-aid teams. It was commonly predicted that in 1952 they would get in an even bigger harvest, and that things would go better for them from day to day.

Everything was ready waiting for the spring rain. At first they waited patiently, but little by little their anxiety grew. The Bright-and-Clear Festival passed, then the Grain-Rain Festival. If this drought continued, it would spoil everything.

Kao made a tour of the village from east to west, feeling as if a fire were burning his heart. He looked up at the clear cloudless sky, then down at the parched scorched fields. At the end of the village he met Chu Tieh-han carrying two buckets of water. Kao ran over and stooped to take a few gulps from one bucket. Wiping his mouth he asked Chu: "What's this water for?"

"My mum's planted two pumpkins on the slope and she asked me to water them." Chu looked closely at Kao. "Lots of people have urged me to tell you not to get too het up in this scorching weather."

"Why not? If I'm het up I shall think up some plan."

"If Old Man Heaven won't send rain, what can *you* do?"

"Why, seeing you has given me an idea — why don't we dig wells in the fields?"

"Ha, that's not a bad idea. Let's go ahead."

"After lunch we'll call a Party committee meeting, then one of old peasants. We must plan the work carefully before we start."

That same afternoon, however, the district committee called a meeting of Party secretaries and village heads to pass on to them the county committee's instructions to "dig wells to combat drought and rush through the sowing".

Kao was overjoyed. He thought: the higher organization's so close to us, it knows what's in our hearts!

At the meeting, District Secretary Wang mentioned Sweet Meadow by name. Standing in the middle of the room, his notebook in one hand, the other on the edge of the desk, he glanced to where Kao and Chang were sitting and said smugly:

"Since my arrival your village has done best in mutual aid and co-operation. The villagers' political consciousness is much higher and your mutual-aid teams have been consolidated. This is fine. But you must strive harder still to win greater glory! In this new movement to dig wells and combat drought, you ought to take the lead and set an example for all the other villages in our district. Don't disappoint the hopes and expectations of the district leadership. Now let all the rest of us hear what you mean to do."

All eyes turned then towards the corner where these two leading cadres from Sweet Meadow were sitting. A couple of young men started to clap and at once the others followed suit.

Kao flushed.

Chang clenched and unclenched his fists, feeling rather tense.

In Kao's view, the idea of digging wells in the fields had only just occurred to a few cadres and had not yet been carefully thought out. Of course, this directive from above increased their confidence and made them determine to go all out and sink as many wells as possible. Still, while the plan was still in the air, he did not like to make promises at random on such an important occasion.

Chang's view was different. This seemed to him a good chance to please the leadership and impress the leading cadres of the whole district. He longed to spring to his feet and make a passionate pledge! Unfortunately this meeting had been called by the district Party committee, and as Kao was Sweet Meadow's Party secretary, the village's leading Party member, Chang could hardly speak before him.

Wang beamed at Kao. "Go ahead. Speak up. We're all comrades here. No need for false modesty."

Kao thought: It's right to express one's determination so as to encourage each other. So he stood up and looked around, then re-

ferred to the small notebook in his hand. He said quietly: "Party Secretary Wang has just passed on to us the directive from the county committee. It's bucked me up no end. This is exactly our own wish. I'm all for it. When we go back from this meeting we must carry it out in good earnest, changing our leadership's spirit into mass action. We shall go all out and in 1952 win another good harvest. That's all I have to say."

Wang held up his hand to stop the applause which followed. With a look of disapproval he said to Kao who had resumed his seat: "You'd better be more specific about your plan and the measures you mean to take, to supply the others with some fresh ideas."

Kao thought for a bit, then stood up again. In the same quiet voice he said: "After we go back, we'll first call a Party branch meeting and study the instructions from the county and the district Party committees until we've really grasped them. This way, all our Party members can unify their thinking and their actions. Then, with the Party taking the lead, we'll carefully arouse the masses. We must prepare every single team, every single household. We won't do anything by halves. . . ."

Wang impatiently cut him short. "Don't just give us that empty talk. What do you guarantee?"

"We guarantee to carry out the instructions from above. Our mutual-aid teams will take the lead, and we'll make the best use of our labour force."

Wang frowned. "Be more explicit. Just tell the masses and the leadership how many wells you guarantee to sink, how many ~~mu~~ of land you guarantee to sow and water in ten days of shock labour."

Kao countered: "We can't decide on the exact figures till we've gone back and discussed it with our Party members and then with the masses."

"If we can't even fix figures like these, what's the use of having cadres?" Wang fumed. "If we've no more guts than this, why join the revolution? Of course we have to discuss things with the masses, but that doesn't mean we should just tail behind them."

This meeting had been very lively to begin with. All those present were cadres with heavy responsibilities on their shoulders, who

had been so worried about the drought that they hadn't been able to eat and sleep properly. The timely directive issued by the county and the district Party committees had lightened their hearts, boosted their morale, and given them fresh confidence and hope. But now Wang's attitude introduced a new tension into the atmosphere. No one moved or spoke. All watched to see what would happen.

From Wang's rebuke Kao realized what the district secretary was up to and what he wanted. He would not be satisfied unless Kao produced some figures. Kao asked himself: Should I give him what he wants? He immediately rejected the idea. He definitely would not do such a thing. A Communist, no matter what the situation, should never say a word to the Party and the masses which did not come from his heart. . . . Having made up his mind to stick to principle, he stood up for the third time.

"Secretary Wang, I don't agree with what you've just said," he declared. "When our leadership calls on us to fight the drought and dig wells, seems to me this is a mass movement. We must indeed sink wells and get the fields sown in good time. To do this, first we have to arouse Party members then together rally the masses and, after careful study, produce a plan. These are concrete measures, not just empty talk. If I made up some figures here out of my own head, *that* would be empty talk, a downright lie! I can't do that."

Many cadres at the meeting took heart, looking at Kao with approval.

Wang was pale with fury but could find nothing to say.

Li Pei-lin, the district cadre in charge of agriculture who was sitting next to Wang, thoroughly agreed with Kao's attitude. To prevent Wang from rebuffing Kao again, he tried to shift the target by interposing: "Well, the comrades from Sweet Meadow can think it over. Let those from other villages speak first."

The district secretary's words had made it clear to Chang what he wanted to hear. Having worked with Wang before, he understood him well enough to know how to please him. This incident increased his admiration for Wang's use of his authority — his high-handed behaviour as a leading cadre. It delighted him, too, to see Kao subjected to pressure. He hoped this situation could be prolonged to enable Wang to blast Kao more scathingly, making Kao lose face



before the other cadres. Inwardly gloating, he looked around trying to impart his own feelings to the meeting. But then his eye fell on District Head Tien Yu in a group near the door and his heart sank — this was a bad sign. He thought: If I don't make a move now, Kao will get by and I shan't be able to please the district secretary. So he stood up forthwith and cried at the top of his voice: "Let me say a few words!"

Wang had never thought Kao would presume to challenge him openly. He was in a quandary when Chang's cry rescued him from his dilemma. With a sigh of relief he said cheerfully: "Good, go on."

Chang's face was calm but he was thinking furiously. Purposely beating about the bush, he started: "Our Party and our government really have our welfare at heart. We come across a little difficulty in our attempts to improve our livelihood, and at once the Party and the government stretch out their hands to help us. As soon as there's a drought they show us the method to combat it. I think digging wells is the very best way to fight drought. I'm all for it, and I'll carry it out even if it costs me my life, otherwise, what sort of Communist am I? Of course I must leave it to the Party secretary to describe our village's over-all situation. As for myself, I can only tell the leadership what my own mutual-aid team guarantees to do. . . ."

This pleased Wang, who promptly said encouragingly: "Well, you're a member of the Party committee, and the Party branch has collective leadership; so you can speak about the whole situation too."

Chang smiled in a self-deprecatory way. "Oh no. I'll leave that to our Party secretary. But as for our mutual-aid team, in this drive to dig wells we vow to take the lead and set an example. We've six families in our team. . . ." He wanted to say that each family would guarantee to dig one well, but the expectant look on Wang's face made him fear this might be too little and then Wang would not be pleased — might even reprimand him as he had Kao. So he swallowed back the words on the tip of his tongue and announced: "Our six families resolutely support this directive on fighting the drought. We guarantee to sink one well on each plot of land!"

Most of the cadres looked sceptical at this.

Wang, however, beamed with delight. "Right!" he said. "This

is the way to show resolute support and carry out instructions from above." Addressing those who looked sceptical, he continued: "Did you hear that, all of you? Sweet Meadow is taking the lead. One well on each plot of land!" Then he turned to Li. "Put that on record. Our district must encourage mutual-aid teams of this kind. We must introduce their initiative and experience to the whole district."

Taking up his pen Li asked Chang: "One well for each plot. How many plots has your team?"

Chang looked up at the ceiling and calculated. "Eighteen altogether," he said.

Kao corrected him: "No, your team has twenty-one."

Chang turned to him, shaking his head. "How can there be so many?"

Kao counted on his fingers. "Your family has four, Chin Fu's family five, and Feng Shao-huai's family five. That makes fourteen plots between your three families. And then what about Erh-lin, Chin-shou and Liu Wan? Have they only four fields between them?"

Unable to refute this, Chang backed down. "That's right. I'd forgotten Erh-lin. He only decided to join us a few days ago."

Wang raised his hand. "Never mind. So it's twenty-one. Pei-lin, put that on record."

As Li entered this figure in his notebook, he deliberately read out aloud: "Chang Chin-fa's mutual-aid team has twenty-one plots of land. In response to the call from above, they guarantee to sink one well on each, making twenty-one wells altogether."

Those who were sceptical exchanged glances again.

Kao once more stood up. "I want to say something," he said. "If Chin-fa wants to express his team's determination, that's his business. But our district leadership can't put this figure on record. Digging wells isn't too difficult on our plain. Even so, for one team to dig twenty-one in just ten days is simply impossible."

Assuming that Kao was jealous and therefore trying to discredit him, Chang called loudly to Wang: "There's no problem. We'll be as good as our word. Our team guarantees to dig one well in each field."

Wang breathed more easily then and settled back in his chair. "Comrades!" he said with feeling. "We should all learn from Sweet Meadow. That's the way to work for the revolution. This directive from above is a test for each of us. We must all respond actively, all be a hundred per cent enthusiastic. No matter who a comrade is, how important his job, how great his past achievements, each and every one of us must be obedient cadres and carry out instructions from above. We mustn't make any conditions, mustn't emphasize objective difficulties. Anyone who does will be making a big mistake, and he'll suffer for it! Presently the district head will issue you some forms to fill in. You must put down definite figures. Ten days from now the district head and I will come to each village to inspect every team."

Tien Yu now re-entered the room with a stack of forms and squeezed his way through the crowd to a seat beside Wang. He looked round at the cadres. "I'm late," he said, "because I had to tell a work team from the county the situation. Regarding the spirit of this county committee's directive, Secretary Wang has already explained it in detail, so I won't repeat what he's said. I just want to make a few points. Through this fight against drought we must lay the basis for this year's bumper harvest, and create the conditions to develop the mutual-aid and co-operative movement. At the same time we'll use real facts to educate the masses, convincing them that men can conquer nature. I feel these three things should be the main aim of this drive to dig wells to lick the drought. You must first get clear on this yourselves, but if you're the only ones clear on it that's not enough. Only when all our Party members and masses share our conviction can we really go into action effectively. So when you go back to your villages, first call Party branch meetings to unify the thinking of Party members; then hold mass meetings, especially meetings of the mutual-aid teams."

Tien Yu's short speech clarified the cadres' ideas. And knowing the specific measures to take also bolstered their morale.

Only Chang was unhappy. Tien Yu's remarks struck him as akin to those of Kao which Wang had objected to. Apparently the situation in the district committee was just like that in their own village

committee: during the implementation of the Central Committee's resolution on mutual aid and co-operation, on the surface there seemed to be unity, but under the surface different groups still clashed. Perhaps he could turn this to his own advantage.

After Tien Yu had spoken the forms were distributed. He explained how they should be filled in, and asked everyone to complete them by the next evening.

"Isn't that too late?" asked Wang.

"Just now I rang up the county office," Tien Yu told him. "They said our district could send in its report in two evening's time. This will give each village an extra day to discuss and work out its plan."

"If we have to send in our report to the county the day after tomorrow, surely it will be too late if their forms aren't ready till tomorrow evening?" Wang objected. "The whole district is so big, how can all those forms from the scattered villages be collected in time?"

"Tomorrow evening Comrade Pei-lin and I will cycle to all the villages to collect them. We can work through the night to make out our report. It won't be late."

Wang had to agree. He announced to the cadres: "The district head has given you an extra day. You must go all out and see who can do best. Otherwise, I'll criticize you."

Then Li Pei-lin declared the meeting at an end. Talking loudly, the cadres started squeezing their way out.

Tien Yu called out: "Will the Party secretary and village head of Sweet Meadow stay behind? We want to discuss something with you in the district secretary's office."

Kao was pleased to hear this. When they were by themselves he could speak unreservedly to the leadership and discuss certain measures more thoroughly. Then on his return he would have a clearer understanding and be able to throw himself into the work with greater gusto. He would have more confidence, too, in his ability to carry out the instructions.

Chang, however, was worried by Tien Yu's decision to keep them behind. He thought: Tien Yu can't have disapproved of Kao's behaviour in the meeting, or approved of mine. What does he want to discuss with us?

Wang was disgruntled too. Of course his annoyance was directed against Kao. It arose not from pique or personal resentment, but he had felt from Kao's handling of certain problems that he was a disobedient and insubordinate cadre. Wang himself always obeyed his immediate superiors implicitly. He therefore expected the cadres under him to accept his instructions without a murmur. Submissive cadres of this kind gratified his ego, making him feel he had real authority. The previous year when Kao took the lead in opposing the slogan "Build up the family fortunes" which Wang was advocating, he had naturally been annoyed; but after the Central Committee's instructions were issued, he had got over it. Today's business, although trifling, had revived his old dissatisfaction with Kao which apparently had deep roots.

So when Tien Yu called the two Sweet Meadow cadres to Wang's office and explained in detail how best to implement the instructions on their return to the village, the district Party secretary held aloof. And finally the three men's low-voiced discussion and occasional arguments lulled him to sleep.

Tien Yu kept Kao and Chang to a meal, after which he took from his desk some articles dealing with the experience of other districts in combating drought for them to take back and study with the cadres and the masses. Finally he said:

"When you go back, remind the comrades of your Party branch that the county and district committees set great store by your work in Sweet Meadow. What your village does has a big influence on our other villages; so mind you work hard and in a down-to-earth way. Regarding the plan for digging wells, you can revise it after discussion with the masses. Don't fill in the form until you're sure of your figures. We'll go by your revised form."

Kao thoroughly approved this proposal, which gave Chang a chance to correct his earlier mistake.

Chang, however, felt that Tien Yu showed bias and was deliberately helping Kao to put him on the spot. He burned with resentment.

Kao wanted to go back with Chang, so as to have a good talk with him on the way and give him a chance to change his stand; but Chang, knowing this, decided to avoid the issue. When they

reached the south gate he announced that he had important business in the street there, leaving Kao to go on alone.

6

After the two main cadres' return to Sweet Meadow, a new and fiercer match of strength unfolded in the village.

Kao Ta-chuan went first to the village administration office to announce a meeting of the Party committee. But as Chang Chin-fa failed to turn up, he asked Chu Tieh-han to notify all the Party members, Youth League members and leaders of mutual-aid teams to come to a meeting so that he could promptly relay the county committee's directive on well-sinking and the district committee's proposals. He wanted them to pass these on to the villagers working in the fields to prepare them for the rally that evening.

After the meeting, seeing Kao gulping water from a teapot, Chu Tieh-han said to him: "Take it easy, comrade! While listening to your report just now, I was thinking. Sinking wells to fight drought is nothing compared with what we had to do last year — overcoming our difficulties through production. We were short of both money and grain then, and we needed money to buy a cart so we could tide the villagers over through self-reliance. But all we need for sinking wells is manpower. We're not short of men in our mutual-aid teams and all of them have worked hard their whole life. So what is there to worry about?"

Kao nodded in agreement. "I feel much better after hearing you make the comparison. Only the farming season waits for no man. It's a hard task we have, and time is short. One slip up, one weak link in the chain, may bring our whole plan to nothing."

But Chu was confident. "Don't worry," he said. "We'll bring our old tradition into full play — work at night too and do two days' work in one. We can make good time that way."

Feeling more optimistic, Kao broke into a smile. "What a good idea!" he cried. "We were farming individually last year and had to work round the clock. With so many men in our team now, we can work three shifts a day — do three days' work in one. I'm pretty



sure we can accomplish the task.” His spirits soaring, Kao rolled up his trouser-legs, snatched up a straw hat and took Chu by the arm. “Come on, let’s have a look at the fields.”

Kao’s cheerfulness infected Chu. “Which plots are we going to?” he asked as he followed Kao. “Your team’s or ours?”

“The whole lot. We’ll put in some leg work before the rally tonight looking over all the land in our village; we must sound out as many people as we can so as to have a rough idea of things, to make the rally a success.”

“Good gracious!” Chu exclaimed. “That means walking dozens of *li*.”

“If your shoes aren’t comfortable, go home and put on a new pair so that you won’t drop behind me.”

Chu stamped his feet. “No problem. I can keep up with you even with bare feet. Let’s head for Hsikuantao first. Old Chou Chung is spreading manure for Sung Lao-wu. Why not take him along? He’ll be a good adviser.”

Kao laughed and patted Chu on his broad shoulders. “You live and learn, eh?”

But Chu was serious. “Chou Chung knows more about farm work than we do. He’s a real agronomist.”

They left the office and headed west. The setting sun beat down on them. Sparse grass and wizened flowers were struggling to keep alive in earth as dry as fried flour. And the hot breeze licked their faces like tongues of fire.

As they walked on, Kao told Chu how Chang Chin-fa had behaved at the cadres’ meeting called by the district committee.

“He’s a show-off, that fellow. Always itching to impress the leadership,” commented Chu.

Gazing into the distance, Kao said reflectively, “I think there’s more to it than that. Seems to me his behaviour today ties in with what I told you last time.”

Chu couldn’t recall what that was.

“Remember how quickly his attitude changed when the decisions of the Central Committee were relayed? He not only organized a

mutual-aid team but dragged Feng Shao-huai and Chin Fu into his team," Kao reminded him.

"That's right. And didn't you say that mutual-aid team of his was pretty certainly bogus?"

Kao nodded. "I've a feeling that he was putting on a show today too."

Chu blinked in perplexity. "It's really strange. A bogus team won't do him any good. He'll still have to work just as hard. Why doesn't he organize a genuine team?"

"That's what we'll have to find out later," Kao said emphatically. "Who's pulling the strings in their team? Feng or Chang? What's at the bottom of this business? We'll have to watch closely and be on the alert."

Chu nodded in agreement. After walking on in silence for a while he asked again, "Wen-ching told me that your brother Erh-lin is joining their bogus team. Haven't you given him a talking-to?"

Kao knitted his brows. "Uncle Chou Chung and I both had a talk with him. He hasn't seen through Feng yet. It's no use keeping on at him till he's taken a few knocks."

"What are you going to do about people like Erh-lin and Liu Wan who are on the wrong track?"

"Keep tabs on what they're thinking and educate them with facts. By licking the drought and getting the sowing done in time we'll show them man's ability to conquer nature and the superiority of mutual aid and co-operation; so that people like Erh-lin and Liu Wan can judge for themselves which is better — collective farming or individual farming, genuine mutual-aid teams or bogus teams. In the end, one by one, we'll get them back on the right track."

Chu couldn't help grinning broadly. "I see, you've got it all worked out. No wonder you're like a fisherman sitting placidly in his boat while a storm blows up."

They had now reached Little Stone Bridge, where they saw Teng Chiu-kuan and Lu Chun-chiang having a lively discussion at the edge of a field.

Kao wondered why they were there. That afternoon all the members of his team had agreed to help Third Granny Teng to plaster her house.

Teng Chiu-kuan, his clothes splattered with mud but his face all smiles, came up and cried, "The days are slipping by, Brother Ta-chuan, and not a drop of rain have we had. We're all worried stiff. So everyone likes this idea of sinking wells. Whoever thought it up was certainly smart. With wells we can water our fields in time of drought and that's a sure guarantee for a good harvest. That will send Old Man Heaven packing!"

"Ha, this fellow who used to be deaf has seen reason at last," Chu teased.

"Not only that. The socialist road has given me more guts. On top of which, we have a first-rate Party committee, and that sets my mind at rest," added Teng.

His naive frankness made everyone laugh.

"After the meeting I called on quite a few folk," said Lu. "All mutual-aid team members are for sinking wells. So I came out to look at my fields, to reckon by the lie of the land where the well should be. But Brother Chiu-kuan had got here before me. Since neither of us has much land, we've decided it would be better to sink one well between us — a deeper, better one that would irrigate both plots and save us both labour and money. But a plot belonging to someone else lies in between."

"Make a ditch through it," Chu suggested.

"Its owner wouldn't allow that," said Lu.

"Whose land is it?" Chu inquired.

"Greedy Guts Chang Chin-shou's," Teng answered.

"Make it up to him with some grain," Chu proposed.

"No. Forget it. We'll have to sink two wells," said Lu.

"You're right. Why have anything to do with that dirty dog?" Teng added.

No one in Sweet Meadow had a good word for Chang Chin-shou. Before Liberation he had owned not a brick of a house nor an inch of land, yet he ate and dressed well — all by swindling other people. During land reform he had begged to be admitted into the peasants'

association, vowing to turn over a new leaf, until finally he was allowed to join. Since then he had described himself as the poorest of poor peasants and hired hands. Anyone, rich or poor, who crossed him was sure to regret it. All the villagers disliked him but dared not offend him.

Looking at the rolling fields Chu sighed, "If only each team's land were all in one piece instead of interspersed with the fields of other teams. What a nuisance it is!"

Lu let out a sigh. So did Teng.

Noticing their gloom, Kao who had been listening attentively said, "Lots of problems like this will crop up once we start sinking wells. I think they can be solved by consultation between the teams. Go back to your work now. Chun-chiang can bring this up at the rally this evening."

After the other two had left for the village Kao and Chu walked on.

Bare fields, some high some low, stretched out before them like a huge patchwork quilt. From the distance the boundary stones of the plots, some large some small, looked like crouching hares.

Mulling over what Teng and Lu had said to Chu, Kao felt that their main difficulty lay not in having to sink so many wells in so short a time but in more unsurmountable problems. It would take too long to sink a well in each plot of land in the village; it would be a waste of labour too. But if two families shared a well, it might lead to many disputes. As it was, they had to work day and night. What time did that leave for tackling these other problems?

Chou Chung now returned from carrying a load of manure to the field. At sight of Kao, he put down his pole and baskets and walked over, wiping the sweat on his forehead. "I knew you'd be coming," he said. "I've been on the look-out."

"We must concentrate on our main job," said Chu Tieh-han. "Don't drop a water-melon to pick up a sesame seed. It won't do just to work hard."

"I know," said Chou Chung. "As soon as I came to the fields, before I even opened my mouth, people fired questions at me. They

know the Party secretary's back from the district and are all keen to hear the directives from above. Some thought the meeting must have been about sowing. They were tickled pink when I told them we're going to sink wells."

"How many has your team decided to sink?" Chu inquired.

"It would be fine if several small plots can use one well. You see, most people doubt if there's time to dig so many if we're to have one for each plot."

"And you're worried because your plots are so scattered?" asked Chu Tieh-han.

"Well, that's another problem. Just you think, the wells have to be sunk one by one. Those who get wells first can do their sowing first. Their seedlings will grow well and they'll have a good harvest. Those who get wells later will lose out. So there's a contradiction."

Kao remembered that Teng and Lu had also wanted to sink one well for two fields and had wished that the land of each team was in one piece. This reminded him that at an enlarged meeting of the county committee Yang Kuang-shen, Party secretary of Jujube Village where the first agricultural co-operative in their district had been set up, had told him: "Mutual-aid teams help develop our productive power. Like a child outgrowing his tiny red jacket and green trousers which are now so tight that they're hindering his growth, our collective needs new clothes. . . ." As light dawned on him he broke into a smile.

"The Central Committee document says that mutual-aid organizations should develop steadily from elementary to more advanced. . . ." he told them.

"That's it!" Chu cut in. "If we set up a co-operative and pool our land, we'll have a collective with unified planning and unified allocation of labour power. After the autumn harvest we'll be paid according to our work-points. Then no one needs make his own little plans for his own plot."

"Let's explain the document to our team members," Kao proposed, "to prepare them ideologically. After the autumn harvest we'll guide them along this path and set up a co-op."

"We can't rush this but neither should we dawdle over it," put in Chou Chung. "As we've already taken the first step, we should take the second too. But this isn't something that can be done overnight. At the moment we have something more urgent to consider. We're already late with our sowing. If we have to wait for wells to be dug on every plot of land, when will the village finish sowing?"

"You're right. Missing the sowing season is no way to fight the drought," agreed Chu.

"Besides," continued Chou Chung, "in these parts we have a dry spring and a wet autumn. If we sow late the seedlings will be swamped when the rainy season sets in."

"It's really tough!" Chu stuck out his tongue in dismay. "It takes time to sink so many wells for so many plots. If the rainy season sets in before the seedlings have grown to any size they'll either be swamped or choked by weeds." Turning to Kao he went on, "Didn't I tell you that this old comrade is a real agronomist who thinks of everything?"

Kao nodded. Chou Chung's warning increased the weight on his mind. While concentrating on coping with the drought he had forgotten all about the subsequent water-logging usually to be expected. If they didn't sink wells, of course they would have no seedlings. And water-logging was sure to come, but they couldn't skip sowing for fear that a few months later their crops would be drowned. Once again, the young Party secretary felt the weight on his shoulders. Thinking hard, Kao took out his tobacco pouch, filled his pipe and struck a match. Breaking it, he struck another and broke it again. He struck a third and this time lit his pipe.

Kao's knitted brows made Chu Tieh-han's heart sink too. Presently he blurted out, "Let's report these problems at once to the district committee."

"Yes," Kao nodded. "This is very important. We must report it."

"And put it to the masses too at the rally tonight," Chu urged.

"Sure!" Kao nodded again.

"We've done all we can, not shirked our responsibility. It's no use worrying."

Kao shook his head vigorously. "It's not responsible to shift the difficulty to our leadership and to the masses. We must submit a plan for the masses to discuss and then get advice from the leadership. We'll solve the problem that way. Otherwise we're shirking our responsibility. Don't you agree, Uncle Chou Chung?"

"Yes. And I can't leave the whole business to you two members of the Party committee either. I've got a suggestion. But I'm not sure whether it would work."

Chu beamed. "So you've hit on something already. Out with it quick. Don't make us go on racking our brains."

Kao had guessed from the expression on the grizzled old man's wrinkled face that he had some proposal to make. Eyeing him intently he waited for him to speak up.

"I reckon we can do two things at the same time." Chou squatted down and with his fingers scooped a hole in the ground from which he took a handful of moist brown earth. Showing it to the two younger men, he said, "Look, the land is low here and is often flooded in autumn. The topsoil's usually dry as dust during the daytime; but at night underground moisture seeps up, so that by the morning the earth's damp enough to be kneaded. We can start sowing right away in plots like this. Once the seedlings sprout the wells will be nearly ready to irrigate them. This way we'll gain a little time so that when the rains come they'll be tall enough to stand the water-logging. What do you think?"

Chu, not quite getting the idea, batted his eyes in bewilderment.

Kao clapped his hands. "Excellent. We'll be able to sow in time and avoid swamping later too. By making good use of our combined strength we can do both things together. Half of us can sink wells while the other half sow."

Chu grinned from ear to ear at Kao's approval. "It seems old Chou Chung's won another citation, eh?"

"A great help he's been!" Kao exclaimed. "We'll see what everyone thinks of his proposal this evening. Other folk may come up with good ideas too."

"I'm sure they will," said Chu. "No wonder our leadership tells us time and again to follow a mass line. When the masses and the

cadres put their heads together, there's no difficulty we can't overcome."

"Quite true. People may call us leaders, but we can't move a step without the masses."

Chu took Chou Chung's arm. "Come, uncle. Take the lead with us. Come along to look at the land and show us which plots can be sown right away, so that the Party secretary can make concrete proposals to the masses this evening."

Chou Chung put down his dung crate and, beaming all over his face, marched off with the two young leaders across the far-stretching fields.

7

Chang Chin-fa had returned to Sweet Meadow in a state of rare jubilation just before sunset. Instead of going home or to the office he made straight for Feng Shao-huai's house.

He ran into Chin Wen-ching coming out from home stripped to the waist, with two empty pails. Greeting the village head, Wen-ching approached him as if he had something to say. Chang thought: Wen-ching's had schooling and has a good head on his shoulders. If I'm to compete with Kao for a mass following in Sweet Meadow, I must win over youngsters like him, not just older men. So Chang looked at Wen-ching with a cordiality that he had never shown before.

"The secretary called a meeting this afternoon of Party members and the heads of mutual-aid teams. As you weren't here, I went instead..." said Wen-ching.

"Fine. I'm running my legs off, having to look after everything in the village and making so many trips to the district and county town. You must see to things for me in our mutual-aid team."

"Our team must get a move on sinking wells and fighting the drought, so that we'll be a mutual-aid team in the true sense of the word."

"Not only that. We must make a good showing and move to top place in Sweet Meadow and the whole Tienmen District too."

"Just talking is no use. We must pitch in."

"Right. We'll pitch in and work really hard. Now's the time to show the stuff you're made of." Then looking round he lowered his voice. "You must put up a good show, Wen-ching. I'm thinking of nominating you for Party membership at our next committee meeting."

Chang's unctuous way of talking disgusted Wen-ching though the content appealed to him. His friend Chu Tieh-han had long been a Party member while Chou Li-ping and Lu Chun-chiang had been admitted recently. How Wen-ching envied them! Although a candidate had to be passed by the whole Party branch and approved by a higher Party committee, he knew that the opinions of the Party branch committee carried considerable weight. He thought: Chang Chin-fa may have ulterior motives, but he's one of the three Party committee members. Even if I don't knuckle under to him, I can't afford to offend him.

Chang knew from Wen-ching's silence that he had made an impression on him. "I'll discuss the well-sinking with our team members presently," he added. "What's your father doing? Tell him to come over to the Fengs'. I'll wait for him there."

"Feng's in his vegetable plot. My dad's at home repairing the plough. I'll tell him to come over. You must give him a good talking-to. He doesn't want to dig wells, he's in favour of waiting for rain."

"I'll talk him round. Don't worry." Chang walked on, stopping after a few steps to call back, "Will you run and tell Liu Wan and Chin-shou to come too?"

Having assented, Wen-ching left his pails outside the gate and went off on this errand.

Chang made his way to Feng's vegetable plot. The vegetables there, watered from the well, were a fresh dazzling green. Feng Shao-huai was alone, squatting by the plot catching insects.

"Working on your own? Where's Erh-lin?" Chang asked.

Raising his round head sweating under the sun, Feng said, "Erh-lin's out carting with Wen-chi, Chin Fu's elder son."

"Do they earn much?"

"Enough to feed cattle and men."

Squatting down beside Feng, Chang said, "I've something important to talk over with you."

"About sinking wells?" Feng shot him a glance.

"You're well informed."

"The Party secretary made such a commotion about it as soon as he got back, the whole village is stirred up. Is construction work so simple? It's mostly bragging, in my opinion. Wait and see the fun."

"But, Shao-huai, in the district meeting I was forced to brag louder than Kao did."

"How?"

"Secretary Wang wanted Kao to say how many wells we'd be sinking. As he hesitated, I beat him to it by giving a figure for our team."

"Good to beat him to it. That was well done."

"I was feeling a bit hot-headed at the time, so I guaranteed 'one well for each plot'."

"Heavens! That can't be done."

"Well, these calls from above are like showers which only wet the surface of the earth. We'll humour him for the time being, then everybody will forget about it."

Feng stopped weeding, his gaze fixed on a tiny insect, its wings wet with the water he had sprinkled, which was struggling to crawl up a cabbage leaf. His mind was hard at work. He had already decided to ignore the call to sink wells and meant to get the others to ignore it too, hoping to make Kao lose the trust of both his superiors and the villagers in the first spring sowing and the first task entrusted to him since his appointment as Party secretary. He thought: I don't mind if my land grows no crops. I shan't go hungry. By carting I'll get enough to eat and to spend. He was just wondering how to get other people to oppose the idea of sinking wells when Chang came up and put him in a fix. Chang was the cadre he liked best, the only man in Sweet Meadow who could stand up to Kao and one day take his place. He must be supported and backed up, not let down.

The hesitation of an able man like Feng caused Chang fresh misgivings. Feng had land, manpower and money. Whether Chang could make capital or not out of this drive to combat drought depended largely on Feng, on whether he adopted a positive or negative attitude. Chang must play up to Feng. He couldn't afford to rub him the wrong way.

Catching an insect, Feng said, "You talked too big, Chin-fa. We have a Party committee now, don't forget. Kao isn't going to let you off."

Chang's heart sank. "That's true. . . . I suppose we'll have to alter our quota."

"That's too much of a loss of face." Feng waved this aside.

"What shall we do then?"

"Hire men from outside to sink wells for us."

"That's an idea! I'm afraid Chin Fu won't agree though."

"We'll do it our old way, each on his own."

"That would let the cat out of the bag."

"Let Liu Wan help Chin Fu then. They hit it off. That can count as mutual aid too and would be a good cover."

"Right. You team up with Erh-lin and I'll work with Chin-shou. And in addition we can hire a few men. That'll do the trick. I shan't have made an empty boast this time, Shao-huai."

Something rustled on the other side of the fence. Then they saw the head of Chin Fu, the Pinchfist whom they had just been discussing.

Chin felt that the heat was off him since he had joined a team, although in name only. His relations with his younger son Wen-ching had improved. Chao Yu-ngo, wife of his elder son, had become easier to handle too. For that he was grateful to Chang and Feng. Having overheard the conversation between his younger son and Chang Chin-fa just now, he had come straight to Feng's vegetable plot and heard all that was said there too. He didn't mind sinking wells. His only fear was that this would lead to enforced co-operation and he'd find himself, in the end, in a real mutual-aid team. No, he wouldn't be taken in, he could figure out what would pay off.

Poking his head over the fence he whispered, "I give you my full support too, village head."

"Fine, fine!" cried Chang. "With your backing I can stand firm, and that means you'll all be in a strong position too."

"Yes, I need your support," said Chin Fu. "That's why I'm backing you up. If you want me to sink wells, I will."

"That's the spirit," responded Chang, more satisfied than ever. "Sinking a well in your own plot will be to your advantage. You'll reap more grain to fill your bin. How can you lose out?"

Chin blinked. "But, village head, I'll only work with my own family. Wen-chi isn't back yet. I'll let his wife take his place for a few days. I don't want any outsiders butting in."

Chang was in a dilemma. "Can your family sink five wells by yourselves in two weeks?"

"Don't worry. We'll have them finished in time."

Chang tried to talk him round. "I knew you wouldn't want anyone else joining in, so I didn't like to suggest it. But after much consideration, I think Liu Wan might help you out for a few days. You're on good terms, aren't you?"

"That's exactly why I don't want him." Chin Fu shook his head and waved his hands emphatically. "Just because we're friends, I'll feel bad if he takes advantage of me, and I won't like taking advantage of him either."

"Why not let Chin-shou pitch in with you for a few days?" put in Feng. "He's only two small plots, he'll not have much work."

Chin Fu hastily bowed, crying: "Spare me, Old Man Heaven! No honest man wants to have anything to do with him."

This sounded to Chang like a reflection on him. "If you refuse all help and insist on working on your own," he growled, "what kind of mutual-aid team is this?"

Chin Fu was taken aback. He quickly countered: "A man should live up to his words, Chin-fa. Didn't you make it quite clear that we were only hanging up a signboard? I wouldn't have joined otherwise..."

Feng quickly raised a hand to stop him, for fear someone might

overhear. "Don't shout. We'll talk it over and see what's the best thing to do."

The gate in the fence creaked and a man lurched in, falling flat on the ground. He scrambled up swearing: "Damn it! Who's littered the ground with vegetable leaves? Trying to trip me up!"

Chang knitted his brows. Greedy Guts was drunk again.

Tottering towards them, his lean swarthy legs showing through his ragged trousers, Chang Chin-shou growled: "Why must you listen to Kao Ta-chuan, Chin-fa? What if he's the Party secretary? I'm not afraid of him. In fact, he's sometimes a bit afraid of me. Last time I went to the market, my old straw hat was blown off by the wind. He promptly picked it up and handed it to me. And though I didn't say a word of thanks, he smiled quite pleasantly at me. You see, I don't have to be afraid of him."

"Why must you get drunk in broad daylight? It's really too much," said Chang impatiently. "Find yourself a place to sit down."

Greedy Guts stepped forward, pointing at Chang's nose. "What's wrong with drinking?" he snorted. "It's better than tagging behind Kao the way you do. Are you crazy that you want to sink wells? A village the size of Sweet Meadow has enough drinking water in it for me."

Fearing that Chang might lose his temper and provoke Greedy Guts to make a scene, Feng interposed: "Don't talk nonsense. We're sinking wells to fight the drought."

"Fight the drought? How can we fight against Old Man Heaven? Instead of praying for rain you resist. That's looking for trouble, I tell you. No. No digging wells for me in this hot weather. I'll cool off in the shade."

Liu Wan now arrived, sweating profusely and covered with dust. He asked the dejected Chang, "Wen-ching called me away from work saying you wanted me, village head. What for?"

"To discuss fighting the drought," Chang answered listlessly.

"I just heard that Chou Chung's team is going to sow first and then wait for rain..."

"That shows how crazy mutual-aid teams are," commented Chin Fu. "The seeds will be scorched."

"The paupers are doing it their way," Feng jeered. "They can't afford to sink wells, so they're trying this method. Ridiculous!"

His mind in a turmoil, Chang was not in a mocking mood. He simply replied: "As the saying goes, well water doesn't interfere with river water. We can all do as we think best."

Eager to return to his work Liu asked, "Well, what's our team going to do, village head?"

After a pause Chang answered in a low voice, "We'll have to sink wells. If we can't reach water we'll dig a hole so that from a distance it looks like a well. Go home and talk it over with your families and then get cracking. Each family in our team will dig its own wells. Well water won't interfere with river water!"

Everyone present gladly approved this plan.

8

The sowing done by the first mutual-aid team was treated as a joke by many villagers, the most scathing being the members of Chang's "team".

When Liu Wan returned with his big brindled cow which he had taken to Fragrant Cloud Temple to be mated, he came across the Chin family's "well-sinking team".

"See how bold the mutual-aid team members are, Brother Chin Fu," he said.

"I call them crazy."

"Won't the seedlings die in the sun?"

"If they don't get wells dug in time, their seeds will be a dead loss. I'd never take such a risk. I'd buy cakes and dumplings instead of wasting all those bushels of seeds."

"Yes. It is sort of risky."

"Even so, they're thinking of turning themselves into an agricultural co-op."

"Really! So soon?"

"You know what an agricultural co-op is? It pools the land and cattle — including your big brindled cow."

"You mean everything's held in common?"

"They're just looking for trouble, ha!"

The land belonging to Chin Kai, a mutual-aid team member, lay next to that of his brother Chin Fu — the two pieces had originally been one large plot. Now Chin Kai had come to his field to choose a good spot for the well the team would be sinking for him. He heard his brother's and Liu Wan's conversation which was in fact meant for his ears. Having no retort ready, he felt as ill at ease as if he had swallowed a fly. Lowering his head he walked to the far end of his plot.

The newly sown field was loose and soft. Small clods of earth crumbled under his feet. Tiny insects hopped in the newly harrowed furrows while sparrows pecked at a few uncovered seeds. Gusts of hot dry wind blew and the sky above was azure blue, flecked with a few feathery clouds.

Chin Kai couldn't help squatting down again. In one hand he held his pipe, with the other he scabbled in the earth till he found a seed sown the morning before. He picked it up and examined it carefully. The moisture in the earth had swollen the seed: it had started germinating. Looking up at the sky, he couldn't suppress a sigh. He thought: If this drought drags on, when the seedlings sprout this scorching sun's bound to kill them.

Voices were heard not far away. A flock of birds came winging from that direction.

Coming towards him from the east were three sturdy men, their figures golden in the sunlight. Kao Ta-chuan, the Party secretary, walked in the front. Next came Chu Tieh-han, a bundle of willow branches in his arms. Old Chou Chung brought up the rear, a small spade over his shoulder and a handful of tender grass in one hand.

As Kao approached he greeted Chin Kai. Then tapping the ground with his foot he asked Chou Chung, "Which team's land is this?"

Chou Chung pointed north with the hand holding the grass. "It's his. I'm not sure whether theirs can be called a team."

Kao turned and saw Chin Fu drawing up earth from the well he was digging with his elder son Wen-chi.

"I've urged him time and again to sow," said Chu. "His land is moist. But he won't. We needn't count him in."

Kao opened his notebook and put down Chin's name and the acreage of his land. "We must count him in," he said, "and do all we can to bring him round. If he's pig-headed, that's his business."

Chou dug up some soil and squatted down to inspect it. "Seeds will certainly sprout here," he said. "He ought to sow quickly."

Chu stuck a willow branch forcefully into the ground.

"The three of us have made a round of all the land in the village," said Kao. "We've put down which plots should be sown. Now let's split up and go from house to house carefully explaining the need for this to folk."

"Let's divide according to streets. I'll take South Street," said Chu.

Kao laughed. "You certainly know how to find easy work. Most of the people in South Street are mutual-aid team members and poor peasants. They'll be easy to persuade. That's why you've grabbed that street."

"All right," said Chu. "I'll take on the families round the village office too. I don't mind how many I take on so long as I can steer clear of Chang Chin-fa's lot."

Chin Kai had stood a few paces away while the three cadres talked matters over. Now Chu went south, laughing loudly. And Chou Chung after a word to Kao left too. Only then did Chin Kai walk up to Kao.

Pocketing his notebook and glancing at Chin Fu and his son who were working away, Kao said to Chin Kai, "Tieh-han tells me they're digging a well in your plot this afternoon."

"Yes. As soon as they're through with Chan-kuei's."

Kao squatted down. Fingering the earth he asked, "What do you think? Will the seeds sprout?"

"Sure. But I'm afraid they'll die."

Kao shot him a glance. "You must have faith in man's ability to conquer nature. With the strength of our collective we'll certainly lick this drought."

To the accompaniment of laughter and jeers, the seeds in the fields of the mutual-aid teams sprouted and broke through the earth before the wells were ready. People who had waited until the wells were finished had only just sown their plots, while the seedlings of the mutual-aid teams began drinking their fill of clear water from the wells. The members of Chang's bogus team did worst. Feng had sunk two wells with hired labour, but the others had been unable to find or afford labour power, and they refused to work together. Instead of having a well for each plot, they didn't even have one for each household. Fearing criticism from above, Chang had persuaded or intimidated his "members" into digging dry holes in the ground for show!

The third day after work had started on Chin Kai's well, his seedlings began to sprout, though unevenly. After filling in the gaps or transplanting, they certainly grew better than those which had been sown late. And his well, started later than his brother's, was finished two days earlier.

The superiority of the mutual-aid team was fully manifested.

Chin Kai fixed a windlass to his well. Two men took turns to work it while a woman watched the outlet, and in this way the seedlings were watered.

Chin Fu and his two sons finally completed one real well and three "show wells". He then gathered his whole family to water and sow the fields. The two brothers had to work the windlass and watch the outlet while Chin Fu ploughed the land, sowed it and then manured it, helped by his wife, who led the ox while Wen-chi's wife followed with the roller. After ploughing a furrow they had to wait for water, and after watering it for seeds and manure. Besides, the field was uneven, so instead of flowing where they wanted it the water circled around the well. In half a day's hard labour they barely sowed two strips of land and watered only half of each. Thus half the seeds were still sown in dry soil.

Chin Kai was quite elated at first. He thought: It was smart of our mutual-aid team to sow early. By the time my brother's seedlings sprout my own will be quite tall. And the mutual-aid team's at hand if I need more help. This is much better than farm-

ing on my own. But before long he ran into the same kind of trouble. The unevenness of the land hindered the flow of the water which accumulated around the well in the south, leaving the northern end as dry as ever. Both well and seeds would be wasted if this went on!

In Chin Fu's field his two sons were both complaining, each for different reasons, about their father's conservatism. Wen-chi resented being kept from his carting, which had earned him good money, to work for nothing at home. Wen-ching blamed his father for not listening to the Party secretary and joining a true mutual-aid team. As a result they had lost face, were wasting their strength and would get a poorer crop.

Knowing himself in the wrong, Chin Fu at first listened mutely. Later, a glance at his brother's plot revived his spirits suddenly. "Damn it, are you trying to pick bones from an egg?" he retorted. "Is the moon shining on other people's courtyards any rounder? Open your eyes and look at the mutual-aid team led by the great Party secretary. The water's collecting in the low land too. They're in the same fix as we are."

His elder brother's gloating taunts cut Chin Kai to the quick. How he longed to tilt his land so that the water would flow all over it!

Shouldering their spades, Kao, Chu and Chou came once more to Chin Kai's field. They were followed by Chang Chin-fa and the other heads of mutual-aid teams.

Chin Kai had wanted to complain to the Party secretary, but clamped his lips together at sight of Chang.

As Kao approached he called: "Having trouble watering your field, Uncle Chin?"

"Yes," Chin Kai answered gruffly. "What use are wells like this?"

"If our team members can get water from underground, we have the power to water our seedlings."

"That's difficult."

Walking up, Chu pointed in the direction of the village. "Look over there," he said. "Divine troops are descending from heaven. Stop scowling, man!"



Chin Kai turned and looked. A troop of men and women, carrying pails and buckets, were coming in his direction. When they drew closer he saw that among them were even some old women and children.

Chou Chung told him: "The heads of the mutual-aid teams have decided to mobilize their team members to water the seedlings with buckets."

"What! On such large plots?" exclaimed Chin Kai. "They'll never manage it, surely."

"I told you a few days ago that collective strength can beat Old Man Heaven. Just wait and see," Kao said.

Chu turned to the team leaders. "The team members have come according to our decision. Take them off and set to work." To the villagers he shouted, "Go with your team leaders and start work!"

Cheerful shouts and the clanking of buckets rang out across the fields.

Kicking off his shoes Chu ran over to the well and began digging. "Here, Uncle Chin," he called. "Let's dig a pit to hold water so that they can fill their buckets from it."

The pit was soon finished. The windlass flew in Chan-kuei's hands as gurgling water filled the pit.

Putting down his spade Chu reached for two pails. But three young fellows, who were quicker, beat him to it.

Chun-hsi and her mother, Chu's mother and Chin Kai's wife raced after the young men with basins full of water.

Chin Kai grinned broadly at this stirring sight.

"I'll take over for Chan-kuei for a while," Chu cried to him. "Go and get four more pails from the village. With twelve pails we'll finish this plot before noon. Then we can start on another."

Chin Kai walked away, his heart singing. He heard Kao urging Chang Chin-fa to get his "team" to work in the same way.

"Uncle Chin Fu's land is uneven," said Kao. "He'd better just water the parts he's sown to save water and energy. He'll never finish sowing at this rate, if he lets the water run wild."

Chang was in a dilemma. He prevaricated: "We're all busy on jobs we're assigned to. It would be difficult to call the members together."

"Our main task now is watering and sowing. You must organize your people to do it, even if it's only mutual aid for the time being. The Party committee meets at noon. You'll have to report on your work."

Kao had spoken incisively and left very dissatisfied. Chang, looking around, deliberately raised his voice, "Suppose we ask Chin-shou and Liu Wan to help him out for a few days."

Chin Fu's heart sank. Hurrying over, he protested, "I don't want Greedy Guts. Not at any price! You gave us your word, village head, that well water wouldn't interfere with river water."

Turning pale, Chang signed to Chin Fu to keep quiet.

Chin Kai let out a sigh of relief.

(To be continued)

Illustrated by Chen Yen-ning

STORIES

*Yu Chun-ying and
Shen Chin-hsiang*

The Golden Keys

The welders' section was the busiest part of the power-station work site. The flashing of bright arcs seemed to pierce the blue sky, symbolizing the fierce battle for electricity.

Meng Hsiang-ken, Party member and leader of the welding team, was bending over a thick steel pipe, moving the welding rod along it. Though beads of sweat stood out on his furrowed forehead, he doggedly worked on and on. When he finally straightened up to wipe away the sweat, a big hand reached out from behind him and snatched up the rod he'd just laid down. A shower of brilliant sparks poured out like fireworks.

"Ta-ming!" Meng exclaimed.

Yao Chen-chuan, the young worker with a chubby face standing beside them, cupped his hands round his lips and shouted, "Comrades, our worker-student Liu Ta-ming's back!"

The welding stopped. The sound of Yao's voice was still echoing in the bright shed as the welders thronged round Liu. He shook hands with one while greeting another and accepted a cup of tea from the

left as a stool was pressed on him from the right. Overwhelmed, Liu didn't know where to turn next.

A man stepped into the welding shed and cried, "Ta-ming! So you've come here already. I just phoned construction headquarters to see if you were there." It was Chen Chih-ping, assistant director of the work site.

"As soon as Master Liu arrived, he began welding. Look at this, Old Chen." Yao pointed to the pipe Liu had welded. "He hasn't lost his old skill."

"Good." Chen grasped Liu's hand, then continued meaningfully, "You can't consider yourself just an ordinary welder now. I've consulted Party Secretary Li. From now on you'll work in our office." He fished two bright silver keys out of his pocket and handed them to Liu. "This one is for the office door and this one for your desk. There's plenty of research material there."

Liu couldn't help glancing at Meng, his former master. The latter looked at him expectantly, confidence shining in his eyes. After some thought Liu said seriously, "Old Chen, you've made a mistake. These aren't the keys you should give me."

"What do you mean?"

"Give me the ones to the tool-box and the locker. I remember before I left for university. . . ."

"Oh yes," Chen cut in, "that's easy. I'll have two made for you."

"No need for that." Meng produced two brass keys shiny from use. He turned to Liu and said fondly, "I knew you'd want them back the minute you returned, Ta-ming."

As Liu gratefully accepted the keys, a feeling of well-being enveloped him. But Chen suddenly flushed a bright red.

2

Two years ago, on the very day that Liu was leaving for university, Chen had come from the technical department for a spell of manual labour in the welding section. Amidst the fluttering red flags and the din of gongs and drums, Liu stood there beaming, a big red flower

pinned to his jacket. Looking on from the midst of the crowd of workers round the new student, Chen was stirred by this warm, impressive send-off. He could hardly believe that it was for a worker on his way to university.

"So you've come too, Old Chen!" Liu had held out both hands and declared earnestly, "On behalf of my team, I heartily welcome you."

"You'll be away for two years, I presume?" Chen asked, delighted for Liu.

Nodding, Liu began to fumble in his pockets for something, then he chuckled and turned to Meng. "Master, where're the keys I gave you?"

"I've promised to keep them for you, don't you worry."

"I'm not worried about the keys. But now that Old Chen's come to work in our team, I want him to have the use of my tool-box and locker."

"I see!" Meng produced two glittering brass keys.

Liu took them lovingly and handed them to Chen.

"Here you are, Old Chen. I've a complete set of tools. Use what you need. But in two years their 'master' will come to reclaim them."

"Of course, of course. . . ." Chen assured him.

Six months before Liu returned Chen went back to work in his office, but didn't turn in the keys. Meng went and asked him for them but they were nowhere to be found. It was only when the office was given a thorough cleaning one day that someone discovered the keys in a corner, and took them back to Meng.

After two years' absence, Liu was now fondly gripping the two brass keys once again. It was no wonder that Chen had become so red.

3

After lunch Liu went to Chen's office to receive his assignment. Despite his stay at university Liu's working style remained unchanged. No matter what the job, he always used to ask his mates for their opin-

ions or consult Master Meng. He had already discussed the welding team's task with Meng and now had a clear idea of how to proceed.

Having poured some tea for Liu and lit himself a cigarette, Chen was about to brief the young man on his work when he seemed to see the shadowy forms of keys dangling before his eyes. Once again he felt ill at ease.

When Chen graduated from university twenty years before and reported for work at his first job, the first thing the head of the technical department had done was to give him the technician's keys; the chief engineer's first words to him had been: "This is your office." Ever since, Chen had buried himself in his office. Several years later he himself became head of the department. So when university graduates reported to him, he naturally followed his predecessors' example. Never had he imagined that a worker-graduate would balk at accepting a technician's keys.

"Well . . . let me put you in the picture first," Chen finally drawled after a few minutes' silence. He took a long drag at his cigarette, then went on, "You've come just in time. Now that we're building a bigger power-station, we've got to find a way to weld thicker pipes of a more tricky alloy steel."

"Aren't Master Meng and the others trying to find a way to automate welding under higher pressure?" Liu interrupted.

"Yes, they've been working on it for quite a while without making much headway." Chen flicked the ashes from his cigarette. "Before the Cultural Revolution I did some research on this type of welding myself. Though I didn't succeed I learned quite a bit from it. Now that you're back, I think . . ."

"I've told Master Meng that's what I want to tackle."

"Fine!" Chen got up and put on his coat. "Follow me. I'll show you the research centre. It'll be your office too."

Liu followed him to a cream-coloured building nestling in a grove of green trees. Chen took the keys from Liu, opened the door and led him upstairs.

"What do you think of it? Not bad, eh? Quiet surroundings free from all disturbance, just the place for research work," Chen remarked complacently as he opened a window.

Liu looked round. Along one wall was a row of bookcases filled with technical books. At either end of the bookcases was a window with a desk by it. Charts covered one wall and a blueprinting machine stood in a corner. It was just like a university research centre.

"So he expects me to coop myself up here and do theoretical research! This is a far cry from the fiery work site!" Liu stared round in wide-eyed surprise. A series of question-marks appeared in his mind's eye.

Meanwhile Chen was busy opening the glass door of a bookcase. He carefully pulled out some handsomely bound technical journals and a thick notebook.

"Come and have a look, Ta-ming," he called. "Here are some recently published foreign journals. And these are my notes on automatic welding. Although the experiments weren't successful, you may find these notes useful for reference."

Liu took the notebook and leafed through it. "Have Master Meng and his mates made any worth-while suggestions?" he asked.

"Hard to tell!" Chen knitted his brows. "They've some vague ideas about what can be done but hardly worth probing into. Well, we can't blame them really, as they know nothing about theory."

"But they have practical experience."

"Practical experience? Well, we can't deny that, but now we're confronted with completely new problems, Ta-ming!"

"New things develop step by step too. They can't be divorced from . . ." Liu had begun to argue but Chen was already at the head of the staircase, beckoning him.

On the ground floor a welder lay beside another machine covered with dust — obviously the automatic welder Chen had worked on and left half finished.

Picking up a section of steel pipe Chen told Liu, "This is one of the pipes I tried to weld, but it just wouldn't work." Shaking his head, he flung the pipe into a corner, then handed the keys to Liu. "It's a tough nut to crack. You'll have to do more research on it."

Liu gazed at Chen thoughtfully. More question-marks flashed through his mind.

"So you see what favourable working conditions you've got — reference material upstairs and equipment downstairs. And it's quiet here. Nobody will disturb you... Well, I've got to go now. Come and see me whenever you meet with difficulties. Maybe I can give you a hand." With that he opened the door and hurried off.

Liu gazed angrily at Chen's receding figure. "Quiet surroundings free from disturbance indeed! If I work in this 'ivory tower', I'll cut myself off from the masses." He was about to leave when he had an idea. "I'd better take these pipes along for study and some reference books as well." Having strung all the pipes on a wire, he went upstairs to choose some books, then left.

Back at the lively construction site Liu soon came to the welding shed. This is more like it, he thought as he looked at the glowing arcs. The sound of welding was music to his ears.

Presently some workers coming on shift entered the tool-room. "Hey, Master Liu, what've you got in your bag?" Yao asked. "Books."

"Oh! Can I have a look?"

"Of course." As Liu took the books out, he added, "I brought them here for you fellows."

"Good for you, Ta-ming," Meng exclaimed approvingly. "So you mean to organize classes for our team?"

"You mates sent me to university. What I've learned isn't my private property — it belongs to the whole working class. I should pass it on to you. Don't you agree?" With that Liu put the books in his tool-box.

"Quite right." Meng nodded vigorously, grinning from ear to ear.

Yao jumped onto a stool and held up his hands for silence. "Comrades!" he declared solemnly. "I propose that Master Liu give us lectures. How about it?"

Shouts of approval greeted his suggestion.

His eyes flashing, Liu raised the two brass keys in his hand. "All right. Here are the keys to my tool-box and locker. I'll hang them in the locker room. Take them any time you need them."

Time had elapsed; the battle continued.

The Party branch committee had given Master Meng and Liu its full support a few days before and many veteran welders had been working hard on the innovation — especially Meng and Yao. In their spare time they had gone to the scientific exchange office and visited factories to get the data Liu needed. After studying it with the workers, Liu had really got down to work. He resolved to persist until victory.

He was walking towards the work shed one day when all of a sudden a piece of steel pipe landed at his feet. Another came flying out of the work shed window, then a third... In a few seconds at least ten others followed. Liu picked them up one by one and soon had his arms full. Standing on tiptoe, he peered through the window and saw Chen.

Chen had just come back from a meeting organized to exchange experience on technical innovations. Construction headquarters had warned him several times that the task was urgent — if the innovation was not completed on time, the completion of the whole power-station would be held up. When he had returned to the work site and learned that Liu and Meng had not yet succeeded in finding a new welding method, Chen hurried to the research centre. Having forgotten the keys, he could only pound on the door. The hollow sound of knocking echoed throughout the building. Furious, he headed for the welders' tool-room. But Liu was not there either. He caught sight of a notice written on the blackboard: "Fifth Lecture on Welding Methods", and recognized Liu's handwriting.

"Damn him, at a time like this he wastes his energy teaching workers." He kicked at the pile of scrap pipes, then picked them up and threw them out of the window one by one.

"Why did you throw all these pipes out, Old Chen?" Liu asked as he stepped into the shed.

"They're pipes I used for experiments in the past. Why did you bring them back?" Chen retorted in surprise.

"We can still use them. We tried welding them several days ago." Liu held up a pipe. "Look at this one. Part of the joint is strong — a twenty-per-cent success."

"That's just a coincidence. Don't get carried away." Chen wagged his finger.

"You're wrong, Old Chen. If we can get a strong weld on twenty per cent of the joint, there is no reason for our not succeeding a hundred per cent," Liu retorted, full of confidence. "Master Meng and the other veteran workers have proposed a new welding method which doesn't require pre-heating of the pipes. They used it to weld this pipe. I think they'll succeed."

"That's nonsense!" Chen leapt to his feet in a rage. "Don't you know what kind of steel these pipes are made of, Liu? Hard, brittle alloy steel. There'll be cracks in the weld if you use that method. Meng and his mates made the same suggestion long ago, but I turned it down. Too many cooks spoil the broth!"

"But the masses are the heroes, you should know that. Their support gives us the most solid foundation possible for our work."

"Scientific experimentation is not a political movement, Ta-ming," Chen cut in. "Political movements need mass support, but scientific research doesn't."

"I don't see any difference."

"Well, I've no time to argue. The most important thing at present is your research. You can't do it here. It's noisy and there's too much interference."

"What!" Liu burned with anger.

"I know," Chen went on. "We'll move the machines to the research centre and work there. So long as we two are filled with determination and put our heads together — a young technician and an old one — I'm sure we'll succeed. We won't let anyone interrupt us. Right?"

"No! That means being cut off completely from the masses." Though usually calm and patient, Liu was getting worked up. "You can't take to your old ways again, Old Chen!"

"Take to my old ways?" Chen exclaimed in surprise.

"Have you forgotten that before the Cultural Revolution you spent a lot of time on your innovation but got no results? Haven't you understood why?" Liu paused a moment, then produced two silver keys from his pocket. "I think these are the key to the problem."

"Those keys?" Chen was puzzled. "What do they have to do with the innovation?"

"You can open the door of the research centre with them, but they aren't the keys to the wisdom of the masses. If you cut yourself off from the masses you can't do a thing, comrade."

Liu barked out these words so fiercely that Chen was stunned. "I'm still in charge here," he retorted, his face red. "I have the right to make this decision."

"No! You haven't the right to change the decision the Party branch made through collective discussion," a voice suddenly boomed outside. Master Meng strode in. "You must thoroughly reform your ideas, Old Chen. Do you want Liu to follow your old ways?"

Like an electric current, these words went straight to Chen's heart. He stood as if transfixed.

Meng turned to Liu. "We've invited the welders from the ship-building yard and the teachers from the technical college here for a consultation tomorrow."

"Good idea!" Liu turned excitedly to Chen. "Will you join us, Old Chen?"

Chen didn't answer, but seemed to be thinking, "This is scientific research — not surgery. Why have a consultation, bah!"

5

Set in his old ways, Chen locked himself up in his "ivory tower" for several days. Having learned that Liu was going to have his fifth try at welding the special steel pipes, he decided to go and have a look — more out of a sense of duty than anything else.

Before he even entered the work shed, he got a shock; Liu was welding without heating the pipe! When Chen saw that the volt-ammeter showed a figure twice that normally used, he dashed frantically in and darted towards the switch. He was reaching out to shut off the

current when a big hand restrained him. Whirling round he found himself face to face with Old Li, the Party secretary. He reluctantly withdrew his hand.

The automatic welder hummed as its rod moved along the joint. After a while Liu took off his helmet and switched off the current. Chen grabbed a flash-light from one of the workers and peered into the smoke-filled pipe. The weld was as smooth and shiny as if it had been enamelled. He immediately examined the other pipes. The welds were all perfect. This undeniable evidence left him speechless. His face turned white, then green, then a bright red.

"You must thoroughly transform your thinking, Old Chen." Old Li walked over and added with deep feeling, "We must never forget to rely whole-heartedly on the working class."

"Yes. I must learn earnestly from Comrade Liu." Chen's voice was contrite.

"Not from me," put in Liu. "Let's all learn from Master Meng. Have you any suggestions, Old Chen, for improving this new welder?"

"Yes, it's time for you old revolutionaries to make new contributions, Old Chen," the Party secretary encouraged him.

"I certainly mean to do my best to learn from the veteran workers." Chen's heart felt lighter. He walked slowly round the new automatic welder. "Comrade Liu, will you let me have a look at your blueprint? I want to study it."

"I don't have a blueprint, Old Chen." Liu scratched his head.

"You must have some sketches."

"Yes. But we drew them on a notebook."

"Where's the notebook?"

"In the tool-box." Liu went off to get it.

Chen followed him to the locker room where Liu took from a nail two brass keys. Then he went to the tool-room and opened the box. Yao took out a small notebook and told Chen excitedly: "Everyone can use the keys. Comrade Liu has told us that those who want to read books or look up data can help themselves. Those who have suggestions to make can jot them down in this notebook. We all call this box 'our pool of wisdom'. Here, have a look at all these pages full of notes."

Chen took the notebook and leafed through it, hands trembling with emotion. On one page were the words: "We workers fear no difficulties. Go ahead boldly with your work, Ta-ming!" He recognized the handwriting of an old worker.

He turned several more pages — all covered with comments and suggestions written by different workers. There were sketches and drawings too. It certainly was no ordinary notebook, but a record of the workers' wisdom and creativity. He seemed to hear Liu's forceful voice ring out again:

"... You can open the door of the research centre with them, but they aren't the keys to the wisdom of the masses. If you cut yourself off from the masses you can't do a thing, comrade."

Lost in thought, Chen gazed at the two golden keys.

Wang Ho-ho

The County Party Secretary

When the county Party secretary came to our village,
 He stayed in the small shed with our stockman uncle.
 Uncle was tickled to death about this,
 Happiness bubbled up from his heart like a spring.
 He said, "You're on the go from morning till night,
 The load on your shoulders is by no means light.
 Suppose at night you can't sleep well here,
 It'll break our hearts if your health's impaired."

By midnight there's a real gale blowing,
 But uncle gets up to feed the stock.
 He lights the lamp, buttons up his coat,
 Then he sees the mangers are already filled.
 The Party secretary must have given out the fodder.
 Swishing tails, horses and oxen are munching away.

Long before dawn, while the sky's still dark,
 Old uncle rises to begin the day's chores.
 Without a sound he slips off the *kang*,
 Then looks around perplexed and mutters,
 "Where's my shovel? Who's taken my wheelbarrow?
 That's mighty queer . . . where have they gone?
 Such things don't walk away by themselves;
 I'm sure they haven't sprouted wings either!"
 Then he notices the tidy floor, newly swept,
 And the water vat freshly filled to the brim.

Outside, still puzzled, uncle sees with surprise,
 The secretary wheeling a barrow load of earth.
 His blue homespun shirt is soaked with sweat,
 Though his face is flushed, it's wreathed in smiles.
 Uncle runs to grasp the Party secretary's hands,
 Words pouring out from his full heart. He says,
 "You're our leader, yet you work like one of us,
 You keep our peasants' welfare always in mind."
 Mopping his brow the secretary steadfastly replies,
 His words ringing clear, his tone firm,
 "To be re-educated by former poor and lower-middle peasants
 Means I must take big strides along the revolutionary road."

Fan Chun-chang

The Old Militiaman

As the bugle beats a quick tattoo,
There's the sound of pounding feet,
When the men are assembled and the roll complete,
There's one man extra at the end of the line.

There he stands, an old, old man,
Holding in his hand a fine shining sword.
His beard flutters in the gentle breeze,
His eyes sparkle with unquenchable spirit.

Before anyone can ask him why he's there,
His resonant voice rings out, clear as a bell.
"I enrolled as a militiaman thirty years ago
To defend the motherland. It's still my duty!"

The company leader smiles and nods his head.
As the detachment leaves the village far behind,
Bayonets pierce the mists that shroud the hills,
Red banners flutter over Spineless Peak.

Resting a while they discuss the revolutionary line,
The whole company flocks around the old militiaman.
Willingly he tells them about the past, his words
Accompanied by the southing of the wind among the pines.

"Spineless Peak is really a peak of heroes," he says.
"Its name was given to it thirty years ago.
For when the guerrillas swung their sharp swords there,
The spineless enemy lost their very guts.

"Yet class struggle has by no means ended,
We must recognize the enemy both within and without.
Only when our minds and ideology are clear,
Will our steel blades remain keen and bright."

His words ring a bell in many a heart,
They cut through the haze in many a mind.
The old militiaman is no less alert these days
Than when he rushed in the van of the attack.

For thirty years he's not laid aside his armour,
For thirty years no speck of rust has stained his sword.
Like a bright mirror, a brook in the hills
Has reflected this sword-grinder beside its waters.

Frost has touched the temples of the sword-grinder,
While for thirty years he's whetted his sword,
Around him these sturdy pines stand erect,
Above the distant hills a red star shines.



Mu Ching

Desert Date Trees

The desert date tree is a staunch soldier,
Resisting wind, taming sand, painting the plateau green;
A forest of desert date trees now spreads afar,
Its fragrant blossoms a million golden stars.

Deep underground their roots are woven,
Iron-strong stand their dark brown trunks.
Their silvery leaves rustling, rustling,
Make music in the desert's gentle breeze.

What was there here, only ten short years ago?
Nothing but sand, sand, sand. . . .
Sand drifts, sand dunes, a sea of sand,
It was indeed a whole world of sand.

But when we soldiers of Chairman Mao came,
We swore we'd make the sand retreat.
We spread our tents in line like a street,
At night the line of lights shone bright.

Sand joined forces with an evil wind
To wrestle in combat with us soldiers.
But after a short sharp battle, they were routed
And retreated to grovel tamely at our feet.

Now waves of emerald paddy fill the fields,
Apple trees are covered with a froth of white.
Silver fish gambol in the new reservoir,
Skylarks have come to make their home here.

Beside a line of green tamarisks stretching far,
Are miles of golden-blossomed desert date trees,
Fields are criss-crossed by gurgling waterways,
Such a magnificent picture gladdens the eyes.

The desert date tree is a staunch soldier,
But even more resolute are our men.
Look! See that detachment with red banners waving,
It's off to strike roots deeper in the distant desert.

Chao Cheng-min

The Girl on the Raft

Through a mizzle of rain, over swirling waves,
Her long pole dips into the swift flowing water.
Who is this young girl who poles so expertly
With both feet firmly braced upon her boat?

Maybe the river is swollen with endless rains,
And rapids churn around new hidden reefs.
But taking upon her shoulders this heavy task,
She still is eager to make full speed ahead.

Rampaging billows crash against the river banks,
Each bounding like a ferocious lion.
Linked behind her boat is a great raft of logs,
A dragon's tail lashing with the tortuous current.

The motherland needs timber for construction,
These logs must go to building sites.
City and countryside need houses, bridges,
Poles for communication lines and also for defence.

As the flotilla cuts through wind and rain,
Her folk-songs arouse the waves to laughter.
Steering the great raft down the twisting river,
Like a red cloud she floats on toward the far horizon.



Yang Chun

Fishing in the Clouds

High, high on top of the sky-scraping peak,
There's a secret hidden among the clouds,
A new crescent moon is gleaming there,
Floating in a sea of silver mist.

Can it be that the Yaos have a new tractor
Ploughing fine furrows through mist and cloud?
As the wind lifts this nebulous curtain,
We can see Yao mountain hunters fishing!

Rhythmically their oars spread ripples in the clouds,
The mountain appears to float beneath their boat.
As they cast a net into the azure blue,
Folk-songs ring out over nine ridges.

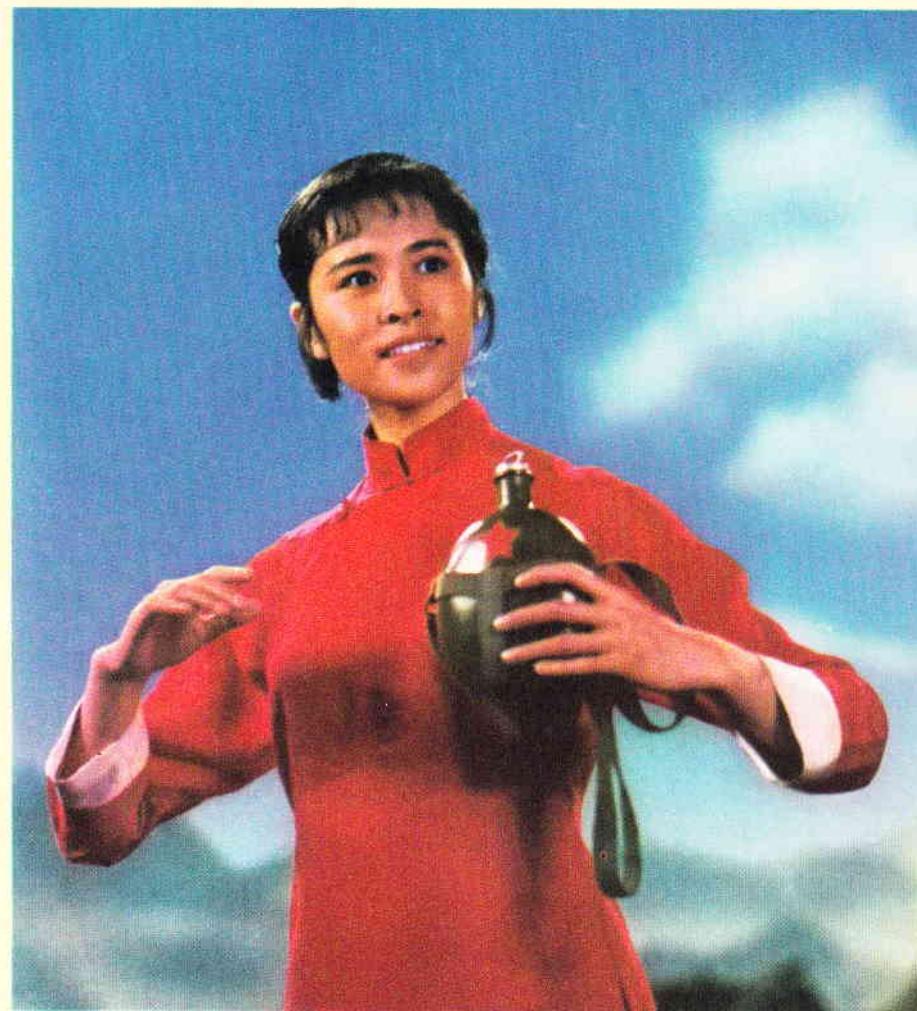
Who could believe that in the past
Wild beasts claimed this peak as their own;
Or when rains failed, dust would rise like smoke,
And fetching water meant scaling many peaks.

Since Chairman Mao's call, "Learn from Tachai",
Our sky-scraping peak has a new look;
Terraced fields reach right to the summit,
And a reservoir lies above rosy clouds.

This fine lake nestling between high peaks
Keeps paddy fields sweet all year round.
Now our good Yao hunters can go there
To cast their nets in its smooth waters.

Water and clouds, clouds and water intermingle.
Clouds dissolve into water, fish play in the clouds.
Someone shouts loudly for all to hear, "Get them!
Don't let those fine carp escape back to the river."

Our Yao hunters roar with laughter,
As they haul in a record catch,
With a boatload of fish from a load of cloud,
Back they go to their new white-walled, red-tiled village.

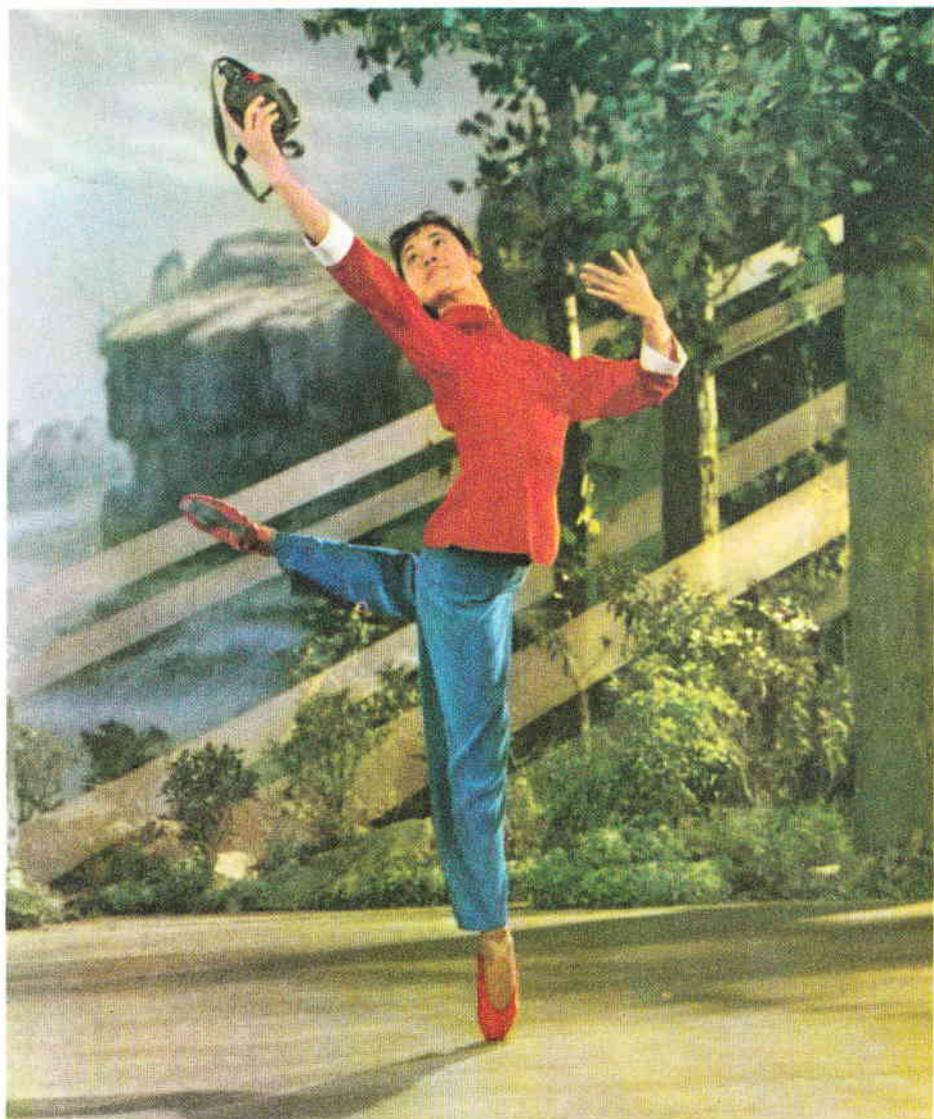


Ying-sao

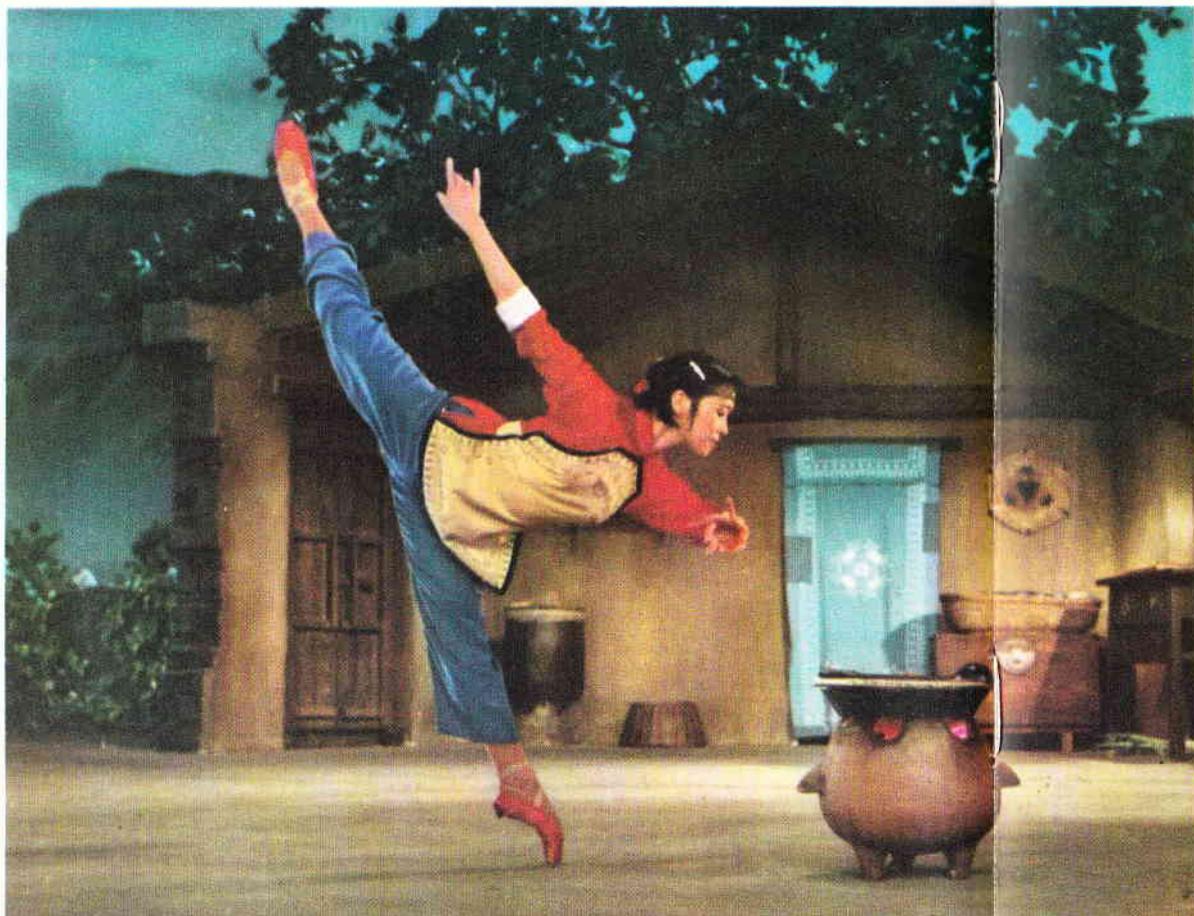
Ode to the Yimeng Mountains

(a revolutionary dance drama)

Fang Tieh-chun cleverly eludes the enemy



Ying-sao gives milk to Fong to revive him



Ying-sao brews chicken broth for Fang at night

Fang exercises vigorously to hasten his recovery





Chicken broth for the beloved PLA wounded

Chang Ya-ko

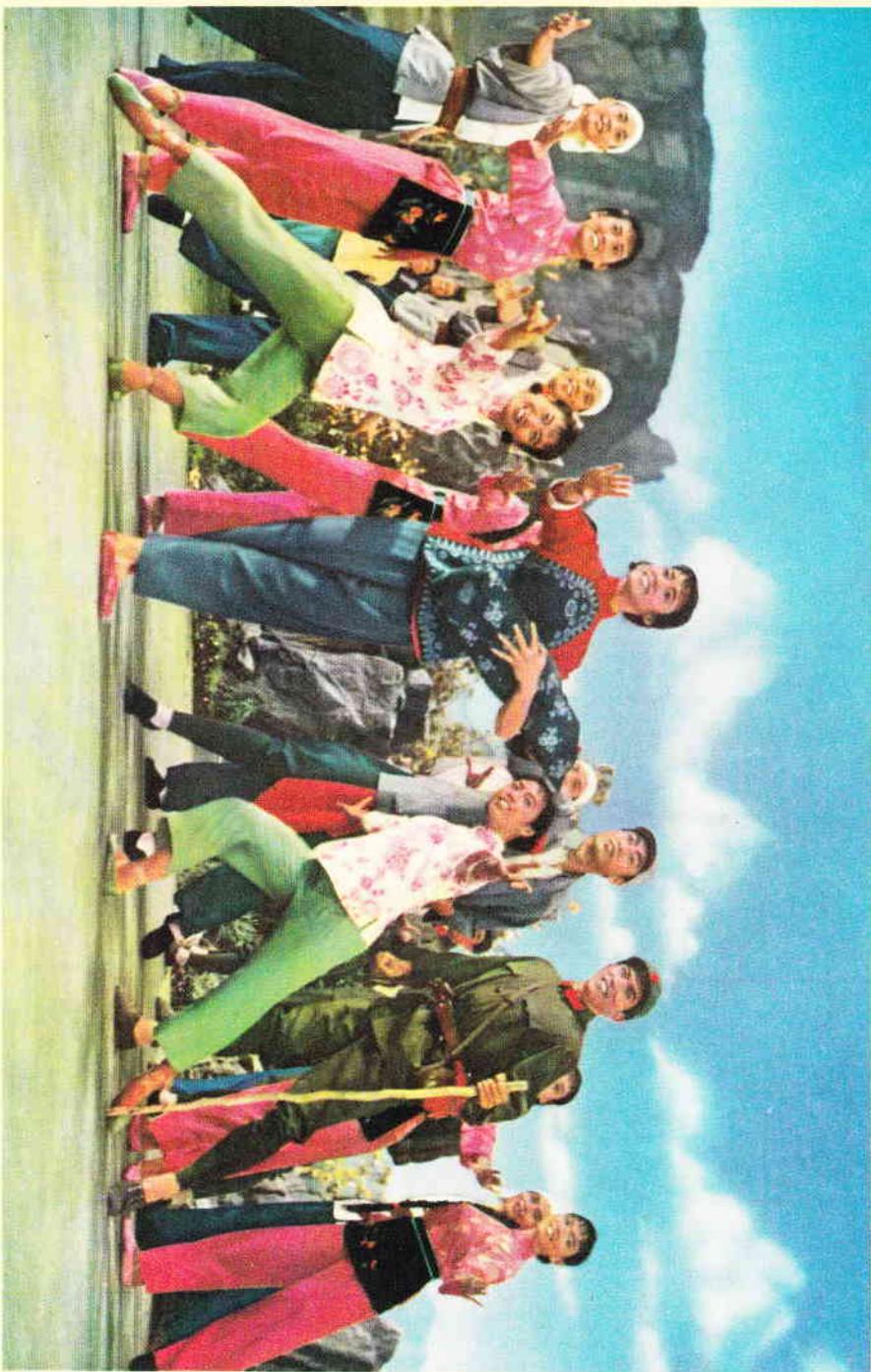
Class Love on the Sea

At dusk a gale blows up at sea,
Tossing waves and spume sky high,
Far out a fishing boat is missing,
Seamen and a woman pilot are notified.

The roar of the tempest heralds rain,
Lightning unfurls amid peals of thunder;
Storm and peril go hand in hand,
The fishing boat must be rescued fast.

The plane's wings cut through a wall of wind,
The motor launch cleaves the crests and troughs,
Seamen's hearts throb like their ship's pounding engines,
The pilot flies low, searching, searching. . . .

Ying-sao and the villagers send Fang off to join his unit



Here at last! The pilot drops a red flare.
She flashes a message to the launch, to say,
"I've found the fishing boat, it's over here.
Hurry, hurry. Come fast to its rescue."

The plane still circles the fishing boat,
The big launch speeds to it straight as an arrow.
In her cockpit, the pilot mops her brows,
In a lightning flash she has seen the final rescue.



WRITINGS BY LEGALISTS

Liu Tsung-yuan

The Snake-Catcher

The country around Yungchow* yields a curious snake—black with white spots. Any plant it touches dies, and its bite is fatal. But if caught and dried for medicine, it cures leprosy, palsy and boils, heals putrid sores and checks all noxious humours. In earlier times it was decreed that two of these snakes should be presented each year to the imperial physician, and that those who captured them should be exempted from taxes. So the people of Yungchow made every effort to catch them.

I questioned a man named Chiang, whose family had made a living in this way for three generations.

"My grandfather died of snake-bite, so did my father," he told me, his face drawn with grief. "Now I've followed in their steps for twelve years, and narrowly escaped death many times."

I pitied him.

"If you hate this calling," I said, "I can ask the authorities to release you from it and let you resume paying taxes instead. What do you say?"

*Present-day Lingling County in Hunan Province, where Liu Tsung-yuan was banished after the failure of the reform movement.

Chiang was appalled. Tears welled up in his eyes.

"Have mercy, sir, and let me live!" he cried. "Though this is a wretched life, it's better than paying taxes. If not for being a snake-catcher I'd have come to grief long ago. For the sixty years that my grandfather, father and I have lived here, our neighbours have been more hard put to it every day. When all the produce of their land, all their earnings have gone to pay taxes, they leave their homes lamenting, to fall hungry and thirsty by the wayside; or toil winter and summer in the wind and rain, breathing pestilential air, falling ill of plague, till often their corpses pile up. Of my grandfather's generation, not one in ten is left; not three in ten of my father's; and not five in ten of those who twelve years ago were my neighbours. Those not dead have fled while I live on alone — because I catch snakes!

"When those savage tax-collectors come to our district, they bel-low curses from east to west and rampage from north to south, raising such a fearful din that the very fowls and dogs have no peace. Then I tiptoe from my bed to look into my pitcher, breathing freely again at the sight of my snakes and lying down once more. I feed my snakes carefully and present them in due season, then come home to enjoy the fruits of my fields in comfort. I risk death twice a year but for the rest of the time live happily, unlike my neighbours who face death every day. Even if I die today, I shall have outlived most of them. How could I hate this calling?"

The more I heard, the more I pitied the fellow.

I used to doubt that saying of Confucius: Tyranny is more rapacious than a tiger.* But Chiang's case has convinced me of its truth. Alas, to think that taxation is more pernicious than a poisonous snake! So I have written this for those officials who study conditions in the countryside.

*A saying from the *Book of Rites* attributed to Confucius and originally used to slander the political reforms introduced by the newly emerging landlord class. Here Liu uses it in the opposite sense to mean that the reactionaries of his time were oppressing the people so cruelly that political reforms were necessary. The Legalists after the Han Dynasty often employed these tactics, using the words of Confucius to attack the Confucians.

The Bear

The deer is afraid of the leopard, the leopard of the tiger, and the tiger of the bear. The bear has shaggy hair and can stand on two legs. Its great strength makes it most dangerous to men.

South of the land of Chu* there lived a hunter who could imitate the cries of all beasts on his bamboo pipe. One day, taking his bow and arrows and a pitcher containing embers, he climbed the hills to make the sound of a deer, so that when a deer came, attracted by the cry, he could light a fire and shoot it. A leopard ran up, however, on hearing this cry; and the hunter in his alarm made the noise of a tiger to scare it away. As soon as the leopard left, a tiger arrived; then the hunter, more frightened than ever, made the noise of a bear. At that the tiger fled, but a bear came in search of a mate. Finding a man, it seized him with both paws, tore him limb from limb, and ate him.

All those who rely today on some power not their own will meet a similar doom.

*The regions including the present-day provinces of Hupeh and Hunan.

Three Fables

I have always disliked those men of today who, blind to their own shortcomings, take advantage of circumstances or powerful protectors to lord it over others, bragging of their skill and seizing every chance to swagger. Such bullies always come to grief in the end. I shall therefore relate three cautionary tales I have heard about a deer, a donkey and some rats, which remind me of such men.

The Deer of Linchiang

A man of Linchiang* caught a fawn and decided to keep it. But when he took it home, all his dogs bounded over drooling and wagging their tails. He angrily called them to heel. Every day after that he carried the fawn to the dogs to accustom them to it and teach them not to hurt it. And by degrees he allowed them to play together.

As time went by, all his dogs did as he wished. The fawn grew up and forgot it was a deer, thinking dogs were its true friends. It would butt them, lie down beside them, and make quite free with them. And the dogs, out of fear of their master, played up to it. From time to time, though, they would lick their chaps.

When three years had passed, the deer went out of the gate. Seeing many dogs from elsewhere on the road, it ran over to play with them. But the sight of it threw these strange dogs into a frenzy. They fell on the deer and devoured it, scattering its remains on the ground. And so the deer perished without understanding the reason.

*Present-day Chingchiang County in Kiangsi Province.

The Donkey of Kweichow

There were no donkeys in Kweichow until someone officious took one there by boat; but finding no use for it he set it loose in the hills. A tiger who saw this monstrous looking beast thought it must be divine. It first surveyed the donkey from under cover, then ventured a little nearer, still keeping a respectful distance however.

One day the donkey brayed. The tiger took fright and fled for fear of being bitten, in utter terror. But it came back for another look, and decided this creature was not so formidable after all. Then growing used to the braying it drew nearer, though it still dared not attack. Coming nearer still, it began to take liberties, shoving, jostling, and charging roughly, till the donkey lost its temper and kicked out.

“So that’s all it can do!” thought the tiger jubilantly.

Then it leapt on the donkey and sank its teeth into it, severing its throat and devouring it before going on its way.

Poor donkey! Its size made it look powerful, and its bray made it sound redoubtable. Had it not shown all it was capable of, the tiger fierce as it was might not have dared to attack. But such, alas, was the donkey’s untimely end!

The Rats of Yungchow

A certain householder in Yungchow had a dread of unlucky days and observed strict taboos. Because he was born in the year of the Rat,* he considered rats as holy. This being the case, he would keep no cat or dog and forbade his servants to catch rats. Unchecked, they had the run of his store-rooms and kitchen.

*The ancient Confucians believed that different years were governed by different animal deities.

As news of this spread among rats, more and more of them flocked to his house, where they could eat their fill with nothing to fear. They broke all the household utensils, gnawed through all the clothes on the hangers. The household had to make do with the food they left over. Processions of rats mingled freely with men in broad daylight, and at night they made such a din by gnawing things up and fighting that no one could sleep. Still the inmates of the house put up with them.

After some years this family left and another household moved in, but the rats carried on as before.

"These are creatures of darkness," said the newcomers, "but now they are running riot. Why were they allowed to get out of hand like this?"

They borrowed five or six cats, closed all the doors, removed the tiles from the roof and poured water down all the holes, hiring men to help them catch the rats. Soon a mound of dead rats was piled up in a corner, and the place stank for several months.

This is a lesson for those who think they can fill their bellies for ever at the expense of others with nothing to fear.

Liu Tsung-yuan's Prose Writings

Liu Tsung-yuan (773-819), a well-known Legalist of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), was a statesman with a materialist outlook as well as an outstanding man of letters.

Born in a small landlord family, he lived during a period when the once prosperous Tang Dynasty was in decline. Powerful eunuchs had usurped authority in the central government while provincial commanders were seizing autonomy. The rich were annexing more and more land from the poor, taxes and levies were inordinate, the central authority was very weak and the economy seriously disrupted. So iniquitous was the rule of the nobles and great landowners and so cruel their exploitation of the common people that the latter lived in misery and class contradictions sharpened from day to day. As this chaos affected the interests of the smaller landlords, within the ruling class itself the contradictions also became more acute.

The nobles and big landlord class used the reactionary ideas of Confucianism to bolster up their rule, retain their hereditary privileges and guard their vested interests. They publicized the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius and initiated a retrogressive political and ideological trend which served the interests of the nobility, big land-

owners and those who followed a separatist line. The smaller landlord class, on the other hand, having their own interests at heart, proposed reforms and the centralization of power to weaken the eunuchs and regional commanders. This led to a sharp clash within the landlord class between the die-hards and reformists. Progress or retrogression, national unity or separatism — these were the key issues between the Confucians and Legalists of that period.

In his youth Liu was relatively close to the lower strata of society and deeply influenced by early Legalist thought. He opposed the abuses of the middle Tang period. Together with the poet Liu Yu-hsi (772-842) and other scholars holding similar views he joined the reform party headed by Wang Shu-wen (753-806). In 805 Wang Shu-wen gained control of the government for a short time and carried out a reformist political line, strengthening the authority of the central government and the unity of the country. This was a powerful blow to the conservative forces: the local separatists as well as the eunuchs, nobles and big landlords. These counter-attacked so vigorously that this attempt at political reform was aborted. Liu was banished more than once to remote regions, spending the last years of his life as an outcast in the southern provinces.

During his banishment Liu was attacked and persecuted by the die-hards, yet he never faltered in his convictions. On the contrary, in his fourteen years of exile the sufferings of the people and the calamities caused by bad rule which he saw for himself served to increase his hatred of the reactionaries, confirming his belief in the need for reform. He once said that even if banished ten thousand times he would never change his stand. And he used his pen as a weapon, writing much militant poetry and prose to advocate Legalist ideas and criticize the doctrines of Confucius. In one poem, he compared himself and other reformists to a captive eagle longing to break out of its cage "to soar through the clouds freed from all entanglements".

Liu used the old concept of *Tao* — the Way — to sum up his Legalist line. But the main idea in his "Way" is denial of the existence of the mandate from Heaven and recognition that all things must change and develop, and therefore all political measures must be based on the actual needs of the times. In other words he was a materialist

in his philosophical outlook, while in politics he was for reform and against conservatism and retrogression; he was for rule by law and against rule by rites, for national unity and against separatism. He believed that literature should serve politics and declared that "literature should manifest the Way". Decrying the euphuistic prose full of empty bombast and stereotyped parallelisms which had been in vogue from the third to the sixth century, he tried to use new and more expressive prose forms and language to put over his Legalist views. In his opinion, literature should reflect reality, praising what was good and condemning or satirizing what was bad in society. In this connection he laid down some excellent guidelines, saying for example, "The Way is manifested through writing, and writing is handed down through books as long as it conforms to the Way." This makes clear the dialectical relationship between form and content in literature. He maintained that polemical essays should "possess lofty vision, vigour and depth, a serious style and comprehensive reasoning". Narrative and belles-lettres should be "splendid yet disciplined, clear and original, with beautiful language easily understood". And he set an example of this in his own writings.

Views on political reform occupy an important place in Liu Tsung-yuan's writings. He wrote character essays to expose the iniquities of his time and express his political views. One such essay is *The Snake-Catcher* published in this issue. Written after his banishment, by describing three generations of snake-catchers it tellingly reveals what the people suffered from inordinate taxation and rapacious officials after years of civil wars between local commanders. "Of my grandfather's generation, not one in ten is left." This sentence epitomizes the bankruptcy of the countryside which was leading to more serious social upheavals and also projects the theme — the cruel exploitation of the peasants by the landlord class. "Alas, to think that taxation is more pernicious than a poisonous snake!" This is an indignant denunciation of the vicious rulers of that day. However, one of his important reform policies was the reduction of taxes; thus the final sentence "so I have written this for those officials who study conditions in the countryside" shows that he still had illusions that the rulers might introduce social reforms. This was owing to the limitations of his class.

Eager to shore up the tottering rule of the landlord class, Liu was convinced that it could escape ruin only by carrying out certain reforms to strengthen the feudal order. It is true that his aim was to prolong the rule of the Tang Dynasty; but in that historical context the disclosure of abuses by enlightened members of the landlord class had a progressive significance.

Liu Tsung-yuan wrote various short character sketches, most of them dealing with men from the lower classes as in the case of *The Snake-Catcher*. Thus *The Story of Young Ou Chi* describes a quick-witted and courageous young cowherd, *Camel Kuo the Tree Planter* deals with a nurseryman, while the hero of *Sung Ching* is an apothecary in the market. These descriptions of members of the lower orders reflect the sad lot of the labouring people and the sharp class contradictions of that time.

Writing prose romances was the vogue among Liu's literati contemporaries, whose chief characters were usually talented scholars and young ladies. Liu's concentration on underdogs was significant in classical Chinese literature. It also shows that he did not hold with the Confucian view that the upper classes were wise and the lower benighted. These concise stories of his with their clear themes are good works of realism.

Another important theme in Liu's prose writings is his firm belief in national unity and his opposition to separatist tendencies. In his day, the struggle between unity and separatism was mainly manifested in people's attitude towards regional forces. Although the local commanders were originally officers appointed by the central government, by the middle Tang period some of them controlled several prefectures and were becoming more and more powerful. They set up their own political, economic and military institutions within the areas they controlled and appointed their own officers, refusing to send revenues to the court, so that they were independent local despots. The existence of so many separatist forces large and small throughout the empire greatly weakened the power of the central government. It was a case of the tail growing too big to be controlled by the head.

The Confucians of that time defended separatist tendencies. To refute them, Liu wrote his brilliant essay *On Ducal States*. In this, he used an evolutionary viewpoint to demonstrate that the establishment of ducal states in slave society was a natural result of historical development while the subsequent establishment of provinces and counties during the feudal period was also a necessary step forward in history. He analysed the rise and fall of different dynasties, coming to the conclusion that the feudal system of dividing the empire into provinces and counties was superior to the ducal states of slave society. Stating explicitly that history could not be reversed, he showed his firm political stand for progress and unity and against retrogression and separatism. In this way he dealt a forceful blow against Confucianism and against those separatist forces which were undermining the central government and splitting up the empire.

The fable *The Bear* in this issue further develops this idea. The inept hunter who ends up being killed by the bear satirizes the rulers during the reign of Emperor Teh Tsung (780-805) who foolishly tried to pit different regional commanders against each other as the local separatist forces grew more and more unruly. When one commander rebelled, the court would rely on others to crush the rebel; and those who came off victorious would seize the chance to expand their own power, leading to greater rebellions, just as the hunter after chasing away the leopard was confronted by the more ferocious tiger, and after chasing away the tiger found himself unable to escape from the bear. The conclusion is: "All those who rely today on some power not their own will meet a similar doom." Here Liu summarized the lesson of past history putting forward again the view expressed in his essay *On Ducal States* that the ruler should control the armed forces and choose suitable governors, and his political ideal of reform and unity.

Liu wrote many fables directed against the corrupt conservative forces of his day, making passionate and scathing exposures of the iniquities of his political enemies and other evil-doers. The *Three Fables* in this issue is an example of this. "The Deer of Linchiang" shows how those who rely on the power of others will sooner or later come to a bad end. "The Donkey of Kweichow" satirizes

die-hards who may appear awe-inspiring and powerful but actually have no real strength and, like the donkey, will finally be devoured by a small tiger. This story of the big donkey falling prey to a young tiger expresses the truth that the small and vigorous can overcome the old and moribund. "The Rats of Yungchow" is a satire on obstreperous local warlords who were undermining the country. He hoped that some new master would come to wipe out these pests. Although this shows his desire for unity and his aversion to disunity, the fact that he placed his hope on some new ruler again reveals the class limitations of his thinking. These fables were written soon after the defeat of the reform party, when the conservative forces including the regional commanders, the eunuchs, certain high officials who represented the interests of the big landlord class, and their stooges were rampant. In the eyes of Liu Tsung-yuan, all these opportunists and flunkeys had no real strength and were doomed.

Most of Liu's fables deal with the animal kingdom, with creatures such as the bear, deer, donkey, rats or dung-beetles. Concisely and vividly written, with a subtle meaning, they display his mastery of satire.

Liu Tsung-yuan was an outstanding poet too who has left more than one hundred and forty poems. The majority of these express his grief and indignation after his banishment as well as his firm convictions and fighting spirit.

Liu Tsung-yuan's political and philosophical ideas so ably expressed in his writings have enriched Chinese literature. But as he was after all a political reformer of the landlord class, his reforms could not be radical enough to transform the feudal system. Moreover, many of his progressive ideas were put forward ostensibly to explain the "Sage's Way". For instance, at the end of *The Snake-Catcher* he quotes a statement attributed to Confucius, "Tyranny is more rapacious than a tiger", to point out the harsh exploitation of the masses by the rulers and the need for political reform. Of course, using a Confucian cloak for Legalist ideas was an effective ruse in political struggle, but at the same time it shows that he was not completely free from the fetters of Confucian orthodoxy. In some of his writings, again, he reveals something of the escapism and pessimism of frustrated feudal literati. These are his failings.

NOTES ON ART

Tien Niu

On the Dance Drama "Ode to the Yimeng Mountains"

The background of this dance drama is the people's militant life in the old revolutionary base around the Yimeng Mountains of Shantung Province during the War of Liberation (1946-1949). Depicting the stirring story of a poor peasant woman who saves the life of a wounded PLA soldier by giving him milk from her own breast, this dance drama is an ode to the heroes and heroines who incarnate the spirit embodied in Chairman Mao's words, **"If the army and the people are united as one, who in the world can match them?"** With its well-knit plot and skilful characterization the drama achieves a high level of artistry.

The time is the autumn of 1947 when the War of Liberation is entering its second year. The Chinese revolution is at a historical turning-point when darkness gives place to dawn. To implement Chairman Mao's grand strategy of switching from strategic defence to a strategic offensive, our People's Liberation Army embarks on large-scale mobile warfare and withdraws temporarily from some areas formerly in our hands. In a last-ditch fight, the Kuomintang reactionaries

concentrate heavy forces to start a frenzied attack on our Yimeng base area. The dramatic conflict starts with the enemy combing the area for a wounded PLA platoon leader, Fang T'ieh-chun. A battle centring around this search develops between the enemy and our people, setting the stage for the heroine Ying-sao's fight to foil the enemy. Ying-sao's actions fall into three categories — rescuing, nursing and then protecting the wounded man — with emphasis on the first. However, by depicting her care for and protection of the wounded man, the dance drama unfolds the heroine's inner world and brings the dramatic conflict to a climax.

In the scene "Milk is sweeter than water, the army and the people's hearts are linked", typical dance movements and poses are employed, supplemented by music, decor and other artistic forms to delineate the main facet of the heroine's character, her class love for the worker-peasant army. She appears in circumstances fraught with danger, when the landlord's revanchist forces are searching all around for our wounded and Fang T'ieh-chun, on his way to catch up with his unit, faints from thirst and loss of blood behind a bush. It is a critical moment. She has come up the mountain to gather wild herbs and suddenly sees bloodstains which lead her to where the wounded soldier lies. The unconscious man moaning for water makes her desperate to find water for him. But his canteen is empty. What can she do? In her anxiety, she puts one hand to her breast, the other holding the canteen, lost in thought. Then it occurs to her that milk can quench thirst just as well as water. She squeezes milk from her own breasts into the soldier's canteen, and puts it to his lips until he revives. She then carefully hides him in a cave. The heroine's dance in this scene projects the three concepts, blood, water and milk, stress being laid on the transition from lacking water to supplying milk. With exaggerated dance movements mounting step by step to a crescendo, the choreography expresses her deep class feelings as she grieves and worries for the wounded man. When she finally reappears holding the canteen of milk in both hands, there is great beauty in her pose with one leg in the air and her eyes bent with love on the unconscious soldier. Here a close integration of choreography with the character's emotions is achieved. The stirring singing offstage of "Milk saves

the wounded, deep is her love for the army" combines with the lyrical quality of the dance to express the heroine's unblemished class love and lofty revolutionary qualities still more vividly.

Now that Fang T'ieh-chun's life is saved, the struggle deepens as she contrives to nurse him. In the scene, "The stove burns bright at night, deep is proletarian class love," we see the heroine sitting up at night rolling bandages by a stove on which a pot of chicken broth is bubbling. She has killed one of her hens to nourish the wounded man and speed up his recovery. All is quiet as the night deepens. The red glow from the stove highlights the heroine's inner world. Melodious southern Shantung folk songs behind the scenes accompany her solo dance, a dance crystallizing the heartfelt feelings of the people in the old revolutionary bases for their own army.

"Add another handful of wood from our Mengshan Mountain to make the fire brighter, put in a ladle of Yiho River water to show our intense love. Let our dear one recover quickly so that he can return to the front to fight for the people's liberation." This revelation of the heroine's political consciousness and revolutionary passion as she tenderly nurses the wounded man heightens her moral stature.

Saving the life of a wounded man and then nursing him safely back to health under the very eyes of the enemy cannot but involve acute and fierce class struggle. Drawing upon the creative experience derived from the production of the revolutionary model theatrical works, this dance drama depicts the main heroic character in the midst of typical conflicts and struggles. Ying-sao, the heroine, is constantly portrayed as the central figure and the principal aspect of each contradiction, thus bringing out her heroism in sheltering the PLA man at the risk of her own life and imbuing her with a vivid feature of our times.

She is calm and composed when the landlords' armed thugs break in on her in the middle of the night and, pointing to the chicken broth on the stove and a towel belonging to Fang, demand to know where she has hidden him. Her deft leap and hand gestures show her utter contempt for these moribund forces. And when they strike her, the fearless determination with which she fights back with her clever demonstrates the militancy and hatred for the enemy of poor peasant

women in the old revolutionary bases. When the enemy set a trap to induce her to reveal the whereabouts of the wounded soldier, she outwits them and with the help of a neighbour gives them the slip, displaying great resourcefulness and courage as she takes the basket with the chicken broth uphill to the wounded man. When the enemy discover the cave where Fang is hiding and set fire to the hill, she shows a great spirit of self-sacrifice by revealing her own whereabouts to draw the enemy away from him.

The portrayal of Ying-sao's character culminates in the scene, "Sacrificing herself to save the people's army, she enables the landlords' forces to be wiped out!" Here the climax comes when the enemy threaten to kill her baby to make her give up the wounded PLA man. Fearless in the face of this cruel test, Ying-sao draws inspiration from the masses' support and, uniting closely with them, persists in the struggle. At the critical moment when a blood-thirsty thug picks up the baby, Fang Tieh-chun comes out of hiding. He snatches the child from the enemy's clutches and clasps him to his heart, ready to give his own life rather than see the people come to harm. At this point the masses, with Ying-sao at the forefront, rush forward to protect their fighter, braving death and destruction themselves.

It is in fierce struggles like these that the heroine's fearless character, her daring and skill in struggle develop in breadth and depth. Delineation of various facets of her character enriches her main feature, making Ying-sao appear not only loftier in stature but better rounded out in character. At the same time the central theme, the class love between the army and the people, is also reflected in depth.

Ying-sao is an ordinary poor peasant woman in an old revolutionary base. But nurtured by the Party and guided by Chairman Mao's revolutionary line, she has the political consciousness to link herself wholly with the victory of the great people's war of liberation. She dares to smash the centuries-old fetters of traditional ideas by offering her own milk to save the wounded PLA man. She dares to confront a savage enemy with courage and intelligence, using every wile to shelter the wounded man, displaying both wisdom and strength in the ensuing struggle. In the presentation of Ying-sao's personality, the revolutionary heroism and staunchness of the proletariat is artistically

generalized so that the drama presents an image with traits common to all proletarian heroes. The image of this poor peasant woman is thus a glorious prototype of the worker-peasant masses which gave birth to the people's army. Herein lies the typicalness of Ying-sao, which gives historical depth to the theme of this dance drama.

Adhering to the principle that life is the source of art but art must be on a higher level than life, the dance vocabulary of this drama, designed to bring out the significance of the theme and project a fine proletarian heroine, has achieved some success in weeding through the old to bring forth the new. The script writers paid many visits to the Yimeng Mountains to learn from the local people and to collect stories about their support for the army and how they helped the PLA at the front. Living in their midst enabled them to understand their new spirit and outlook since the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. They were then able to summarize the raw material of life there from the height of the people's understanding today and so to create for the heroic characters a vividly contemporaneous dance vocabulary vibrant with the tang of life.

Following the principle of making the past serve the present and foreign things serve China, new attempts were also made at integrating national and folk-dance movements with classical ballet forms. For instance, Ying-sao's lyrical solo dance as she makes chicken broth at night successfully combines the rhythm of Shantung's *yangko* dance with the ballet pirouette in order to add a fresh earthy touch to the choreographic image of this poor peasant woman.

As regards the music too, revolutionary folk-song melodies popular in the Yimeng Mountains were used as a base to create the stirring revolutionary theme tune with its strong local flavour which permeates the whole drama.

In all these respects, this dance drama provides fresh artistic experience for the proletarian revolution in literature and art. It is yet another fine result of the implementation of Chairman Mao's revolutionary line in literature and art.

Ode to the Yimeng Mountains has been made into a colour film which is now on show throughout the country.

Wuhu Iron Pictures

Iron pictures are a distinctive form of folk art.

During the 18th century, there lived in Wuhu, Anhwei Province, a blacksmith named Tang Tien-chih who loved pictures. As one of his neighbours was a painter, Tang liked to go and watch him at work. One day the artist rounded on him, however, saying that a blacksmith had no right to interest himself in art. This goaded Tang into trying his hand at making pictures himself; but instead of ink-stone and brushes, he used his sledge-hammer and anvil to produce wrought-iron pictures. This is how this special form of art came into being.

Before Liberation, however, iron pictures like many other folk arts nearly died out. After Liberation the Communist Party of China and the people's government set great store by traditional folk arts. The Wuhu municipal authorities discovered a veteran craftsman Chu Yen-ching, the last exponent of this craft in the city, and encouraged him to train apprentices. After great care was taken to help revive this craft, it eventually acquired a new lease of life.



Yang Tzu-jung kills a tiger (an iron picture)

Although the materials needed for iron pictures are simply thin iron sheets and wires, the working process is highly intricate, calling for a sound basic knowledge of metal-work and as much expertise as in ivory-carving. Every detail in a picture, ranging from huge rocks to the fine veins of a leaf, must be made thoroughly life-like. The craftsman must first have a clear mental picture of the subject he means to portray, then decide which method — forging, welding, boring, cutting or pressing — best suits each component part. When

the composition is finished, he coats the wrought-iron with black lacquer to prevent rust then sets it in a frame backed by a fine white paper traditionally used for painting.

After the revival of this art, the craftsmen received help from professional painters and adopted certain methods of expression used in traditional Chinese painting. They introduced new working processes, combining welding with forging, and succeeded in making their black iron pictures stand out in sharp relief in a way reminiscent of traditional ink paintings but with a three dimensional effect.

Since the Cultural Revolution, the craftsmen have done much to overcome the poor depiction of figures which was formerly a weakness of this art. They have created many heroic images drawn from

The veteran craftsman passing on his skill



Pine (an iron picture)

the model revolutionary theatrical works. These pictures with their strong lines and clearly contrasted black and white project the lofty stature of such proletarian heroes as Yang Tzu-jung from the Peking opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, Wu Ching-hua, the heroine of the dance drama *Red Detachment of Women* and Kuo Chien-kuang from the Peking opera *Shachiapang*.

In the past iron pictures were made by copying every detail of some model down to each single petal of a flower, each leaf of a bamboo. But now the craftsmen are able to design their own pictures. Their creativity being brought into play, they have enhanced their power of expression.

CHRONICLE

Festival of New Stage Productions in Peking

Another festival of new stage productions from different provinces and autonomous regions has been held in Peking.

Troupes from the five provinces of Chinghai, Shantung, Anhwei, Kiangsu and Fukien performed more than twenty items: adaptations of modern revolutionary Peking operas or separate scenes from them in various local opera forms — *luchu*, *huangmei*, *huaichu*, *minchu*, Chinghai *pinghsuan* and Tibetan opera — as well as some new stage productions including dramas, music and dances.

Rosny Children Choir in China

Fifty members of the Rosny Children Choir from Australia visited Peking and Shanghai in June and received a warm welcome.

During their visit, they performed over thirty songs in various styles including such well-known folk-songs as *Click Go the Shears*, *The Stock-Rider's Song*, *The Song of Youth* and *The Australian Sunrise*. They also sang in Chinese *I Love Peking's Tien An Men* and another Chinese song *Young Pine Tree* to express their friendship to the Chinese people.

The Australian children's choir's visit to China has helped to foster the friendship between the peoples of China and Australia.

Another Collection of Popular Songs Published in Peking

The fourth series of *New Songs on the Battlefield* was published recently by the Music Publishing House of Peking.

This collection contains one hundred and six songs published in various parts of the country since last year. They reflect the enthusiasm and revolutionary drive of China's various nationalities in the socialist revolution and construction, being strikingly militant and imbued with the spirit of our era.

Children's Art Exhibition in Shanghai

An exhibition of art works by children aged from four to fourteen opened recently in Shanghai.

Over four hundred works were shown including traditional Chinese paintings, oils, gouaches, New-Year pictures, woodcuts, serial-pictures, scissor-cuts, embroidery and woven tapestries. Their fresh political content and vigour demonstrate the new spirit of children in New China.

Excavation of a Tang Dynasty Tomb in Hupeh

Recently a seventh-century Tang Dynasty tomb was excavated at Yunhsien, Hupeh Province. It was the tomb of Li Tai the third son of Emperor Tai Tsung who reigned from 627-649.

The tomb is fairly large, 36.3 metres in length. It consists of the burial chamber, main passage leading to this, side passages and small shrines. The burial chamber is square, 4.9 metres each way and 5 metres high. It has an arched roof, on the ceiling of which is a painting of the constellations; on the walls there are other paintings.

Among the objects excavated is a box containing well-carved stone inscriptions recording the life of this prince and the struggle for power in the imperial house. There are 158 gold and silver objects, including a gold lion, gold bracelets, gold hairpins, gold ingots and silver pins. The lion weighing 358.5 grams is a finely executed and beau-

tiful work of art. More than three thousand grams of gold were unearthed from the tomb. Such a large hoard of gold has never been discovered in other ancient tombs in this province. Pottery figurines of horsemen, musicians, guards of honour, horses and camels were also unearthed, as well as green and white porcelain jars, bronze mirrors and crystal beads.

The excavation of Li Tai's tomb provides fresh data for the study of Tang Dynasty history.



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A Bumper Catch (scissor-cut)

by **Pan Pao-chi**



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