CHINESE LITERATURE

CONTENTS

3

1955

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CONTENTS

NEW PLAYS

INTRODUCING

CULTURAL EVENTS

PLATES

No. 3, 1955

CHINESE LITERATURE
QUARTERLY

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ASHMA

I

A fine bamboo we lengthwise split
  In two, four, eight, sixteen,
And choose a piece without a flaw
  To fashion a mô-sheen.

For when the soft mô-sheen is played,
  Our inmost thoughts are told.
No sweeter music has been heard;
  We love it more than gold.

Beneath the rock bees build their hive,
  And make their honey sweet;
But I, I cannot make a hive,
  Or honey good to eat.

Beside the pool the long grass grows,
  And cuckoos sing in spring;
But I, I cannot grow like grass,
  And neither can I sing!

A crooked tree makes worthless wood:
  My voice was never strong;
And I can do no justice to
  A sweet and tuneful song.

This is one of the oldest ballads of the Shani people—a branch of the Yi, one of China's fraternal nationalities. No written text of this poem exists in the Shani language. This translation is based on a Chinese version published by the People's Literary Press, Peking. See *Chinese Literature* No. 1, 1955.

It would be wrong to shirk my song;
  But what song can I sing?
A story of a mountain maid,
  A woodland flower of spring!

Our forebears told their sons this tale,
  In ages long ago:
Each generation passed it on;
  It never ceased to grow.

A little water buffalo
  Plods onward unafraid,
And plants its four hooves in the tracks
  The mother cow has made.

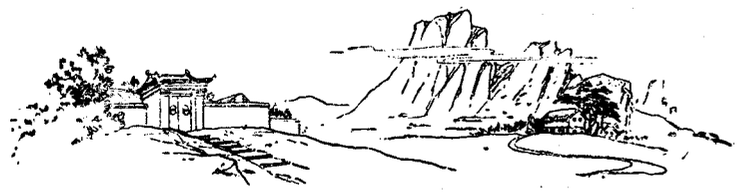
The bitter buckwheat has no barbs,
  Sweet buckwheat, though, has three.
We love the land where we were born,
  We love each hill and lea.

Now, trusty friends and brothers true,
  And elders, every one!
Oh, tell me how the tune is sung,
  And how the tale should run.

For if I am to sing a song,
  What song, pray, shall I sing?
A story of a mountain maid,
  A woodland flower of spring!

Wild geese which have no tail stretch back
  Their feet to fly instead;
And though I am no singer, still,
  I must not hide my head.

Oh, trusty friends and brothers true,
  And elders good, as well,
Pray ask the three trees by the stream
  Which story I should tell?



II

We Shani folk live in Ajdee,
  And there in High Ajdee
There were three plots untilled by man,
  And smokeless buildings three.

For whom were these three holdings left?
  None but a loving pair!
And whose were these three empty rooms?
  True lovers should live there.

There were three pools untouched by man,
  With water bright and clear.
Oh, who would drink of these three pools?
  Why, none but lovers dear.

Three groves where never man had walked
  Had leaves of emerald green.
For whom were these three orchards left?
  For love to walk between.

Klujmin it was and his sweet wife
  Who 'mid these trees did roam;
They tilled the land beside the pools,
  And made the place their home.

To find the flowers Klujmin grew
  Bees came from far away;
They came to sip the nectar sweet,
  Throughout the livelong day.

Their cassia trees were sweet to smell,
And sweet their daughter fair;
And straighter than a sapling pine
The son they nurtured there.

But far away in Low Ajdee
Lives sly Rabûbalor.
His household harboured wicked hearts,
No ant dared pass his door.

The household of Rabûbalor
Was rich beyond compare;
But to his flowers no bees would come
To sip the nectar there.

His courtyard trees grew all awry,
His son was just the same;
A surly, wizened ape was he,
And Ajii was his name.

III

Quite otherwise was Klujmin's son,
And he was named Ahay;
Like some green pine upon the hill,
He'd break but ne'er give way.

No tree grows taller than the pine:
It fears not winter's cold;
As if he'd supped on tiger's blood,
Ahay was lithe and bold.

In wind and storm he climbed the hill
To cut and gather wood;
He cleared the rocky land for crops,
His maize grew tall and good.

Ahay from boyhood rode bareback,
None sat a horse so well;
When in the chase he bent his bow,
His quarry always fell.

And when he sang, the thrush would fly
To join him in his lay,
And racing stags would pause to hear
When on his pipe he'd play.

The Shani elders loved him well,
The young men's hero he;
The Shani people sang his praise
For his great bravery!

Eagles alight on mountain tops,
Flowers grow by water clear;
A younger sister had Ahay,
And she was Ashma dear.

One day, out of the azure sky,
A flower fell to earth;
It fell into the Ajdee land,
And this was Ashma's birth.

The Shani folk made merry then,
And laughed aloud in glee.
Have you no tub to wash the babe?
Then buy one in Luhsi.

The tubs and basins in Luhsi
Are all with gold inlaid;
And she will be as good as gold,
The pretty little maid.

Three pools of water crystal clear,
From each bring ladles three;
And lave therein the bonny babe,
How fair the child will be!

No moon is whiter than her face
Or tiny form so sweet,
No turnip whiter than her hands,
No egg shell than her feet.

As soft and plaintive melody,
The three-day infant's cry;
And when her mother combs her hair,
It shimmers glossily.

From Luliang buy a spinning wheel,
A shuttle from Kunming;
From Chuching buy a treadle too,
And all is set to spin.

Oh, Lunan flax is long and fine,
And Hsiangyun cotton best;
A length of cloth can soon be spun
To make the child a vest.

From Chenchiang we get silver thread,
From Iliang thread of gold,
With which to make the swaddling-bands
The little babe to hold.

The day that she was one month old,
Up spoke her father dear:
"To celebrate this happy day,
Let friends be gathered here."

"We'll choose a name to give the child,"
Her loving mother said.
"Let all rejoice," said young Ahay,
"And food for guests be spread."

For ninety-nine the board was laid,
But by six score was filled;
A hundred pigs were brought as gifts,
But twenty more were killed.*

The guests brought wine kegs ninety-nine,
But drank a full six score;
And to the hundred dishes brought
They added twenty more.

"How shall we name our little one?"
The mother asked each guest.
"Pray choose my pretty babe a name,"
The father made request.

Then all the village elders spoke,
Their answer was the same:
"As Ashma let the child be known;
Let Ashma be her name."

"Ashma!" they shouted one and all,
The very rafters rung;
And ever after, Ashma's name
Was heard on every tongue.

IV

From day to day sweet Ashma grew,
Till three months old was she;
When gay as cricket was her laugh,
She crowed so merrily.

*The Shani people use ninety-nine and one hundred and twenty to describe any very great number.

From day to day sweet Ashma grew,
  Until at five months old,
Her parents laughed to see her crawl,
  So nimble and so bold!

At seven months she learned to run,
  And blithe and gay did dart
Like some small ball of hempen yarn
  To cheer her parents' heart.

At six or seven, beside the door,
  She wound her mother's thread;
At eight or nine, with pack on back,
  Wild herbs she harvested.

From day to day sweet Ashma grew,
  Till she knew summers ten;
In shoes of straw, she took a scythe
  To mow the hillside then.

Oh, who could ease her father's toil,
  And cheer her mother sad?
Young Ashma helped her parents dear,
  And made their hearts right glad.

From day to day sweet Ashma grew,
  Till twelve years old was she;
And water bucket, kitchen stove
  Were all her company.

From day to day sweet Ashma grew,
  Until she was fourteen;
And, staff in hand, to tend her flocks
  She climbed the mountain green.

On mountain crags she tended goats,
  And sheep within the pass;
The flowers bowed before the wind,
  Her cattle cropped the grass.

TSAO KE-HUNG: Cats

Within the shade of some great tree
  The shepherdesses sat,
To sew a patchwork jacket bright,
  A gaudy skirt or hat.

Oh, gently then the light wind blew,
  To waft the pine cones' smell;
And, chatting as they sat to sew,
  Of Ashma all spoke well.

"The flowers on her embroidery
  With bright camellias vie;
Her woolly sheep are whiter far
  Than clouds in autumn sky.

"Among ten thousand lovely flowers,
  Our Ashma blooms most fair;
Among ten thousand Shani girls,
  None can with her compare."

From day to day sweet Ashma grew,
  Until she was fifteen;
A ball of yarn beneath her arm,
  She learned the way to spin.

And at her loom a length she wove
  Of linen dazzling white,
Broad as the waving *chientao* grass,
  As cotton fine and light.

From day to day sweet Ashma grew,
  Until she was sixteen;
She helped Ahay with all her might
  To till the ridges green.

Ahay ploughed up the land before,
  And Ashma scattered seeds,
While soil flew up on either side,
  As wild ducks flap through reeds.

The maize seed in the furrow fell,
In eight days shoots were seen;
And like the wings of moths in flight
The lusty leaves grew green.

And eight days after it was sown,
Up sprang the Indian corn;
As green as emerald were its leaves
And curved as bullock's horn.

From day to day sweet Ashma grew,
Till she was seventeen;
With turban bright and apron gay,
No fairer maid was seen.

She took her flax from off her bed,
Her mô-sheen from the wall,
And went at evening to the camp*
With lads and lasses all.

A bonfire blazed inside the camp
Within the cabins' square;
And as the young folk watched the flames,
Their singing filled the air.

What drew the young men to the camp?
Her singing clear and high.
And Ashma taught the other girls—
Their shuttles deftly fly.

Oh, Ashma, you are sweet and fair
Beside the other maids,
As sweet as grow the sweet wild pinks
That blow in Shani glades.

*Shani lads and lasses, from the age of twelve to the time of their marriage, sleep in separate camps for boys and girls.

Oh, darling of your mother's heart,
Your father's joy and pride,
You grew like some white flower in spring,
By your dear parents' side.

Then you might choose embroidery,
Or you might choose to sew;
To work or rest as you thought best,
To tarry or to go.

Then should you wish a love to take,
They would not say you nay;
And should you wish to marry him,
You need but name the day.

"Together pine and cypress grow,
And rivers seek the sea;
In spring we sow, in autumn reap:
A working man for me!

"A straight tree which is felled for wood
Requires no sawing line;
Some men are upright as a tree:
May such a man be mine!

"And he must dance more light than floss,
Draw birds to hear him play;
For only such a man as this
Can steal my heart away."

A good steed's neigh will reach the ear
Long ere the horse is seen;
But Ashma's fame spread far and wide
Ere she was seventeen.

Ajdee's young men fell deep in love,
And lurked beside her door;
Three times a day they sought her out,
And sometimes even more.

With silver bracelets on each wrist,
  At home sat Ashma good,
Her bracelets sparkled in the light,
  And tinkled when she stood.

The name of lovely Ashma now
  Was known the whole land through;
Famed far and wide was Ashma now,
  A maiden good and true.

V

Behind closed doors Rabûbalor
  Had heard of Ashma's grace;
And in his dreams Rabûbalor
  Was haunted by her face.

Rabûbalor resolved to find
  A bride to wed his son,
And swore that Ashma must be theirs,
  For sweeter girl was none.

He took long counsel with his son,
  Then went Hajow to see,
To beg this mighty officer*
  Their go-between to be.

*Rich Shani families used to ask powerful people to act as their go-betweens, for this made it difficult for the other family to refuse the proposed match.

"Since Ashma's name is on all lips,
  Then Ashma must be ours.
But you alone can make this match;
  You only have such powers!"

Hajow feigned fear. "None but a fool
  Dares find a man a wife.
Whoever acts as go-between
  Is cursed his livelong life!"

"A parrot gave you cunning lips,
  Your tongue came from a snake;
This match with Ashma we desire,
  No man but you can make.

"If you win Ashma for my son,
  You shall not work in vain;
But take what sheep and goats you want,
  And gold, and golden grain.

"Pigs' trotters, pork and sweet rice wine
  He'll bring you for New Year,
Two coats and hats, with trousers too,
  And shoes for you to wear.*

"Throw not away such handsome gifts!
  Consent—you cannot lose!
Most powerful in all the land,
  How can you still refuse?"

Then flushed with wine and sure of gain,
  The wily snake held forth:
His parrot's tongue began to wag:
  Hajow would prove his worth!

*It was the custom for a young Shani couple, on the first New Year after their marriage, to take gifts to the go-between.

A rat is always counted sharp,
  But sharper still was he;
A bumble-bee is known to prate,
  But he outdid the bee.

"Why, both of Ashma's parents now,
  However loath they be,
However much they may object,
  Will be talked round by me.

"And Ashma's brother, brave Ahay,
  Though he is stout of limb,
Will find his skill of no avail,
  For I shall deal with him."

As thieving monkeys leave the hill
  Upon the crops to prey,
This thieving man reached Ashma's home
  To carry her away.

"When yellow maize is ripe to pluck,
  The harvest cannot tarry;
Now Ashma is the proper age,
  The time has come to marry."

"Oh, honey-sweet my child to me,"
  Her mother first replied.
"As salt is needed with our meat,
  I need her at my side.

"Until she weds, she is our child:
  Once wed is ours no more;
You cannot cut a girl in two;
  Her loss would grieve me sore."

"A girl is but a flower that fades,"
  The go-between replied,
"Unlike a son who, rich or poor,
  Is always by your side.

"When evening comes the dew will fall;
  When dawn comes, cocks will crow;
None can delay the wedding day;
  And then your child must go."

"Wine's given when a daughter weds,"*
  Said Ashma's father dear.
"But soon 'tis drunk, and all that's left
  Is grief from year to year.

"When daughters wed, an ox is led
  Inside our stable door.
Soon time has sped, the ox is dead,
  Yet brides come home no more.

"How can an ox replace my child?
  She weeps, the cattle low.
Is she bamboo to cut in two?
  I cannot let her go!"

"They'll give me rice when Ashma weds,"
  Up spoke her mother too.
"But soon 'tis gone, and all that's left
  Is grief my whole life through.

"They'll give us yarn when Ashma weds,
  But soon the yarn is spun;
Yet parting with a daughter dear
  Can never be undone!"

"Your child is not the only bride,"
  Hajow said. "Every year,
How many thousand Shani maids
  Must leave their parents dear!

*On the occasion of a wedding, the bridegroom's family gave a bottle of wine to the bride's father, a basket of rice to her mother, an ox to her brother, and a skein of yarn to her sister-in-law.

"If you will not let Ashma go,
But want her in your sight,
Is she to stay till she is old,
Until her hair is white?

"Old trees upon the mountain top
Will stand content for aye,
But girls once grown must think it shame
By parents' side to stay.

"If you refuse to let her wed,
When she is seventeen,
At twenty she will wait in vain
For any go-between."

And Ashma's mother pondered well
On all Hajow had said.
"Yes, every mother's daughter dear,
Content or not, must wed."

And Ashma's father pondered well
On all Hajow had said.
"Yes, every father's daughter dear,
Content or not, must wed."

"Then wed she shall," her mother said,
"And join another clan.
But let her wed a trusty lad,
And not a wicked man.

"For if she leaves her mother's home
To be a good man's bride,
Then kindly he will smile at her
As he sits by her side.

"His father also in the hall
Will greet her and admire;
His mother too will smile at her,
Beside the kitchen fire.

"But if she leaves her mother's home
To be a bad man's wife,
She will be sent to gather wood
Without an axe or knife.

"Three loads of firewood she will take,
And if one load be wet,
Long after it has burnt away
She'll yet hear curse and threat.

"For if she leaves her mother's home
A worthless man to marry,
She will be sent to gather herbs,
But with no sack to carry.

"She'll get three aprons full of herbs,
And one with old herbs fill;
But after all the herbs have gone,
They scold and curse her still.

"For if she leaves her mother's home
With cruel folk to live,
They bid her fetch them water clear,
But will no ladle give.

"She fills three vessels at the pool,
One muddied out of three;
Long after all the water's drunk,
They still scold endlessly.

"I carried her beneath my heart,
The daughter I have bred;
Rather than see her suffer so,
I will not let her wed."

"In Low Ajdee," replied Hajow,
"Lives rich Rabûbalor.
His house is tiled with solid gold,
Of silver is his door.

"In gold and silver ornaments
His massive gate abounds;
His barns are stacked so high with grain,
The rats weigh nine full pounds.

"His cattle roam nine mountain sides,
His goats nine forests steep;
On seven hills his oxen graze,
In seven woods his sheep.

"You will not find so rich a house,
Though far you search and wide;
There is no better house to take
Sweet Ashma as a bride!"

Fair Ashma led her flock that day
On mountains high to roam;
And when her beasts had cropped their fill,
She led them safely home.

The buckwheat leaves beside the road
Appeared like moths in flight,
So green they were and beautiful,
Her heart leapt at the sight.

And Ashma, too, so young and fair,
Was like a buckwheat leaf;
Untouched by sorrow all her life,
She knew nor care nor grief.

The yellow maize beside the road
Grew curved and glossy too,
And Ashma's heart was filled with joy
To see how green it grew.

Oh, like a leaf of golden maize
Was Ashma young and fair;
Untouched by sorrow all her life,
She knew nor grief nor care.

In all her life, the gentle maid
Had said no bitter word;
But when she heard the go-between,
Then Ashma's wrath was stirred.

"Rabûbalor, his kith and kin,
All honest folk condemn.
Though they plant flowers to tempt the bees,
No bees will come to them.

"I do not care how rich they are;
You cannot dazzle me.
Though we are poor, no rich man's wife
Will I consent to be!

"Clear water will not mix with foul;
Of them I will have none!
Lambs will not lie with jackals sly;
I will not wed his son!"

"The mountain deer," replied Hajow,
"Choose low and sheltered ground;
And birds that fly across the sky
Will go where grain is found.

"Do you disdain a rich man's house,
To be a poor man's wife?
To dwell within a wretched hut,
And freeze your livelong life?

"You eat ere noon and fast at dusk,
If you're a poor man's bride;
And if you sup, you fast next day,
And ne'er are satisfied."

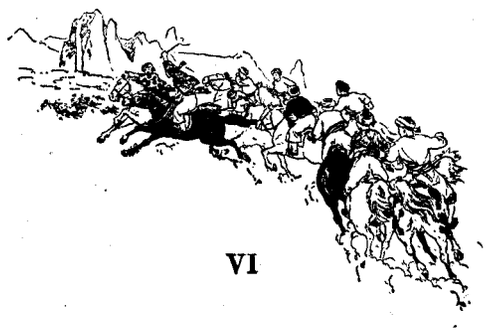
"The tree that's stood a thousand years
Still rises true and great,
And never stoops and never bends:
The poor stand just as straight!

"The poor they know a poor man's woe,
  Their joys and griefs they share;
With those I love I count it joy
  Both cold and want to bear."

From storm clouds only pours the rain,
  Wild beasts alone seek prey;
Vile men alone do wicked deeds,
  And vile is all they say.

"Rabûbalor, like some great rock,
  Can crush a tender tree;
'Tis his command you wed his son,
  And you must come with me."

"I answer: Ninety-nine times No!
  I will not go with you!
He cannot make me wed his son.
  No! That he cannot do!"



VI

See ninety-nine full loads of meat
  And kegs of wedding wine;
Five score and twenty bridegroom's men,
  Five score and twenty kine!

The yellow dust flies up, while black
  As clouds the horsemen ride;
The kinsmen of Rabûbalor
  Have come to steal a bride!

They come like uninvited guests,
  To wreak their wicked will;
And though no bride attends the feast,
  They eat and drink their fill.

With wine-flushed face and greasy lips,
  Up speaks the foul Hajow:
"When guests arrive and wine is drunk,
  That serves as marriage vow.

"Though Ashma has no wish to wed,
  She cannot disobey."
Alas, poor Ashma! Wicked men
  Are snatching her away!

A bamboo fence it cannot stand
  The fury of a squall;
And when a boulder hurtles down,
  The small thatched hut must fall.

"Oh, darling of your mother's heart!
  The moon will wax and wane;
The crescent moon will wax full soon,
  But shall we meet again?"

Then Ashma choked the salt tears back
  To ease her mother's woe.
"Rabûbalor, for all his might,
  Will have to let me go.

"Snow cannot hide the pine for long,
  But melts in sunshine bright.
Frost cannot bind the pine for long,
  But thaws within the light.

"Oh, quickly bid my brother speed
  To save his sister dear;
For he could surely rescue me—
  If only he were here!"

VII

So mournful then is High Ajdee,
With Ashma snatched away,
As if no blossoms bloomed in spring,
No buckwheat bloomed in May.

The jade-white bird is crying still,
White clouds still float above;
But Ashma's parents, sick at heart,
Have lost the child they love.

Unhappy, grieving father!
His eyes with tear-drops fill;
Leaner today than yesterday,
He grows fast leaner still.

Unhappy, grieving mother!
Her hair is turning grey;
Greyer today than yesterday,
Greyer from day to day.

"At meat I long for Ashma dear,
My heart is filled with grief;
At work I long for Ashma dear,
My heart knows no relief.

"Within these rooms she used to walk,
Before the house she played;
The hassock by the table there
A seat for Ashma made.

"The hassock brings my child to mind,
Each time I see it here;
And each day is a bitter day
Without our daughter dear.

"Oh, jade bird flying in the sky,
A message take for me!
Pray bid Ahay come quickly home
To set his sister free!"

The jade-white bird is crying still,
White clouds still float above;
But Ashma's young companions all
Have lost the friend they love.

"Among our flocks we think of her;
Our hearts are filled with grief.
And when we sew we think of her;
Our hearts know no relief.

"The spreading tree still sheds its shade,
But she has left the hill;
Our camp fire's light still blazes bright,
But Ashma's voice is still.

"When flesh is torn, the pain is keen;
Then cursèd be the day,
And cursèd be the wicked men
Who stole our friend away!"

Such bitter, bitter tears of grief
No stars could bear to see,
The moon grew faint to hear their plaint
Of hate and agony.

We sow the buckwheat seed in March,
  In April early rice;
We reap the buckwheat in July,
  In August early rice.

The day will come when crops are ripe,
  When harvests heap the plain;
But, Ashma, will there be a day
  When you come home again?

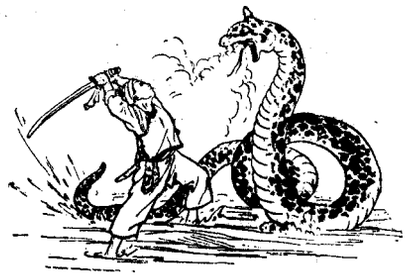
Oh, jade bird flying in the sky,
  A message take for me!
Pray bid Ahay come quickly home
  To set his sister free!

The jade-white bird is crying still,
  White clouds still float above;
But all the village elders now
  Have lost the girl they love.

The old folk grieved for Ashma too;
  They cursed and sighed full sore.
"Rabûbalor, that heartless beast,
  Will ruin her," they swore.

"Rabûbalor is like a wolf;
  Shall he have Ashma fair?
His house is like a tiger's den;
  Shall Ashma sweet live there?"

Oh, jade bird flying in the sky,
  A message take for me!
Pray bid Ahay come quickly home
  To set his sister free!



VIII

Ahay had led his flocks away
  In pastures far to roam;
He watched his flocks for seven months,
  Nor thought of turning home.*

He went where never shepherd trod,
  Where none had been before;
And crossed great mountain ranges high,
  To reach the river shore.

What company have mountain crags?
  They have the chestnut tree.
What company had brave Ahay?
  His shepherd's flute had he.

Three knots it had, and seven holes
  Were fashioned by Ahay;
One hole he placed against his mouth,
  The rest he used to play.

He played the five notes of the scale,
  He played his flute all day.
"Oh, kinsfolk dear and friends at home,
  Can you not hear me play?"

*When the grass on the mountains withered, the herdsmen took their flocks to warmer districts in southern Yunnan Province, not returning till March or April the next year when the hills were green again.

One midnight, wracked by fearful dreams,
  Ahay rose up in dread,
Of flood, and of a monstrous snake
  That reared its cruel head.

What fearful threat hung o'er his home?
  Ahay was in dismay.
In three short days he hurried home,
  Nor rested night or day.

"Oh, mother, I see empty kegs
  And wine-stains on the floor.
What visitors have feasted here?
  What brought them to our door?

"And growling curs are crunching bones
  Around our court and home.
What guests have been here, mother dear?
  And wherefore did they come?

"With buckwheat stems I strewed the ground
  To keep our cow shed dry.
Who trampled on those buckwheat stems,
  And damaged all near by?"

Then Ashma's mother wiped her eyes,
  And told her son Ahay:
"Rabûbalor's accursèd kin
  Have snatched our girl away."

"How long ago did they depart?"
  "Three days ago, Ahay."
"And think you I can catch them up?"
  "Your steed is good—you may."

"My sorrel mare—is she at home?"
  "She's waiting, son, for you."
"My bow and arrows—are they here?"
  "Your bow is ready too."

Ahay's return brought hope to all
  The villagers that day;
And, when they knew that he had come,
  They hurried there to say:

"A flower torn up will fade away,
  A girl enslaved must die.
Make haste, Ahay, to rescue her!
  To horse, to horse, and fly!"

He seized his bow and arrows then,
  And spurred his sorrel mare;
Bells tinkled on the horse's head,
  As swift it cleft the air.

IX

When whirlwinds gather in the hills,
  The sun gives light no more;
A horde of men urged Ashma on
  To dread Rabûbalor!

One crag was higher than the next;
  Hajow, the braggart, said:
"There towers alone their sacred stone—
  That fang-sharp peak ahead!"*

*The Shani people used to keep the ancestral tablets of the three most recent heads of the family at home. The tablets of earlier forebears, placed in a wooden case, were kept in a cave in the mountains.

"What is to come I cannot tell;
  What's past is clear to see:
'Tis there the robbers hide their spoil;
  You need not lie to me."

The crags grew steep, the forest dense;
  Another lie he told:
"This fountain here, so crystal clear,
  Is where they wash their gold."

"What is to come I cannot tell;
  What's past is clear to see:
'Tis there they wash their bloody hands;
  You need not lie to me."

And entering a steep ravine,
  Hajow a third time lied:
"That is his orchard over there
  Upon the mountain side."

"What is to come I cannot tell;
  What's past is clear to see:
'Tis there they breed their tiger-cubs;
  You need not lie to me."

They travelled many a weary mile,
  Climbed many a mountain high,
Till to Rabûbalor's dread lair
  One morning they drew nigh.

In this grim place where Ajii dwelt
  Grew flowers fresh and fair;
But though they bloomed, no bees would come
  To sip the nectar there.

In this grim place where Ajii dwelt
  Trees grew in every glen;
But wolves and panthers roamed the hills
  To prey on honest men.

The hungry wolf who sees a lamb
  Will slaver at the jaw;
And Ajii's loose mouth watered too,
  When Ashma sweet he saw.

He piled up gold and silver then,
  To give fair Ashma pleasure;
He pointed to his herds and barns,
  And showed her all his treasure.

The gold it gleamed and glittered there,
  The silver sparkled gay;
But Ashma would not smile or look,
  And turned her head away.

"O lovely Ashma," Ajii said,
  "Why treat me with disdain?
You shall be mistress of this house,
  Great treasure be your gain!"

"Although your barns are stuffed with grain,
  Your cattle fill the leas;
Your ingots large as horses' hooves,
  I set no store by these.

"If ever I should fall in love,
  You shall not say me nay!
For I shall marry whom I please—
  'Tis not for you to say!"

The jade-white bird is crying still,
  The sun shines in the sky;
His body dripping sweat, Ahay
  Comes riding madly by.

He covers two days' road in one,
  From peak to peak he rides,
Across more crags than man can count,
  And through more glens besides.

A hamlet—three small huts—he sees,
And peasant old and grey.
"O good old man, as you raked dung,
Did Ashma pass this way?"

"I did not see sweet Ashma pass,
But saw a wedding crowd;
All dressed in silk and fine brocade
They passed like thunder cloud."

"How long ago did they pass by?"
"Two nights now, and a day."
"Think you I still can catch them up?"
"Your steed is good—you may."

Ahay whipped on his horse again,
And spurred his mare anew;
He took a road the old man showed,
And after Ashma flew.

The jade-white bird veered far away,
But dimly shone the sun;
The threshold of Rabûbalor
All honest men did shun.

"Proud maid!" cried Ajii angrily,
"If you will not wed me,
Your parents shall be driven out,
And banished from Ajdee."

Sweet Ashma stood before him then,
As straight as young bamboo;
Her eyes flashed bright with bitter scorn,
No fear or dread she knew.

"You cannot dazzle me with gold;
You cannot frighten me.
Those plots of land and courts are ours;
You do not own Ajdee."

When this was told Rabûbalor,
He stamped with rage and frowned;
He whipped poor Ashma cruelly,
And threw her to the ground.

"Once past my threshold, you become
A chattel which I own.
Bold wretch! Into a dungeon dark
I'll have you straightway thrown!

"A heaven on earth I offered you;
The pains of hell you choose.
A wretched, base-born peasant wench,
Such riches to refuse!"

Then once again and fearlessly,
The lovely Ashma said:
"I answer: Ninety-nine times No!
Your son I will not wed!"

Dried capsicum but sears the tongue;
This man, more galling still,
Threw Ashma in a dungeon dark,
To try and break her will.

The jade-white bird is crying still,
The sun shines in the sky;
His body dripping sweat, Ahay
Comes riding madly by.

He scales two mountains in one breath,
Then crosses five in two.
His mare's hooves shake the mountain woods,
As he comes flying through.

Two huts he sees, a bent old dame,
And curbs his horse to say:
"Good dame, as here you watched your cows,
Did Ashma pass this way?"

"I did not see sweet Ashma pass,
  But saw a wedding crowd;
All dressed in silk and fine brocade
  They passed like thunder cloud."

"How long ago did they pass by?"
  "One night now, and a day."
"Think you I still can catch them up?"
  "Your steed is good—you may."

Ahay whipped on his steed again,
  And spurred his mare anew;
He took a road the old crone showed,
  And after Ashma flew.

But dimly shone the bright sun then,
  The jade bird veered away;
Poor Ashma was in agony,
  Alone and trapped she lay.

"Why has this dungeon drear and dark
  No ray of sun or star?
How dank and grim these dungeon stones,
  More cold than ice they are!

"Why hear I not the winds that blow,
  Nor see the birds that fly?
Why feel I not the sun's warm rays,
  Nor see the moon on high?

"Who calls me now beyond these walls?
  My loving parents dear?
Ah no, for when I listen well,
  'Tis only bats I hear.

"Whose steps are those beyond the wall?
  The friends I love so dear?
Ah no, for when I listen well,
  'Tis but my heart I hear.

"What gleam is that beyond the wall?
  A flying charger bright?
Ah no, for when I look more close,
  'Tis but the glow-worms' light."

Although the cell is firm as rock,
  Her heart can struggle through;
Although the cell is cold as ice,
  Her warmth can melt it too.

The jade-white bird is crying still,
  The sun shines in the sky;
His body dripping sweat, Ahay
  Comes riding madly by.

He rides two journeys in one day,
  And five days' course in two;
The woods and hills are left behind,
  As he comes hurtling through.

A single hut, a peasant lad . . .
  He curbs his horse to say:
"Oh, shepherd boy, beside your flock,
  Did Ashma pass this way?"

"I did not see sweet Ashma pass,
  But saw a wedding crowd;
All dressed in silk and fine brocade
  They passed like thunder cloud."

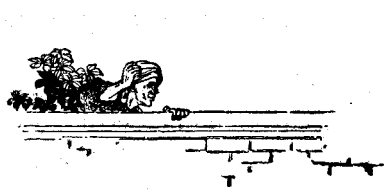
"How long ago did they pass by?"
  "Why, only half a day."
"Think you I still can catch them up?"
  "Your steed is good—you may."

He rode where no man else dared ride,
  Past clefts uncrossed before;
The jade bird sang as down he sprang
  To face Rabûbalor!

"Oh, Ashma! Ashma! Ashma dear!"
Three times he called her name.
The sound of Ahay's well-loved voice
Into the dungeon came.

The dark, dark cell seemed lightened then,
And warmed each ice-cold limb,
As, playing on her small mô-sheen,
Ashma answered him.

Like earthquake dread that wakes the dead,
Like wind or thunder's roar,
He shouted loud to cow the crowd
Around Rabûbalor.



X

Then Ajii barred the iron gate,
To shut Ahay outside.
"First let me see if you can guess
My riddles!" Ajii cried.

"If you sing best and pass the test,
You shall come in, Ahay.
But if you cannot answer me,
Then you must go your way."

"Twelve roads there are ahead of you,
And thirteen pathways too;
Then take your pick of any road,
The choice is left to you!

"My cause is just, so I shall win
In any bout of song;
You cannot shut your door on me,
For you are in the wrong."

Then Ajii sat upon the wall,
Beneath a tree, Ahay;
The one uneasy in his mind,
The other calm and gay.

And straightway Ajii asked Ahay:
"Which is the bird of spring?"
"The cuckoo is the bird of spring;
Spring comes when cuckoos sing."

"Which is the bird of summer, then?"
Asked Ajii, sore downcast.
"The skylark is gay summer's bird,
When lotus blooms at last."

"Which is the bird of autumn, then,
That sings when leaves do fall?"
"The nightjar is rich autumn's bird;
The frost comes at its call."

"Which is the bird of winter cold,
Which comes when snowflakes fly?"
"The swift wild goose, for when it calls
We know that winter's nigh."

They sang for one whole day and night,
Till Ajii, like to choke,
Was breathing hard, his throat was hoarse,
His voice a feeble croak.

They sang for one whole day and night;
  Ahay in smiling ease,
For all to hear outsang the clear
  Cicadas in the trees.

When Ajii had no riddles left,
  Ahay his questions tried:
"Who gave the hawthorn trees their thorns
  Upon the mountain side?"

But Ajii could not answer him,
  The coward's tongue was tied;
He had to open up the gate
  And let Ahay inside.

And when the threshold he had crossed
  He shouted joyously:
"Where are you, Ashma? Ashma, love!
  Make haste and answer me!"

But straight Rabûbalor proposed:
  "First whet your axe, Ahay!
If you can fell more trees than I,
  Then you shall have your way."

"Twelve roads there are ahead of you,
  And thirteen pathways too;
Then take your pick of any road,
  The choice is left to you!"

Rabûbalor and Ajii plied
  The axe with furious strokes;
But ere they felled a single tree,
  Ahay felled three great oaks.

Rabûbalor saw they had lost,
  And planned a third attack.
"This is no day for felling trees;
  Now put the timber back!"

But felling trees or grafting trees
  Left Ahay undismayed.
"Let's see what other tricks you have,
  What other plans you've laid!"

While Ajii and Rabûbalor
  Were grafting one small tree,
Our brave Ahay, with no man's help,
  Had quickly grafted three.

Rabûbalor saw they had lost,
  But countered in a trice:
"This is no day for grafting trees;
  How fast can you sow rice?"

But grafting trees or sowing rice
  Left Ahay undismayed.
"Let's see what other tricks you have,
  What other plans you've laid!"

Rabûbalor and Ajii then
  Threw rice by handfuls fast,
But three or four times more than they
  The bold Ahay had cast.

When he perceived that they had lost,
  Thus spoke Rabûbalor:
"This is no day for sowing rice;
  Now pick it up once more!"

But scattering or picking rice
  Left Ahay undismayed.
"Let's see what other tricks you have,
  What other plans you've laid!"

While Ajii and Rabûbalor
  Picked up a little rice,
Three times as much, with no man's aid,
  Ahay picked in a trice.

Rabûbalor walked over then,
And crowed with wicked glee:
"Three grains of rice to every ditch,
But you are short of three!"

The young pine on the mountain side
Fears neither wind nor gale;
Although Ahay had lost three grains,
His courage did not fail.

And when the skylark ceased to sing,
And daylight left the plain,
And savage dogs no longer barked.
He went to find the grain.

When slowly, slowly rose the sun,
He saw, far far away,
An old man plough a buckwheat field,
His ploughshare bright as day.

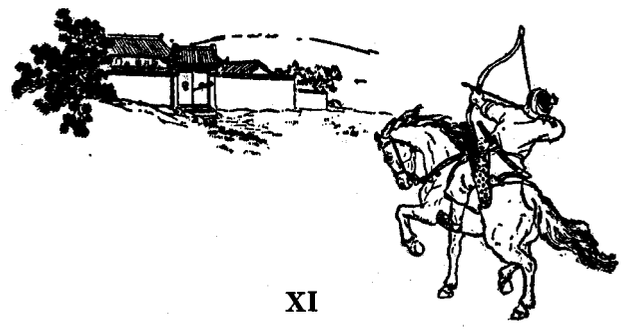
"O good old man, I ask your aid,"
Up spoke our brave Ahay.
"Where can I find three grains of rice
That I lost yesterday?"

The kind old ploughman answered him:
"Lost hoes seek in the lea;
Lost herds seek on the mountain side;
Lost rice seek on a tree.

"Now give three shouts upon the hill,
And in the valley three;
Upon a branch half up the hill
Three turtle doves you'll see.

"The middle dove, it faces west,
But east the other twain.
Shoot down the dove that faces west;
Its crop contains your grain."

Then running to the tree, Ahay
His bow bent in a trice;
The turtle dove that he brought down
Spat out three grains of rice!



XI

Ahay picked up the grains of rice,
And ran to Ajii's door;
He strung his bow and aimed three times:
His shafts were swift and sure.

Three arrows struck that wicked house:
The shrine, the wall, the door.
Good men might pluck those arrows out,
But not Rabûbalor.

And as the arrows pierced the wall,
With fear those villains shook;
Great their dismay, for now Ahay
Could bring them all to book!

The kinsmen gripped the arrows then,
And wrenched with might and main;
They yoked five buffaloes abreast,
But tugged and pulled in vain.

In vain all measures that he knew
  Rabûbalor essayed;
He had to open Ashma's cell
  And beg her for her aid.

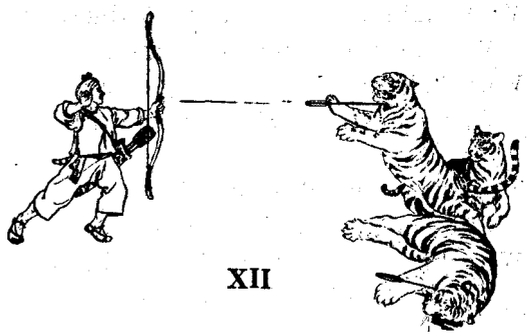
"Oh, ask your brother, Ashma fair,
  To pull these arrows out.
For we have lost, and he has won;
  No more your will we'll flout."

With Ahay near, she had no fear,
  But said: "With all your craft,
And all your skill in working ill,
  You cannot pull one shaft?"

"Sweet Ashma," said Rabûbalor,
  "Your shafts your words obey.
If you will pull them out, then home
  We'll send you with Ahay."

"The arrows that Ahay has shot
  Would yield to me, I know.
I'd sooner kill than lend my skill;
  And yet I fain would go."

As soon as she put forth her hand,
  Out came the arrows three;
Thus stronger than five oxen great
  Did Ashma prove to be.



XII

They could not overcome Ahay
  For all their wicked wiles;
Nor yet prevail on Ashma sweet
  With their deceitful smiles.

Yet still that knave, Rabûbalor,
  Resolved to have his way.
The silent wasps are those that sting:
  He smiled upon Ahay.

And, swallowing his rage, he said:
  "You must be tired, I know.
Then rest yourself before you leave;
  Tomorrow you shall go."

But Ashma knew their wicked plot
  To kill Ahay right soon;
And taking out her small mô-sheen,
  She played a warning tune.

"Take care, Ahay! Now they have failed
  In every contest fair,
They will let tigers out tonight
  To kill you! Oh, beware!"

Then Ahay played upon his flute,
  To answer Ashma dear.
"With bow and arrows I am armed;
  Sweet sister, do not fear!"

That night they loosed great tigers three
  Who prowled on velvet paws,
With baleful eyeballs all agleam,
  And monstrous, slavering jaws.

The Shani folk all love to hunt,
  But none excelled Ahay;
With knife and bow he had laid low
  A thousand beasts of prey.

Three tigers climbed the tower stairs,
  But from the stairway dark
Ahay shot three swift arrows down:
  Each arrow found its mark.

The largest of these dreadful beasts
  He deftly skinned anon,
Then put the skin back as before,
  That none could see 'twas done.

But he had formed an artful plan;
  His vigil he did keep,
His toe upon the tiger's tail,
  He lay as if asleep.

Rabûbalor and Ajii too
  Stayed wide awake all night,
Then called at dawn: "Arise, Ahay!
  Come down to eat! It's light!"

They called as loudly as they could,
  But no one made reply;
They called again a second time,
  But heard no answering cry.

They called once more, both loud and long,
  Yet all to no avail;
But noticed there, above the stair,
  A tiger switch its tail.

The kinsmen of Rabûbalor
  Both loud and long laughed they.
"We see a tiger switch its tail;
  It must have killed Ahay!"

While yet the words were on their lips,
  A crash disturbed the dawn!
As three dead tigers rolled downstairs,
  Ahay stood up to yawn.

"I did not know you kept these cats.
  Their howling was so great,
That I must ask your pardon now
  If I have slept too late."

Rabûbalor turned grey with fear,
  And Ajii he turned white;
Rabûbalor he quaked with dread,
  And Ajii shook with fright.

"You must excuse us. We forgot
  To tell you, dear Ahay.
We'll have these tigers skinned at once,
  To feast you here today."

"And will you skin the largest first,
  Or with the least begin?"
"You skin the largest: 'tis your due—
  The smaller we will skin."

To skin the smaller tigers then,
  They sweated, sire and son;
But in the time it takes to dine
  Skinned only half of one.

Ahay he grasped the tiger's tail,
  And pulled from left to right,
And then held up the skin entire
  To their astonished sight.

"Your wicked schemes outnumber far
A tiger's hairs, I know.
I will not eat the tiger's meat,
For homeward I must go."

Then with cold sweat was Ajii wet,
And old Rabûbalor;
They saw sweet Ashma led away,
Yet dared not bar the door.

•

XIII

Rabûbalor was not content,
But swore to wreak his hate;
For when Ahay was far away,
Then it would be too late.

He called to mind the great ravine
Which lay upon their road;
In that ravine, twelve crags between,
A little brooklet flowed.

Upstream a mountain lake was dammed
With stony rampart good;
The crops around were safe and sound,
Protected from the flood.

Rabûbalor and all his men
Would breach that dike of stone;
The flood should carry Ashma off
And leave Ahay alone!

The mare's bell rang, the jade bird sang,
They left Rabûbalor;
And now that they were riding home,
Their parents grieved no more.

Then Ashma sweet her small mô-sheen,
Ahay his flute did play;
With joy he heard his sister dear,
And she with joy Ahay.

They reached the foot of twelve steep crags,
The brook ran hard beside;
Then suddenly the banks gave way,
And flood-spread far and wide.

Then Ashma could not cross the flood
While Ahay walked behind;
Yet when he led, or rode ahead,
No path could Ashma find.

The brother held his sister's hand,
And Ashma held Ahay;
To brave the waters of the flood,
Hand clasping hand went they.

Ahay and Ashma did not fear,
Though loud the torrent roared;
The rushing tide they both defied,
Together they would ford.

•

But on the foaming water rolled,
To form a whirlpool great,
And lovely Ashma was caught up
And borne off by the spate.

Her voice alone was left to float
And hover on the wave:
"O brother, brother, save me now
From such a watery grave!"

Above the twelve crags in that place
Another maiden dwelt;
Her name Skadulma, and to her
The same fate had been dealt.

A lovely and a nimble girl,
Beloved of all was she;
But all her husband's kith and kin
Had wronged her cruelly.

Now Heaven had made a mighty rock,
An ancient boulder square;
And she had scaled those twelve great crags,
And made her dwelling there.

And whensoe'er her dear ones called,
She answer made the same;
So "Echo" ever afterwards
Became Skadulma's name.

When Echo heard sweet Ashma's call,
And saw her swept away,
The mountain maid was sore afraid,
And great was her dismay.

As sparrows to their eaves return;
Kind folk for kind folk sigh.
Echo, who saw sweet Ashma's plight,
Could not stand idly by.

While Ahay battled with the waves
And braved the torrent's might,
The whirlpool's vortex snatched away
His sister from his sight!

And Echo then, fair mountain maid,
The raging waters braved;
She clove the angry, foaming flood,
And Ashma's life she saved.

At last Ahay the whirlpool's spate,
And torrent overcame;
Then "Ashma! Ashma! Ashma dear!"
Three times he called her name.

And high above the twelve great crags,
An answer floated clear—
The selfsame accents as his own:
"O Ashma! Ashma, dear!"

He saw the bow that spanned the sky,
Half golden and half red;
Echo and Ashma radiant stood
Beneath it, high o'erhead.

With sparkling ear-rings Ashma stood,
And silver bracelets bright;
A soft smile played about her lips,
Her sweet, dark eyes alight.

"Oh, brother, see this ancient rock,
That rises square and sheer.
Heaven gave it as a refuge sure,
And my new home is here.

"From this day forward, never more
Together shall we stand;
But in one hamlet shall we live,
So far, yet close at hand.

"And daily when the meal is cooked,
And when your bowl you take,
If you will call me, brother dear,
An answer will I make.

"And brother, tell my parents dear,
Whatever may befall,
That though the day be fair or foul,
I'll answer at their call.

"As they tend sheep or plough the land,
  Or cook or carry water,
Or sew or spin, I'll answer them,
  Whene'er they call their daughter.

"And brother, bid my playmates dear
  Remember as they sing,
That at the summer festival,
  The festival of spring,

"As on the soft mô-sheen they play,
  Or flute's clear echoes fall,
If they will come and call my name,
  I'll answer at their call."

So Ashma spoke, and from that day
  An echo she became.
Call her a thousand different ways,
  She answers with the same.

Each day, his maize bowl in his hand,
  Beneath the boulder high,
Before Ahay began to eat,
  "Dear Ashma!" he would cry.

And then from Ashma's rocky lodge
  That towered above the shore,
The words that he had called returned
  "Dear Ashma!" ever more.

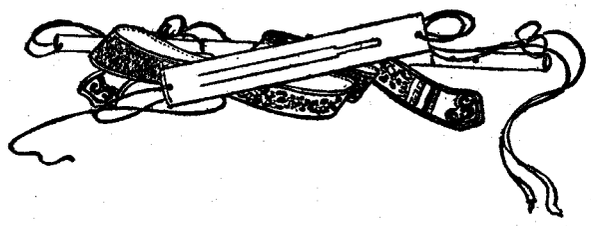
When Ashma's friends laid by their work
  To roam through wood and glade,
Their songs and laughter filled the glen,
  As on their flutes they played.

Then from the mountain echoed back
  The flutes' soft piercing trills,
And merry songs and laughter spread
  Through all the woods and hills.

And when her parents went to work,
  They hailed the boulder sheer;
"O Ashma, daughter lost to us!
  Oh, Ashma! Ashma, dear!"

And from the peak the selfsame sound
  The good old folk could hear:
"O Ashma, daughter lost to us!
  Oh, Ashma! Ashma, dear!"

Translated by Gladys Yang



ON THE DUSTY HIGHWAY

LIU PAI-YU

Whenever twilight descended, the highway near the front would come to life with a boom. The dust would rise from the road in smoke-like bursts through which heavy transport lorries jolted, the branches tied around them for camouflage rustling with a loud, swishing sound. Suddenly the first star would pop up on the distant horizon, like a flaming, gold-red dot. The same instant, all the headlights would be turned on and countless lorries seen racing along the tortuous highway in a chain of lights. Their glare would make the leaves on the trees, thickly coated with dust as they were, look as if they had been scorched. Here, on the frontlines of the war, speed and still more speed meant everything.

The lights made the highway look like a busy market street. When our car reached the traffic sentry, he moved us on with a dexterous flick of his white flag and we flew past. Every time we passed a sentry, our driver would raise his left arm in solemn greeting. But suddenly shots rang out from somewhere beyond the road. All the lights vanished in a split second. The whole area was shrouded in darkness while enemy planes droned over us. When the planes went off, the headlights came on again, as if they were emerging from underground. Our driver continued to sing a Korean song as he had done all along, and once more we gathered speed. Racing on like this, we only stopped for a rest in a village at the foot of a hill of red clay when day was just beginning to dawn.

When I woke up, it was nearly noon; the day was very hot. I ambled over to where our driver was sitting on a pile of straw sacks in front of the cow-shed for a chat.

Thinking back to our lightning-like journey the night before, I was overwhelmed with respect for our driver's skill at the wheel and for his optimistic behaviour. His personality seemed to mirror many of the virtues of our fighters and I felt I had to tell him this in so many words. But he said: "Why speak of me? . . . What am I to speak of? Wait till you see our Yang Tsung-fang!"

And then and there he began telling me of Yang Tsung-fang, his comrade-in-arms.

"It happened last year, during the fifth campaign . . ." our driver said. "The comrades on the frontline were facing the enemy on one height after another. . . . At the most critical moments, signals would come in asking for ammunition, more ammunition and still more ammunition. The situation was really dangerous in the extreme. It was midnight by the time the commander summoned a group of us drivers to his headquarters. When we got there, all was quiet and the commander was

pacing slowly back and forth, back and forth, with knitted brows. He stopped when we entered, and looked at us.

" 'Things are getting tough at the front,' he said, 'there's no more ammunition, by now they are even throwing stones. . . .'

"His eyes, bloodshot from lack of sleep, probed us searchingly. Then he continued: 'If this position is lost, the whole army will be in danger. . . . You must get the stuff there before dawn.' Then he walked over and shook hands with every one of us. 'All right, go now. I'll be waiting for news of your success.'

"In a very short time, we started out for the front in some thirty lorries loaded with ammunition. What did I feel then? I knew that whether we made that trip in time would decide not only whether we could hold those heights, but also whether our men on that frontline would come back alive.

"I remember it was in April. Anyway, we were still wearing padded coats. In the early hours of morning, the wind coming through the windows was chilly.

"Some time later the first car stopped . . . some one came down the line and said: 'See if this isn't a good place for us to refuel and check the water.' We parked the cars in a line by the roadside. The highway here ran in a semi-circle right around the foot of a hill, so our cars were fairly well hidden in the light mist of early morning. We put our heads together and reasoned that, since further on there was a long level stretch, it wouldn't be easy to find another place like this. After the stop here, we might as well take a deep breath and make a dash clear up to the frontline.

" 'That's right,' one of the chaps sitting on the mudguard said, 'if we get there and can't turn back before daybreak, we'll hide the cars and carry the boxes of ammunition on our shoulders to the front.'

"The leader of our group nodded and it was decided that we were stopping. All was quiet in the air, so everybody started to make good use of the time. You could hear the bustling that started out of complete silence. Some went to the river for water with empty petrol tins, some stood on the fenders pouring water into the radiators. Some had wrenches in their hands with which they were tinkering at the screwed-on cover of the petrol drum, and still others crept under the cars with flashlights to check the machinery. A few walked off by the roadside to light cigarettes. And just at this point, a plane came—coming on us with its engines roaring!

"The air-raid sentry on a small hill nearby fired a warning shot. In the twinkling of an eye, all lights were extinguished. Even the smokers quickly ground out their cigarettes with their heels.

"Who could know that, from the dense wood on the other side of the hill, a stream of red signal lights would soar up! Comrade, you were here in Korea last year, so you know the enemy often air-dropped secret

agents by parachute; and these agents would hide in out-of-the-way places to signal to their planes. Naturally, we were in very great danger then. Some of our most daring comrades started running towards the other side of the hill with their guns to catch the secret agents . . . but what were we to do with our thirty lorries full of ammunition?

"The plane immediately made in our direction from where the red signal lights had flashed. And now, it started to strafe blindly, with bursts of light coming . . . ta, ta . . . ta, while the plane began to dive. The bullets whizzed past with gusts of cold air, but luckily they all landed in the deep ditch beside the highway, causing nothing more than a furious rustle of the leaves on the trees. What really worried us was that the plane might circle and drop a flare. If they discovered our group of transport cars, they'd never leave off until they'd unloaded all their bombs, they might even radio for more planes to come!

"We were really in a tight spot. The plane did turn around and circle back. I jumped into my lorry and sat behind the wheel. I felt I simply couldn't leave my post; my heart was nearly bursting with suspense.

"All of a sudden, I heard the engine of the lorry behind me starting for some unknown reason.

"I put my head out of the window . . . and shouted. . . .

"I was afraid the driver would drive on blindly in the dark, without turning on the lights, and matters would be even worse if the lorry turned over.

"But even as I was thinking, it started moving. With a turn of the steering wheel, it barely missed my lorry and leapt forward. When it passed me, I saw the driver—it was Yang Tsung-fang. He was gone in a flash."

My young friend stopped at this point and let out a deep breath.

"There he was," he continued, "I'll never forget it! I saw this young chap Yang Tsung-fang sitting straight in the driver's seat, holding the steering wheel firmly. Even in that brief instant and although it was still dark, I saw his face because he passed me so closely. He gave me a quick glance too, then turned his head and stared straight ahead again. He seemed very tense as he shot past us with his lorry.

"Nobody understood what Yang Tsung-fang was trying to do. I thought he was trying to get out of this dangerous situation. Oh yes, and the plane was circling again. What should I do? Should I follow him and drive ahead too? But it was already too late. At such moments one has no time to think, and the plane was diving again with a shriek.

"In that critical moment, a shaft of dazzling light appeared in front of us. I thought at first it was a tracer. But no, the light was not coming down from the sky, it was on the ground—Yang Tsung-fang had turned on his headlights as soon as he was a few dozen yards away from us."

At this point, I couldn't help interrupting: "Wasn't that a very dangerous thing to do?"

The driver looked tense and his voice was lower than before when he answered me. "Of course, it was. I nearly jumped out of my seat with fright. You know, when the planes are overhead and looking for you, trying to blast you to pieces, and you airily turn on the lights to help them find their target. . . . What is there that one can say?

"I saw it all very clearly, the lights from his lone car bobbed up and down on the road, racing towards the level stretch in front of us. Right behind it, fire burst from the plane chasing it, the strafing was a terrible sight to watch. Yang Tsung-fang's lorry with its bright lights drew the plane away and so removed the danger hanging over us in one stroke.

"We all left our seats at this point and stared at the bright lights racing into the distance, our hearts in our mouths. The plane was shrieking madly and sputtering red sparks here and there in the dark sky, but still the headlights from Yang Tsung-fang's car shone forth. At one moment, the lights would seem to sway upwards, that's when the lorry took a slope, then they would be out of sight, when the lorry was going downhill. And then they would appear somewhere still farther away. The plane dived, fired a volley, zoomed into the air again, then circled around and dived once more to strafe.

"But then the lights had disappeared, suddenly all was darkness, nothing could be seen. The plane had lost its target and strafed blindly, but as soon as it soared to reconnoitre, the lights were on once more. The lorry was still racing along the highway. This went on again and again, till the American pilot was driven quite mad and dived lower and lower, so we could see in the stream of light the black wings of the plane practically brushing the top of the lorry; immediately afterwards there were bullets and sparks. Then the bright lights went out suddenly, we didn't know whether the lorry had gone too far ahead for us to see, or turned a corner behind the hills, or whether the strafing had got it. I hoped that the lights would come on again, we all waited, but there was no more light.

"Darkness surrounded us on all sides, you didn't know what was happening out there. We only heard two dull explosions, then there was a flash of red light which lit up our faces. My heart sank deeper and deeper. . . . Finished, now he's finished. We could hear the plane circle overhead twice more, then it flew away into the distance. In a little while, there wasn't even a tremor of sound left in the sky. All was quiet around us, too. We could hear the wind rustling in the pines on the hilltop. I calmed down a bit, but my heart was still very heavy.

"Quietly, the comrades gathered, with our leader up in front; we all looked into the distance, but no one said a word. We all understood clearly that if Yang hadn't been so brave and generous, risking his own life, the enemy plane would have dropped a flare and discovered us; we would not be standing here like this. Our thirty lorries loaded with ammunition were like a powder-magazine. Had only one box of our cargo exploded,

all the lorries would have been blown to pieces, even the hill beside us would have collapsed and the pines been burnt down. By daybreak, there would have been nothing left but a giant crater. When we thought of all this, we stared into the distance again and wondered what had become of Yang and his lorry.

"In a few minutes, the comrades from the end of our line asked loudly out of the darkness: 'Who was it?' I told them then it was Yang Tsung-fang. They all stood around me and we thought of Yang.

"But, comrade, I haven't told you yet what Yang looked like. He was twenty-four, strongly built, he didn't like to talk much. He was completely different from me, didn't like to sing at all. When he was driving, he'd just stare straight ahead and speed on. The fast way I'm driving now, I've more or less learned from him. Nobody could overtake him driving a car. He used to say: 'The bullets don't get those who are far enough ahead.' When you asked him why, he would say, 'The reason is speed. If you gain one per cent in speed, you've gained another per cent in safety. Don't you agree?'

"But at that time, comrade, as I was thinking of Yang Tsung-fang, he seemed to be standing before me. I remembered how his lorry had streaked past and the quick look he had given me—as if to let me know what he was doing and also as if in farewell. I couldn't ever forget a person like him. I remembered especially that time during the fourth campaign when I was his assistant on a trip. Our troops were moving out from the frontline along the Han-gang River and our lorry loaded with ammunition was among the last to go. Ahead of us, the enemy's long-range artillery was trying to block the Han-tan River. When we drove into Uijongbu, we found the whole street in flames like a fiery dragon. There was a lot of smoke, and the leaping flames dazzled us, so that we could hardly make out the way. When we turned a corner, we saw a Korean boy standing motionless in front of a burning house, with his back to us.

" 'Do you think the enemy tanks will get here soon?' Yang asked me.

" 'I don't really think they're far away,' I replied.

" 'That boy must be an orphan . . .' he said. 'There's no one to take care of him. . . .'

"Yang had stopped the car while he was talking, pushed the door open and jumped down. He made straight for the child, and was back in a moment with the boy in his arms.

"The boy was about ten years old, his clothes were burnt and torn, and his bare feet were thrust into a pair of Korean shoes twice the size of his feet. I took him from Yang and sat him on the seat between us. Yang jumped back into the lorry and drove on at top speed. At first the child cried and strained his eyes to look out of the window, but then he leaned his head against me and fell asleep. Yang made me hold him

on my lap so he could sleep more comfortably. After that, Yang took the little orphan with him wherever he went. In order to keep the child, he shared his own rations, clothes, allowances and everything else with him. Usually, when we halted for the night the child would be sound asleep beside him and Yang would tenderly carry the little fellow from the lorry. He really cared for the boy like a brother. It went on like this until this year when things became better in the Korean rear and the commanders decided the child shouldn't stay with us any longer. Only then would Yang part from the orphan. Taking the boy by the hand, he entrusted him to the teacher of the orphanage where the child was to stay.

"The boy has not forgotten Yang either, he is still writing frequently, telling of his progress in school. Yang, too, keeps up the correspondence with the child very seriously. And speaking of the boy, he really is a very intelligent, likable little chap. . . ."

The young driver felt he was straying from his story, so, smiling shyly, he returned to the main subject.

"That night of the plane attack, the real danger lasted only ten minutes or so from beginning to end. We started on our journey again, after the plane had been gone some time.

"I was the first in line and stepped on the gas, intent on getting ahead, to find out what had happened to Yang.

"After we went over a hilltop, I noticed a few pine-trees along the roadside, and under them the lorry, looming black and motionless. I was afraid something terrible had happened. I jammed on the brakes, pushed the door open and dashed towards the trees. While I ran, I shouted: 'Yang Tsung-fang, Yang Tsung-fang!' But there was no answer. The nearer I got, the more my heart sank. When I got close, I saw him, with one arm still on the steering wheel, the other resting on the open car window. His head had fallen on his arm, so that he was facing backwards. He must have fainted looking out of the window behind him like that. His cap had disappeared and his hair was tousled by the wind.

"The cars behind me stopped also. All the comrades crowded around. I gently lifted Yang by the arm-pits; when my face touched his left shoulder, I found it was wet. . . . He'd been wounded and was still bleeding. . . . My movements brought him round. . . .

"I asked: 'How are you feeling, Yang Tsung-fang?'

"He did not reply, he only raised his head to look at me and the other comrades. Then he asked: 'Have all the comrades got here?'

"Our leader pressed forward. With one foot on the mudguard, he said with great feeling: 'We're all here, Comrade Yang, no one is missing, everybody's here!'

" 'We didn't lose the ammunition?'

" 'No. Don't you worry any more!'

"At that moment, all our attention was focussed on Yang Tsung-fang and it was only Yang's words that brought us back to matters on hand. Time was getting short and our urgent task was not yet accomplished. We turned to look in the direction of the frontline, quite a distance away. The artillery fire made flashes like dew-drops before dawn on a summer morning, and the wind carried the dull roar of the guns. When we heard all this, we realized how impatient the comrades on the battlefront must be, waiting for the ammunition we were carrying.

"Our leader turned, beckoned to us and said: 'Let's go, comrades, they are waiting for us at the front!' He opened the door of the lorry, and bent to get in beside Yang.

"I started my car, but turned to look at them again. Their lights were on and our leader was dressing Yang's shoulder with a roll of snow-white bandages. He had taken the seat behind the wheel. Then he turned the lights off and their engine started with a hum. They made for the frontline at the head of our group."

He paused at this point, fished out a cigarette from his pocket and started to smoke. I couldn't help nudging him, "Then what? Did you get the ammunition there in time?"

"You are anxious to know the ending, aren't you? Of course, we did . . . and at the most critical moment, too! We got the thirty lorries full of ammunition to the front in the nick of time! The sky was a deep red in the east, it was just before daybreak. The comrades told us, 'If you had arrived only an hour later, things would have been pretty bad!' They stood up right amidst the smoke and fire and threw hand grenades.

"You remember, what I'm telling you happened last year, when things were really tough—but even those difficulties didn't stop anybody. You probably saw last night how lively traffic was on the transportation route. The enemy bombed out scores of cities, but we've turned the whole of North Korea into one big city. You've seen how cars and lorries are running at full speed, and we even have traffic signals at the cross-roads. . . . But here I've strayed from the subject again! Well, later, I went to visit Yang at the hospital.

"Sitting beside him, I asked: 'How did you happen to start racing ahead?'

" 'At first,' he said, 'I just stepped hard on the gas . . . my mind seemed to have stopped working, all I could think of was to draw the plane away. But by the time the bullets fell on the lorry like pebbles, I realized that something was not quite right. I was not afraid to die, but the ammunition had to be kept away from the firing. Besides, what if they had hit the petrol tank? If you think things over, you'll find a lot of hitches. . . . Then I thought: I've drawn the plane away at any rate. So I turned off the headlights and the bullets missed me and landed on the highway, instead. But when I heard the plane regain altitude I thought: Oh no, after all my efforts to get you to chase me, you mustn't get away! So I put the headlights on again.'

"I said, 'Tell me, Yang, old chap—weren't you afraid at all at that moment?'

" 'Who said I wasn't? Of course, I was, I'm not made of wood,' he answered. 'Not that I didn't know that bullets make holes in one's head, but. . . .'

"He stopped. His left arm was all bandaged and couldn't be used, so he had to strike a match with one hand to light his cigarette. Although I pressed him with other questions, he said no more on the subject. Finally he just waved his hand and said, 'Think of the fighters on the battlefront, what's so big about this I've done?' "

I could only look at the young driver beside me, so brave and cheerful himself. When he had finished the story of Yang Tsung-fang, he got up, took the empty petrol tin that stood beside him and with his short, husky figure stalked towards the well. The sunlight streamed over him through the dark-green foliage of a giant chestnut-tree. There are a great many such chestnut-trees in Korea, their branches with big leaves sprawling wide. I saw this young driver standing beside the well, a group of Korean children in pink, white and lavender blouses and skirts clustered around him. They seemed to like him; in a few minutes he had made friends. While he chatted with them in broken Korean, he set about filling his empty petrol tin. Then he began to sing again that charming Korean song of his.

"Think of the fighters on the battlefront, what's so big about this I've done?" I thought about these words Yang Tsung-fang had spoken at the hospital. My eyes were still on this other courageous and happy young man, who had shown such resolution in doing his duty while enemy planes were overhead and who was yet so avid of life. Then I began to understand why our people's army is invincible.

Translated by Tang Sheng

HAN MEI-MEI

MA FENG

I had finished my job at the Chaochiakou Co-operative Farm last November, and was going back to report to the authorities. I had to go through Shuanho on the way, and thought I would drop in and see the local primary school. I used to go there to borrow newspapers and books, when I was working in the town last spring, and knew some of the teachers and the children.

Directly I got inside the doorway I ran into Lu Ping. Her subject is reading and writing. She is an example to her profession. In fact she is quite famous, and is a member of the local people's council. I first came across her several years ago, when she was still a student, and was even then burning with the desire to serve her country. The year that she graduated was the year that two new elementary schools were opened in the county, and there was a shortage of teachers, so that the county education authorities were looking out for new ones. Most of the graduates didn't see any future in teaching in elementary schools, and Lu Ping was the first one of her group to take it on. The others took on different things; some went to college, others worked in government offices, or took other jobs. The few who like Lu Ping started teaching, didn't make much of a success of it, got fed up, and wanted to change. But Lu Ping herself liked it from the beginning, and besides the actual teaching was responsible for the school branch of the Youth League. She had done very well, and was greatly respected for her work.

We exchanged greetings as we met, and then she asked me straight out, "Comrade Ma, are you writing anything at present?" But before I could answer she went on, "Would you like me to give you something to write about?"

"Why not," answered I, laughing at her eagerness. She smiled back in return, and took me into her rooms. After giving me a glass of water she went to a drawer, and took out a bundle of letters.

"These are some letters from an old pupil of mine who finished school last summer. I think you know her. Do you remember Han Mei-mei?"

I cast my mind back. "The name seems familiar," I said, "but I can't place her."

"How can you have forgotten! Don't you remember, you spoke very highly of her compositions?"

Now I remembered her clearly. A slender seventeen-year old, with two long plaits. A quiet girl, but with a mind of her own, only average in most subjects, but good at composition. I had read these before. Well worded, thoughtful, and when she got on to the subject of her village, and the changes that had taken place there, how her love of it came out. I

knew her village, Hsiaohsienchuang, too, and her father, a pigheaded old man who doted on his only child. He used to say to the neighbours that even if he had to beg he'd do it to keep his daughter at school, now that men and women were equal, and educated women could get big jobs. As all these memories came back to me, my interest quickened and I asked, "What is Mei-mei doing now that she's left school?" Lu Ping smiled. "You can see that from her letters," she said, folding them up and handing them to me, as the bell rang for school to start. "I'll have to go now. Read them while I'm at class, and don't go until I come back." She picked up her textbooks, and went off.

I settled down to read the letters one by one.

July 25.

Dear Miss Lu,

I'm afraid I failed in the entrance exam for the secondary school. So did Chang Wei, who also comes from our village. He was at No. 2 School in the town, and today we went together to look at the pass-list outside the school. Of course we went through the whole list twice, from top to bottom, but we still couldn't find our names. . . . Chang Wei burst into tears, though I felt it was terrible to see a great seventeen-year-old boy blubbering in public. He made such a noise that passers-by stopped to see what was the matter. I think even Chang Wei realized how awful he was being, because he turned round and ran home by himself. I ran after him, but I didn't catch him up.

I must say that I felt like crying myself, when I realized I had failed, but I managed to hold the tears back, and told myself that crying wouldn't help. I would have loved to go to secondary school, but since I failed the exam, I'd have to make the best of it and find a job. I remembered what you said before we left, at the last Youth League branch meeting: ". . . if you don't get through the entrance exam for secondary school, you should make up your mind to start some productive work straightaway. Whatever job you do in our new society has a future for you. As long as you work properly, you are taking part in building our nation." Miss Lu, I took these words to heart, because I felt they were true. So I decided that I would take up farm work.

But when I returned to the village, Miss Lu! You can't imagine the carry-on. . . .

Directly I arrived I saw that there was a bunch of people in front of Kuan Ti Temple. When they caught sight of me, they stared like anything and chattered like magpies. They were obviously talking about me, and when I went past them I could hear Li Yu-ching clearly.

"Well, well . . . so the girl scholar couldn't get through the examination. Tee-hee!"

His sarcasm set them all tittering, and I felt my face go all hot. Li Yu-ching is what you might call our village specialist in sarcasm. Always trying to show up other people's weaknesses. I didn't try to answer him back, but headed straight for home.

I found the whole family having their midday meal under a tree in the courtyard. Their faces all grew stern when they saw me come in. Mother sighed, Grannie pursed up her lips and said, "H'm," and Father's moustache twitched as he burst out, "Shame on you! You've disgraced me!"

Oh, dear Miss Lu, what a way to be greeted by my family. It was the last straw, and I couldn't bear it. I felt the tears coming into my eyes, and rolling down my cheeks. When Father saw this, he banged his bowl of rice down with a crash that bounced the spoons and jars, and bawled at me in a terrible voice,

"What have you got to say for yourself? I wonder you dare to cry!" Mother saw I was very upset and tried to intercede with Father. "Don't be so hasty. . . . Don't you see Mei-mei is as unhappy as we are?"

Father's anger choked him. He couldn't speak, took up his unfinished rice, and stalked out into the street to eat alone. When he had gone, Mother tried to smooth me down. "Run and wash your face, dear," she said, "and then come back and eat your dinner. You'll only make Father worse if he sees you crying. You know what he gets like." I tried to pull myself together, thinking, "What's the good of crying? You'll have to put up with it," and managed to stop, washed my face and sat down to eat. My thoughts were racing through my head as I tried to find words to say why I had failed.

After a bit, Father came back, a bit calmer. He put his empty bowl down on the table, took out his pouch, filled his pipe and began to question me.

"What do you intend to do now?"

"Start working on the farm," I answered bluntly. I saw his moustache twitched again. "Farm work!" he bellowed. "Here have I been denying myself all these years, scrimping and saving every penny, so that you can learn to read and write, and what do I get for it? What's the good of anything?"

Then Grannie joined in. "H'm, h'm. . . . Didn't I tell you that it was a wicked waste to send a girl to school? D'you think a girl's going to change into a fabulous monster? Look at her, after five or six years at school. It was simply throwing good money away!"

I knew why I was sent to school. I was expected to get a good job afterwards and keep the whole family in comfort and respectability. No wonder, then, that they went up in the air when they heard I wanted to work on the farm. I tried to keep my voice calm as I said, "Grannie. education is useful on the land as well. Anyway, Father's getting on now. Somebody will have to help out, and there's only me to do it."

"Fat lot of good your workdays will be to us!" Father interrupted me.

"Dad, what do you want me to do? What is there besides farm work? Do you want me to sit at home?"

Father couldn't answer, but sat there with his head down, sucking at his pipe. A gloomy silence reigned, until the bell of the co-operative farm rang for afternoon work to start. He took up his hoe, and walked off, muttering, "My! My! A ne'er-do-well for a daughter!"

Grannie started a regular tirade directly Dad had gone. She went on about Dad ever sending me to school, at me for not passing the exam, and wound up by rubbing it in that I was good for nothing at all. I didn't try to argue with her, but helped Mother scrub out the big iron rice-cauldron. Then I started off for the co-operative farm office.

All the members were out in the fields, except for the chairman, Han Chuan-yu, the accountant, and the old pig-keeper, Uncle Yun-shan. Uncle Yun-shan was talking when I went in.

"You told me before that I could have a someone to give me a hand, and here I am still on my own. Fine words don't feed the pigs!"

The chairman explained that he had tried to talk several of the women into taking it on, but they regarded it as a dirty job and weren't going to do it. There wasn't a man to spare either, at this time of year: in fact, there was a shortage in the fields as it was. In the middle of this, Han Chuan-yu saw that I'd come in, broke off what he was saying, and called out to me. I told him why I'd come, and everyone cheered up.

"First rate, first rate!" Han Chuan-yu said warmly. "We're desperately short of workers, particularly educated ones. Nothing could be better." He thought it over for a minute, and then went on, "What d'you want to do? You can choose your own job."

I told him I'd do whatever needed to be done, and he and the accountant went into a huddle. Then Han Chuan-yu said, "What about being the store-room keeper, Mei-mei? Would you like that?" "I'll do what I'm told," I answered. "But Han Erh-so's doing that now. What's going to happen to him?"

The chairman sighed, and said, "We'll have to get him to help Uncle with the pigs. You'd find the store-room all right: the work isn't heavy."

I could tell that they were trying to do me a favour, but I didn't like the idea. Miss Lu, you always used to tell us that Youth Leaguers must do the hard jobs, so why should I try to get an easy one? I thought to myself that nobody else wanted to work with the pigs, so why should Han Erh-so be made to? Ought I to get out of doing the dirty work? Besides, he was used to the store-room and whatever I did I'd have to learn it from the beginning. The thoughts raced through my head, and there seemed to be every reason why I should look after the pigs myself. So, at last I said:

"If I look after the pigs, it will save you the trouble of transferring anyone."

There was an outcry at this. "You be the swineherd!" they gasped. Then Uncle Yun-shan said, half in joke: "I don't want to put you off, but the smell alone will scare you away."

"Uncle, you managed to stand it, so will I," I replied with a smile.

They couldn't believe at first that I really meant it and all three advised me to take on the store-room keeping. Then they began to see that my mind was made up. The chairman gave me the job and said seriously:

"Mei-mei, the pigs are a major asset to our farm. It means a great responsibility. You should expect difficulties, and make up your mind that you'll get over them. There aren't any easy jobs in this world."

So it was all decided. In the evening, the Youth League Branch belonging to the farm held a party to welcome me. This was a great encouragement to work properly. So now, Miss Lu, I'm a regular member of the co-operative farm. I thought you'd like to know. . . .

Respectfully yours,

Han Mei-mei.

August 23.

Dear Miss Lu,

I read your letter over and over again. Every word in it is an encouragement to me to stand up to difficulties, and it meant a great deal to me. I've been through quite a difficult time lately, and was very browned off. However, thanks to the help of the Youth League Branch, I've got over my troubles. Then let me tell you about it all.

We've got 46 pigs on our farm altogether, all in one big pen. I'm not surprised nobody wanted to look after them—it make you sick to see it, a foot deep in dung and urine, dirty water and sloppy mud. The pigs wallowed in this muck, and were covered all over with it. Aya! You can imagine the stink, the smell of rotten fodder, and bluebottles everywhere! Nobody could go near the place without wanting to clap their hands over their noses and run. It was the stink that got me down to begin with. It felt like a physical attack on my nostrils, and made me heave, particularly if it was just after I'd eaten. After a morning's work even my clothes stank. . . . But that wasn't the worst thing, although it was bad enough, but Father's attitude to me since I became the pig-girl. He grumbles at me and calls me a disgrace to the family, and Grannie is always on at me, and says it's disgusting for a girl to be mixed up with filthy animals. Mother doesn't curse me, but she heaves a sigh when she sees me. Of course the village is gossiping about me. The first day I went to feed the pigs they came to watch me from a distance, and I could hear the comments. "Hah! Go to school to learn

how to feed pigs. Wonderful." "What a waste of talent!" "A good-for-nothing." And so on. I pretended I couldn't hear them and went on with my work, but at heart I was really fed up. It was bad enough to have to put up with curses at home, without the village joining in, and for some days I was in despair. My heart was heavy, and I was tempted to pack the job in.

The accountant of the farm—he's the Youth League branch secretary—sensed the state I was in, and had a long talk with me. "We don't do our work just to win praise," he said. "Sometimes we just have to grin and bear it. As long as we do it for the general good, and put our best into it, we must go on doing it even if we are laughed at or cursed. Sooner or later it will come out all right, and the world will understand." He said that when the co-operative farm was first started some people sneered and laughed at the very idea of a co-operative, but not long afterwards the same people applied for membership when they saw how well it went. The night after he had talked to me I couldn't go to sleep for ages, going round and round the problem in my mind. I decided in the end that I must stick to the job no matter what people said about me. The failure to put up with a disagreeable situation is a sign of individualism, isn't it?

After I'd worked this out I went on working as usual, and within a few days people stopped ridiculing me. I had plenty to think about, looking after the pigs properly. The idea came to me that the pigsty ought to be kept clean, otherwise even pigs might get ill. After this thought I consulted Uncle Yun-shan, and suggested that we might clean out the filth. I thought he would agree readily, but to my surprise he bawled me out! "I knew it . . . you can't do this job. You can't stand the smell, I bet!" I told him that this wasn't the trouble. "Uncle Yun-shan, it's not because I can't put up with it. It's because pigs ought to be kept clean and free from disease." But he wouldn't have it. "Pigs are dirty animals by nature. You can't keep them clean. Man and boy, in sixty years I've never heard of a clean pig." He was adamant about it, and insisted that pigs liked dirt and that dirt did them no harm.

So my talk with Uncle was a failure, because I didn't know how to put it to him. But I wasn't very downcast, and decided that I must make an opportunity for having another go. This time, I laid my plans better, and took several days over it, without him knowing. In any spare time I could, I dug up the back numbers of the newspapers in the co-op office. I reckoned that there must be something in them about pig-keeping. Sure enough, I found two articles on pig-keeping, and one of them was about the need for cleanliness. It meant a first prize to me and I hastened to read it to Uncle. The article explained why pigs must be kept clean, and gave two examples, one of a co-op farm where, in two years, there were no unhealthy pigs out of two hundred, because they were kept clean, and

the other where there was a different kettle of fish; they didn't keep them clean and ten out of seventy pigs died of an epidemic last summer.

Uncle listened to me and went into a soliloquy, "Oho! So the newspaper says the same as Mei-mei." I told him, "The newspaper must be telling the truth. Our newspapers don't try to fool us." He said, "Yea, yea." I could see I was getting somewhere and hastened to add, "We ought to keep it clean for the sake of the village hygiene. The people who live near the pen are already making a fuss about it to the farm." Again he echoed me, "That's true. People have been complaining a lot." It took a long time, but I won the day in the end. We took a decision to give the pigsty a real spring-clean, and when it was cleaned out, to train the animals to use a dung-passage, as the newspaper suggested, and keep it clean afterwards. I was overwhelmed when I'd got him to agree, and could have jumped for joy. However, it wasn't all plain sailing. To begin with, the pigsty was rather a big one, and there was so much filth that it would take the two of us over a month to muck it out. On top of that, Uncle Yun-shan was a cripple, and wasn't able to do heavy work, but I couldn't ask the chairman for help at this time of year, when there was too much field work as it was. I couldn't think what to do, so I went to ask the Youth League branch secretary for advice. He was delighted to hear of our plans and suggested at once that the Youth Leaguers should be asked if they would give us a hand voluntarily in the evenings. That very evening, when the Youth League met, the question was brought up, and everyone agreed to help! Two of them, in fact, were particularly enthusiastic—they live near the pigsty and have really deep feelings on the subject, as you can imagine.

We started the next evening, in the bright moonlight, and as we were sweating away I started off some songs. It was really quite fun; we laughed and jested and enjoyed ourselves. To begin with only the lads came, but quite soon the girls came too, even quite young ones. It took us five strenuous evenings. We got the muck out, dumped it on the farm compost heap, right at the other end of the village, repaved the floor with clean dry earth—it took several cartloads—and then covered it with fresh straw. Uncle and I drove the pigs down to the creek for a bath. . . . Everything went according to plan.

Now we muck out the pigs two or three times a day, and have started to teach them to use the dung-passage . . . it's rather hard going; they don't listen to what you tell them. But give us time. I think we will remould them.

The whole village is pleased with the new conditions. Those who live near the pigsty went so far as to say that I had done a really good job. But there were still voices. "Ever heard of a new broom sweeping clean?" "Pigs can live in a palace but it doesn't give them royal blood." Of course I heard Li Yu-ching's voice raised in this strain.

Do you want to have some news about Chang Wei? He's sulked at home ever since the day he came back with the bad news. He wouldn't show his face in the street, and sobbed at home. His parents were in a terrible state about him, and tried to tempt him to eat. I went round to look him up a few days ago. He had grown quite grey in the face, and his eyes were as swollen as ripe peaches. I did my best to persuade him to join in the farm work, but he wasn't having any. "I can't bring myself down to that," he said. "I can't understand you becoming the swineherd. What a frightful come-down for you." I told him that any honest work served the country, but before I could finish the sentence he burst out in a rage. "Shut up, can't you? I'm not going to pretend to be a progressive, like you. Go ahead, if you want to show off. You're welcome to it." He made me so fed up that I walked out on him. The Youth League secretary tried to talk him out of it twice, and so did the farm chairman. But it didn't do any good. I have since heard that he argued his parents into selling a picul of wheat, to pay for his travelling expenses to Taiyuan, where he has gone to look for a job. The day before yesterday his mother was showing a letter from him all round the village, and letting the ones who could read feast their eyes on it. She didn't let the others off, but told them, "My boy Chang Wei has been given a post in the provincial government. In the provincial government, mark you." I've read the letter. It doesn't say what the post is. . . .

When Dad and Grannie heard about this they started nagging again, for envy. Not a meal-time has passed without them getting at me. Let them say what they like, I'm beyond caring. Come what may, I've made up my mind and I'm going to stick to it.

Let's talk again another time,

Yours respectfully,

Han Mei-mei.

September 30.

My dear older sister Lu Ping,

I am very proud that you let me call you sister. It makes me very happy. It is lovely to have a sister like you.

Dear sister, please don't think that I'm pleased with myself for such a small conquest. In fact, I do realize that it's not due to anything I've done. I read all the books on pig-keeping that you sent me, and read bits out of them to Uncle Yun-shan. I used to think anyone could be a pig-keeper! Now I have begun to realize that it's a job for a scientific expert. The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know. It isn't at all a simple job. Take the question of food, for instance. Would you believe that it's a most complicated subject? Pigs need an elaborate

special diet, with curious things like calcium, and phosphorus and vitamin content. Before, they used to get the waste from the bean-noodle mill. If there wasn't enough, we had to give them sweet corn and so on. This was very extravagant, and besides, the pigs weren't much better for it. Now we've introduced changes. As well as whatever's left over from the mill, we give them a mixed diet, with green stuff, corn shucks and water-melon rind. This is much better and a saving of crops as well.

Of course there were some complications. Uncle Yun-shan couldn't bring himself to believe in it all. He's got quite cheerful about it, though, and our conversation goes all this, "Mei-mei, what's today's surprise? I hear you've got some new-fangled notion about feeding pigs with chopped sweet corn stems? I never heard of such a thing in all my born days!" I say, hopefully, that it worked all right according to other people's experience, but he answers, "I bet you read it in the newspaper, haven't you? You can't ignore what the papers say, but that doesn't mean to say you've got to treat it like absolute truth. Anyway, everyone knows pigs don't eat this green stuff. Even if you put it in front of them they won't touch it." "They do eat some green stuff," I assure him. "I've tried it on them and I can show you right away that they do, if you'll only believe what you see for yourself."

As a matter of fact, I'd tried it out the day before, because I guessed he would want evidence! I had given them some pigweed which I got from the fields, and they'd guzzled it like pigs, in fact! I kept a bit back to show Uncle how well it went down. He stood watching, deep in thought, for a while. Then he said, "With this number of pigs, it'll take more time than we can spare to go round getting hold of the stuff." Yes, he was right. It is a problem. So I went to talk it over with the chairman and he found a solution. He said, "The very thing! Their food's in short supply just now." Straightaway, he asked all the members to give a hand after the day's work, and bring back pigweed from the fields. Whenever I got the chance I went round all the households and collected all their vegetable waste and anything else they had which the pigs could eat. As time went on, they began to bring the waste to me, and old man Wu, who grows water-melons, became a regular customer, and sent us his accumulation of melon rinds every day at noon on his way home for midday meal. When the harvest's over, we're going to plant two small plots to beet and cabbage for the pigs.

Our pigs are doing fine. Everyone says that they've fattened a lot in the last six weeks or so. They've also increased quantitatively! A few days ago one of the Whites farrowed, and had twelve snow-white piglets. They are darlings. No one could see them without agreeing. You may say that Uncle Yun-shan and I have personally adopted them. We gave them their first warm bath the day they arrived, and are supplementing their feeds with dilute rice-water. Uncle and I took turns to do night duty, in the first week, to make sure the sow didn't overlay

WANG CHI: A Co-op Herdsman

them and squash them. Last spring the farm lost four in a night, overlaid. Uncle Yun-shan and I are determined we'll have no such fatalities, and that we'll rear the whole litter.

On Mid-Autumn Festival Eve, the farm slaughtered one of our fat pigs, and shared out the pork. I was very unhappy that one of my pigs had to be killed, but after all, that's what I rear them for, I told myself. Also, the farm carters' team sold five of our big pigs in Taiyuan and bought a ginning machine, so that we can gin our cotton crop—we needed it because we've got a big area planted with cotton now. They came back with some news as well. They'd met Chang Wei in Taiyuan. He had been an errand boy in a provincial government office, but he's now a worker in an engineering factory. He didn't like being an errand boy; he says it's nothing but doing other people's dirty work. Since they came back with the news, Mrs. Chang has changed her tune. She now says, "My boy is a factory worker now. Of course, that's a very respectable job. Indeed, I understand that factory workers are the leading class!"

Dear sister, I've come to the conclusion that whatever our job is, if we really get into it, we can make anything more and more worth-while. I'm enjoying my pigs now, and the village no longer looks down on me. Even Li Yu-ching doesn't get at me, and his tone behind my back is quite different. "You see, education is necessary for any sort of work. With a bit of education, you can even make a success of pig-keeping." The other villagers who keep pigs come to me for advice, and I read them bits out of my library. This morning, a colleague from another co-op farm came over, and asked me to tell her about "my experience of keeping pigs." My experience, indeed! Our pigs are healthy because we apply scientific methods, and we used our heads and got the method out of newspapers and books. It's no private invention of mine. But my colleague insisted that I should tell her all about "my experience." So Uncle Yun-shan and I talked to her for a whole morning. She said they didn't keep their pigs clean in her farm, and three sows and five gilts died of some disease last summer. She says that her farm is going to apply our methods in future.

With regards,
from your sister,
Mei-mei.

November 12.

Dear sister,

I haven't written for a long time, because we were all busy with the harvest. The farm members all went out at dawn and returned after dusk, and had no time to get our pigweed for us. Uncle Yun-shan and I had to drive the pigs out every day to the field where they had cleared

the yams and sweet potatoes. We had two more litters to look after as well. And nowadays we have visitors who come and ask us about pig-keeping. . . . Uncle Yun-shan and I are so busy sometimes that we don't even get time to eat.

But the harvest's all in now, and we had our Harvest Home last night. Five model workers were elected, and I was one of them. I still can't believe that I should be called a model worker! I don't think I've done all that much. I don't know much about pig-keeping yet, and have a lot to learn, and I haven't done nearly as much as I should. But they insisted on conferring the title. It is a tremendous encouragement, of course, and I shall try to live up to it, and become a real expert.

The annual accounts have been settled, and I had over seventy workdays to my credit . . . that's over 10 piculs of grain. Oh, sister, isn't it grand! All earned by my own efforts. Before I had to live on my parents, but now I can earn my own living.

My father has just over 100 workdays to his credit. I haven't been mentioning him in my last letters, I know, but I can tell you, now that it's all over. When I began to look after the pigs my father treated me very unkindly, didn't he? He got ticked off by the chairman and the Youth League secretary, and stopped doing it to my face. But he was miserable about it and went about with a hangdog expression. He began to stay at home too, and missed some time. He told Mother that he couldn't make himself go out when he'd lost all his interest in life. You see, he had pinned all his hopes on me, and it all crashed when I became the farm swineherd. Sometimes he stayed home all day, brooding. He isn't a drinking man, but he began to drink. When the fit came over him he began throwing the bowls around, and would then throw himself down on the *kang* and go off into a stupor. Usually he wouldn't look me in the face, but behaved as though I didn't exist. Oh, sister Ping, you can't think how horrid it was to be treated like this by my own father! I tried to put up with it as patiently as I could. For several months I was hardly at home except to eat or sleep. I felt sorry for Dad, really. Poor man, he is the result of the old days. Although he's a peasant himself, he looks down on manual labour. I was sure that he would understand in the end, even when things were at that worst, and he did, as you'll see.

Dad didn't come to the Harvest Home, but Mother did. She left before me, and was already home when I got back. I could hear her talking before I got into the house, "You'll never believe how much Mei-mei earned! Over ten piculs! Nearly catching up with you." Father held his tongue, but Grannie said in amazement, "What? Over ten piculs? Whoever would have thought it!" Mother went on, "Nowadays all the neighbours are saying that Mei-mei is a wonderful daughter. They congratulate me on having sent her to school, and say they realize how useful

it is to be educated, when they see how well Mei-mei has turned out! D'you know, Mei-mei was elected a model worker tonight!"

I heard nothing from Father, and when I got into the room, I saw he was hunched up in the *kang*, sucking at his pipe.

"Father," I said, "I would like to sell some of the grain and buy two piglets. It wouldn't be difficult for us to rear them." "It's your grain," Dad answered, without looking up. "Sell it if you want to." "Oh no, Father," I said. "It's the family's grain. I can't decide about it by myself." Grannie was thrilled, and said eagerly, "But it's a good idea! If we rear them successfully they'll fetch four or five piculs."

Before we could go on, the farm chairman came in, his face all agrin, and said, "Come on, Mei-mei. You've got to stand treat all round!" I couldn't imagine what he was talking about, and nor could my family. We sat dumb, but he went on to explain. He'd heard from the County Government that I'm to be sent to the state farm at the capital of the province, to learn all about the new pig-keeping methods. Of course I was mad with joy. Mother and Grannie were as pleased as anything, but poor old Dad couldn't get a word out. He looked at me helplessly, and then suddenly, to my horror, I saw two great tears rolling down his cheeks. He was crying! I'd never seen my father cry before. In a broken voice he said, "Mei-mei. I'm sorry . . . I'm sorry for the way I've behaved in the last few months. . . ." But then he couldn't go on. I didn't want him to; I knew what he wanted to say. I cried too, I don't know why, and that started Mother off. So everything came out all right.

I've spent the whole of today getting ready. Chou Yu-o, another girl, who lives opposite us, is taking on my job. This afternoon the Youth League had a meeting and wrote out my references. I had many good wishes, and lots of advice. And was told to study as hard as I could and get to know everything there was to be known about pig-keeping. For my part I promised that I would do the best I could and that I wouldn't let the country down.

As we came out of the meeting we met Chang Wei, on his way home from Taiyuan. We were very pleased to see him, and began chaffing him. "Hallo there, older brother. What the news from the factory?" Chang Wei didn't answer a word, but headed straight for home. We've heard since what's happened . . . he's left the factory for good. "Factory workers lead a dog's life," he says. "The job is dirty and heavy. There's so much bossing about!" He now thinks he'd be happier on the farm. He doesn't seem to like any job, and he despises manual labour. The Youth League's going to help him solve his problems.

Oh, sister Ping, I'm off tomorrow. . . . I can hardly believe it. I'll write and tell you how I get on.

Yours,
Mei.

I read all these letters through at one stretch. I felt as though Mei-mei had been in the room with me. How could I not like her! She reminded me of Lu Ping, who had brought out these qualities in her, qualities of courage, resolution, and determination.

Lu Ping came back, and asked at once. "Have you read them? What do you think about them? Can you make anything out of them?"

I answered, "I don't have to waste time making anything out of them. They speak for themselves."

Translated by Chien Chun-wei

NEW YEAR HOLIDAY

LO PIN-CHI

As all comrades working in government offices in the countryside know, Sunday is a work day, as usual. Except for May First and National Day, a full day off is a rarity. So you can imagine how the personnel of both the Communist Party committee and the government administration office of the Ninth District treasured the New Year Holiday.

The Ninth District Party workers had left the evening before; early this morning, the district chief had departed, apparently not minding in the least the heavy snow that had fallen during the night. Even old Wang, the cook, had gone back to his village to spend the holiday at home. The district government office with its glass windows facing the street, the big courtyard behind the office, the rear courtyard where hung the placard of the Party committee—all generally so alive with people and activity—were now deserted except for Party Secretary Ting Yu-hsin (concurrently deputy chief of the district government) and messenger Little Chang.

Ting was not a native of the district; his home was far away. He stayed behind to look after whatever business might turn up during the holiday.

Although Little Chang came from a mountain hamlet less than three miles from the district government office, he didn't go home for the holiday either. This was not because the deep snow made riding his bicycle difficult. Little Chang had two reasons for remaining.

In the first place, he thought the secretary needed his attention. Old Wang had left in a hurry and forgot to fill the vat with water. The river was quite a distance off. If he, Little Chang, went away too, who would fetch water for the secretary? In the evening, a fire had to be lit in the *kang*. Who would chop the wood for that? Kindling had to be cut small and fine. And what about the snow on the walks and in the courtyards? And the cooking? Were all these odd jobs to be piled on the shoulders of the district Party secretary? He was kept busy enough all year round. Should he be made to go out and sweep snow on the holiday? . . . Here, Little Chang was considering what was best for the office.

His second reason was a personal one. He didn't want to go home today anyhow. Tonight, Sun Hsiang-chin, a salesgirl in the district's supply and marketing co-op, was going to be given a party to celebrate her marriage to the doctor in the clinic. Little Chang had nothing against the doctor. But the bride—that Sun Hsiang-chin—he simply had to make her squirm! She was always so calm and casual when men were around.

Now, behind everyone's back, she had gone and fallen in love. In a few hours, she was going to be married. This was Little Chang's great chance! He would see whether she was still so calm and casual after she became a bride! He was dying to watch her blush when the traditional teasing and jokes began! . . .

And so, Little Chang remained. He swept a path through the courtyards, then went to fetch some water from the river.

Secretary Ting had been a hired hand. He began working for the revolution back in 1946. Some of the district personnel trained by him were promoted to Party county committees in other counties; a few of the village Party secretaries under him had become heads of districts. He himself was never elevated in rank, though not because he lacked ability or had anything wrong with his methods. On the contrary, it was precisely due to his ability that he was kept where he was—to serve as a model. He was something like the very good machine-building plant that keeps turning out the machinery for other industries.

Ting dressed rather carelessly. Over his cloth uniform he usually draped a short fleece-lined coat. When he made his calls on the villages, he fastened the coat with a leather belt. About forty, ruddy-faced, he had the simple air of the peasant. He was thick in the waist, and when he walked his legs looked shorter than his torso. He knew intimately all the Communists and Youth Leaguers and energetic people in every village the same way a commander knows every sharpshooter in his unit. Ting cherished them like gems of great worth.

Now he was preparing a report summarizing the government grain purchases in his district. He examined the records the district workers had handed in the night before, prior to beginning their holiday. They had bought sixty-tons more than their target figure. The job had been "victoriously completed!"—a phrase Ting frequently used. Deposits had been made by the peasants in the district credit co-operative and in the county bank amounting to nearly eight hundred million yuan. But only five per cent of this came from the peasants in the six hamlets on the hill slopes—in other words, the hill people were still holding on to over two hundred million they had received for the sale of their grain.

It was a problem. What were they thinking to do with the money? Order farm implements in the village supply and marketing co-op? Ting looked through the records of the district co-operative but could find nothing significant. There were orders for horse-drawn implements, for fertilizer, for two Czech hunting guns. One of those guns must be for old Shen's son, Shen Tsai, in Panther Den. The remaining orders were for thirteen foreign breed sows. But all these purchases would only total forty million.

Two hundred million! Ting mused. Is it flowing out of the district? If two hundred million should "leak" into the hands of the businessmen in town for speculation, thereby upsetting the market, that would be very

bad. The livelihood of the peasants in every hamlet would be affected. If the money was being wasted, production for next year would suffer!

As he sat thinking, Ting glanced out of the frost-decorated window. He could see Little Chang trudging through the snow with two big buckets of water suspended from either end of a shoulder pole. In the distance, the little messenger and his burdens looked like three large buckets dancing across the snowy expanse! The weather was clear and fresh after the snowstorm, and a radiant sun gleamed in the morning sky. But Ting knew it must be quite cold outside. He could plainly see the boy's frosty breath. Strange. Why hadn't he gone yet? The boy's widowed mother, in her thatch-roofed house in the hillside hamlet, was certain to be staring out the window, watching for her son to be coming up the southern mountain path.

Whether from the warmth of the morning sun, or the heat of the stove in the room, the frost on the windows melted and dripped on to the sills. Secretary Ting wiped the woodwork, then locked his documents in his desk drawer and walked to the kitchen in the west wing of the compound. Even before he entered the door, he could hear Little Chang's voice.

"Curse you! Take that! And that!" Little Chang was splitting kindling with a small hatchet.

"Put that hatchet down!" Ting scolded affectionately. "Everybody's gone home for the New Year Holiday. What are you hanging around here for?"

"Who's going to do the cooking?"

"I'll do it myself!"

"Why should I go home? I've got nothing to do there. If I go the first thing tomorrow morning it'll be just as good. The cook will be coming back then!"

There was a note of pleading in the boy's words. He held on to the hatchet as he spoke, and his eyes roved over the chips of wood cluttering the kitchen floor as if to say—anyhow I'll have to sweep this all up before I can leave! Even if he had to go, nobody could make him just leave things in this condition and depart!

From the tentative way the boy's black eyes peeked at him, Ting could tell that unless he adopted a stern manner he'd have a hard time getting Little Chang to go. Just as the secretary was about to pull a long face, he realized that the boy was reading his mind. Little Chang's knowing air made Ting laugh in spite of himself.

"All right," he conceded. "You and I will make some meat dumplings. But this afternoon, back you go! If you wait till late, there'll be wolves on the road!"

"They don't scare me. I carry a flashlight. The minute they see a light beam, wolves run."

The secretary was quite helpless against a youngster like this. He knew every corner of the boy's honest heart. Like a doting father to a mischievous but adorable child, he could only say:

"You must go. You're leaving this afternoon!"

Little Chang knew the game was up. When Secretary Ting spoke in that calm voice it meant he really would have to leave in the afternoon. It amounted to an order. But how could he miss teasing the bride this evening? He had already promised the district administrative officer to meet him at the party. He wanted to see Sun Hsiang-chin with his own eyes—how was she going to take it tonight? Ai! What rotten luck! If only something could come up to delay him, that would be fine! If the county Party committee should suddenly call up and ask that some documents be delivered, for instance. . . . But this was New Year's Eve. What rotten luck!

Then what Little Chang hoped for, finally happened. Dogs were heard barking at the entrance to the village. After the snowfall, how still the village was, how the sound of the barking carried! Strangers must be coming. Little Chang threw down the hatchet and excitedly ran outside.

He had guessed right. A sled was fast approaching. The two chestnut horses pulling it were frosted white with a coating of frozen steam. The old man driving the sled looked familiar. His back and shoulders were broad. Wrapped in a big sheepskin coat, his beard too was rimed with frost. As the sled drew nearer, Little Chang could see the girl sitting behind the old man. The bright red kerchief that bound her head was very striking against the white snow background. That young fellow beside her. . . . No question about it—they were an engaged couple coming to register their marriage.

The sled pulled up at the entrance to the district government office. Children who had been sliding on the ice in the school yard came flying over, chanting a welcome.

"New bride! New bride!"

"Come to register?" asked Little Chang in a surprisingly adult voice. "Please come in and wait in the office." He led the young couple inside and closed the door.

Dressed in a simple blue high-buttoned jacket, with trousers of the same material, the girl wore her hair plaited in two braids. As she came in the door, she flashed a smile at Little Chang. Her eyes sparkled. She looked familiar, but she said nothing to the little messenger, maintaining a very decorous manner. Evidently because of the occasion, she was exercising a reserve not at all native to her. She stood with her sweetheart beside the wall. To avoid meeting Little Chang's eyes, she carefully examined the picture on the wall of Chairman Mao, then gazed at the filing cabinet.

The young man, in a black leather jacket and Western-style trousers, looked as if he had just come from the barber shop. There was nothing of the peasant about him. What could his line be? He didn't look like a peasant, he didn't look like a government worker—rather more like a school teacher from the city. Little Chang couldn't be sure.

Secretary Ting came in. If he had not seen through the window the two white-rimed chestnuts and old man Shen breaking open a straw-bound bundle to feed them, he wouldn't have recognized this girl as also coming from Panther Den. Her name was Wu Kuei-hsiang, and she was leader of the women's group in the hamlet's mutual-aid team. Not that her expression of tender joy had so transformed her appearance; mostly it was because Secretary Ting had his mind on other things. He was glad that old Shen of Panther Den had come, and was thinking that now he could talk to him. Ting could find out why the peasants weren't depositing their grain earnings, he could get a clue as to which way those two hundred million were going. After shaking hands with the girl, Ting asked the young man where he was from.

"Panther Den," replied the young man. "My father is Wang Hsin-ho. My name is Wang Shu-tsai. I'm away working in the mine."

Little Chang understood the whole situation now. This fellow had a brother in the army, and he was working in the coal mine as a technician. Glaring disapprovingly at the bride-to-be and her red head kerchief, the messenger stalked out of the room.

He had nothing against the young coal mine technician; he respected his father. But he had no use for that bride-to-be. She looked rather like a Youth Leaguer. But why did she have to pick a coal mine worker for a sweetheart? Before the General Line for the drive to socialism was announced, two or three attractive girls from the hill hamlets had married miners and moved away to live with their husbands. Little Chang was wise to those girls! The miners had just come home on a visit; it wasn't their fault at all. The girls didn't want to live on the farm any more. The moment the miners showed up, the girls began making eyes at them!

You could forgive those girls then; they couldn't see the prospects of the farms. But now, with the policy of the General Line shining like a lighthouse—to run away to a mine now! Maybe we don't need the support of agriculture to build up industry! Maybe it isn't plain how socialism is coming to the countryside! Huh! Backward, that's what she is! Anyhow, she certainly didn't study the General Line very well!

Little Chang suddenly felt exceptionally fond of Sun Hsiang-chin, the salesgirl in the co-op. She was also born and raised on a farm, but she wouldn't leave the countryside. When the clinic became a hospital, her husband, the doctor, would be its superintendent! He might even be elected to the People's Congress of Chilin Province! How wonderful!

Happily, Little Chang swept up the chips on the kitchen floor. He thought of his home in the hills. In his imagination, on the field where he had pastured sheep there now stood a primary school with glass windows! Somehow he had transferred this two-storey building from the pages of the Soviet pictorial, where he had first seen it, to the hill slope outside his native hamlet. Perhaps it was because on the other side of the slope flowed a little stream lined by willows, or because the hillside birches resembled those surrounding the school in the picture. Deep in his day-dream, he didn't hear the approaching footsteps of Secretary Ting.

The registration book was locked in the filing cabinet, and the administrative officer had gone off with the key to his home, about a mile away. Ting sent Little Chang to fetch the key. The boy was delighted. Now he had something to do and could stay on till evening and tease the bride at the wedding party.

Standing in the doorway watching the youngster hurrying away, Ting was still deep in thought. The supply and marketing co-op of the village which administratively embraced the hillside hamlets had put on sale four thousand cakes of crushed bean, used by the peasants for both fertilizer and fodder. Yet the district government workers had reported there wasn't enough of it. The district co-op was sold out and had no more to deliver to the village co-op. Ting wondered what the Panther Den people were feeding their animals. Were they really short of bean-cake? He also wanted to talk with old Shen and see what he could find out about that two hundred million.

Outside, he discovered that what old Shen was giving his horses was not bean-cake, nor was it bran, but a mash of soy bean and sorghum.

"Secretary Ting!" the old man hailed him. "Come to our hamlet tomorrow and spend New Year's Day with us. There'll be a wedding feast!"

"Good! Will you folks be slaughtering pigs?"

"Only one. Dowries are out of style now and we're all trying to economize, but she's the only daughter in her family. Her father wouldn't feel right if he didn't spend a little something at a time like this!"

"Did your hamlet sell all its surplus grain?"

"More than six tons! We only kept just enough to feed ourselves and for next year's seed. Everything else we sold to the government. We all want to push on to socialism!"

"But how come you've kept some soy bean and sorghum—using them for fodder!"

"Not enough bean-cake! As soon as the bean-cake got to the village co-op, the local people cleaned it out. By the time our hamlet heard about it, it was all gone. They say that in the Tenth District you can't buy the stuff, even at ten thousand a cake!"

"Who says so?"

"Wu Hsi-tsai, in our hamlet. He runs a general store in the city, doesn't he? He knows all about what's happening in the market."

"Does Wu Hsi-tsai come back to Panther Den often?"

"Him? Sure. He came back again yesterday. Won't be leaving till after New Year!"

Secretary Ting detected an important sign of illegal traffic. Stroking the head of one of the horses, he continued chatting with old Shen. Ting suspected there was a connection between that two hundred million still being retained by the hill hamlet peasants and merchant Wu Hsi-tsai's frequent visits home, but he couldn't put his finger on it. The merchant always came and left empty-handed.

If only the money isn't being wasted, Ting thought, it can be put back into production. The question is simple, if Wu Hsi-tsai's not mixed up in it. Of course, the fact that he comes home three times in two weeks is worth noticing. And we have to find out how much sorghum and soy bean the hill hamlet peasants have held back to feed their animals. We'll have to get the county co-op to send in a big supply of bean-cake to replace it as fodder. . . .

Cheerfully, Ting praised the well-fed appearance of the chestnut horses. Then he asked, "How's your son Shen Tsai? I hear he's shot over seventy brace of pheasants this winter."

The village mayor had refused to give him a hunting permit to go into the mountains, the old man complained. The mayor insisted that only organized groups would be allowed to hunt, but the hunters were all interested in different game. Besides, each only knew how to shoot his particular specialty. The panther hunters couldn't hit pheasants; those who could shoot pheasants didn't know how to hunt panthers. How could these men be organized into one group? All the game in and around the cypress woods had been finished off, and if Shen Tsai couldn't get a permit to go into the mountains. . . .

Ting explained that the purpose of requiring people to hunt in groups was to serve as a precaution against brush and forest fires. An individual might be careless, but the watchfulness of a group could counteract that.

"Oh, in that case, I've no objections. Why didn't the mayor say so in the first place!"

If the cold hadn't begun nipping Ting's ears, he'd probably still be talking to old Shen beside the sled!

"Let's talk inside," he suggested.

Carrying his whip, the old man followed behind the secretary to the office door. Before entering, he first stamped the snow from his boots, shook his hat, and brushed off the little icicles hanging down from his mustache.

"It's plenty cold out!" Ting hailed the young couple with a smile. "Don't your feet freeze, sitting in that sled?"

"When they freeze, we get out and run a ways," the neat-looking mine worker grinned in reply. The secretary's serious visage a while ago had made the young man very reserved. Now he relaxed, though he couldn't understand what happened outside that the secretary should return so enthusiastic and friendly.

"Kuei-hsiang, what are you standing there for? Sit down!" Ting could see now what a serious thing marriage was to this girl. Her pink face glowed with happiness. She was going to be a bride!

It suddenly occurred to the secretary that the hill hamlets would be losing an outstanding publicity worker, a leader among the women. He thought of the other Ninth District girls—lovely flowers, excellent workers—who had married and moved to the mine. They left the land, left farming, and caused quite a stir among the young peasant boys. The latter were worried they wouldn't be able to find brides in the countryside, that the pretty girls would all be moving away.

"What are your plans?" Ting asked Kuei-hsiang. "Are you going to give up farming?"

"No!"

"But after you marry?"

"I still want to take care of the orchard when we form our collective farm!"

"I can come home every Saturday on my bicycle," said the young man. "We're still building new quarters for the workers at the mine. . . ."

It's too bad Little Chang wasn't there to hear Kuei-hsiang. As a matter of fact, after the General Line was proclaimed, she had changed her original plans. She knew where she was going now, and she loved more than ever her production team, the land, the forests, the wide open spaces of this mountain region. What's more, she was already counting on the orchard they would set up in those wide open spaces, and the bees they would raise.

In the spring, Panther Den was going to form an agricultural producers' co-operative, she said, her eyes shining. So intoxicated was she with the prospect of their future orchard and apiary, she nearly forgot she had come to register her marriage. Her face had lost its expression of artificial restraint and decorum.

"That will be a great day!" she crowed. "Secretary Ting, you come and inspect our Panther Den then! I guarantee the minute you enter the valley, you'll be able to smell the fragrance of our orchard blossoms!"

"We'll have a pasture too," old Shen added. "East of the cypress forest is a flat lowland. It grows beautiful grass every spring, tender, three fingers high. You could let a hundred horses run there freely! It's really big!"

Needless to say, by the time Little Chang came panting back, Secretary Ting still hadn't eaten his lunch—he was so excited and happy talking to the Panther Den visitors. In Kuei-hsiang and old Shen he could

see the strength and confidence in the future which the General Line gave to people. Ting was pleased with Kuei-hsiang finding complete satisfaction in farming. Little Chang was surprised. Why did Secretary Ting show such fondness towards her? He couldn't have been better disposed to her if she had been chosen to attend a county meeting of model farmers!

After the certificate of marriage was issued and Secretary Ting was walking the visitors to the door, he took Kuei-hsiang aside.

"What is Wu Hsi-tsai up to?" he asked in a low voice. "Do you know?"

"I'm not sure," she replied softly. "Every time he leaves, it's very late at night."

"Does he take anything with him?"

"The last two times he rode on old Liu's big cart. Old Liu was hauling rice stalks."

"Both times it was like that?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"Did Liu say he was taking his rice stalks to the city to sell them?"

"Yes!"

"Doesn't your mutual-aid team want to buy rice stalks for fodder?"

"He only wants to sell in the city!"

Ting was sure there was grain hidden under those rice stalks. Liu had money, which he was lending out at interest. He was a typical speculator. Why is it that each time the merchant caught a ride to the city it had to be with him? Ting instructed the girl to tell her village Party secretary to telephone him this time as soon as the merchant left for the city.

"Don't let a word of this leak out," Ting cautioned her. "The least breath will make the grass move, and the snake-in-the-grass will slip away!"

At the sled, Ting said loudly, "You have some big plans for Panther Den. That's fine!" This was continuation of what he had been saying when Little Chang's return with the key had interrupted him. "But we've still got a stretch of rough road ahead where we have to get everyone to pitch in together. If we do a lot on each work day, we can accumulate surplus capital. Then we can spread out our orchards, raise bees! Where do we get the money? By increasing our output!"

Old Shen came nearer to listen to what the secretary was saying.

"What's going to happen if your pasture gets flooded by the summer rains?" Ting asked him. "All right, you can graze the horses on the hillsides. But what about the winter time? Where are you going to find all that hay? Right? We have to increase our production. First, you must organize an agricultural producers' co-operative. Land needs money. You have to invest! But what are you people doing? You earned money from your grain, but are you depositing it, saving it to

buy fertilizer and modern farm implements? Oh yes, you deposited a little, but keeping most of it in your pockets you'll only fritter it away! How are you going to work out those big plans then?"

"It's true," old Shen admitted with a guilty laugh. "It's much better to put the money in the bank than to hold on to it."

"Of course." Ting turned to Kuei-hsiang seated in the sled. He thrust out a big hand. "Well, all right then! I wish you both happiness. Do a good publicity job. Think about how to convince the people to deposit their extra money. Use your head!"

Ting then shook hands with old Shen. "Tie your head kerchief on well!" he called to Kuei-hsiang. "Don't freeze your ears!"

The sled was already moving.

"Goodbye, Secretary Ting!" Kuei-hsiang's voice floated back.

"Goodbye!"

It goes without saying—Secretary Ting had no time that noon to make meat dumplings. At two in the afternoon, the district primary school was giving a New Year party which he had to attend. At three, Sun Hsiang-chin and the doctor were getting married. Ting personally had to officiate. The result was that he ate only some warmed-over corn muffins and a few pickled vegetables. But they tasted delicious to him.

In the end Little Chang, the messenger, was victorious. As Ting was rushing off, he told the boy to wait for the district administrative officer to return, and then go home.

Alone in the big office, Little Chang looked through the window at the large rear courtyard. What a quiet holiday. Silently, he prayed that the sun would quickly set, that it would soon be night! Ai! What a long day!. . . Right! Sweep all the snow in the courtyard into one big pile!

The happy night finally fell on the warehouse courtyard of the supply and marketing co-operative. Pharmacists and nurses from the clinic, salespeople and book-keepers from the co-op, committee members of the Women's Association, the primary school teacher, the secretary of the village Youth League branch—all arrived to join the fun. The administrative officer had hurriedly returned before dusk. Little Chang, fearful that the bride might try to escape, sat blocking the doorway. He had crammed three big logs into the *kang*, and the room was, if anything, too hot. Several people had unbuttoned their overcoats. . . . Those near the *kang* assumed the pleasant duty of keeping an eye on the bride. She sat surrounded on one corner of the *kang*, with an expression that seemed to say no matter how much they distrusted her, she was quite prepared to satisfy whatever requests they might make. Her face was the fresh pink of a spring flower; her eyes flashed with laughter.

Every item on the programme which the bride would be asked to

perform had been decided upon by whispered consultation between Little Chang and the administrative officer. These included a vocal solo (accompanied by the groom on the harmonica), a duet with the groom, a rope-skipping demonstration, and a *yangko* dance with groom. Of course, all these numbers were to be performed on the *kang*. There was also another item, proposed by Little Chang, which had been approved after some additions and revisions by the other celebrants. This was a short skit, in which the dialogue was to run as follows:

First the groom would ask, "Do you love me?"

And the bride would have to say, "I love you!"

"Where do you love me?"

"I love you in my heart!"

"Suppose I don't believe you?"

"Listen, if you don't believe! You can hear my heart thumping and jumping!"

In other words, everything was ready. They were only awaiting the return of the fellow who went for the harmonica. Sitting in the doorway, Little Chang was excited, his face flushed. He could just imagine how embarrassed the bride would be to have to pronounce the word "love" in front of all these people! Of course she couldn't know that they had prepared such wonderful dialogue.

And then, just as the precious moment was arriving—this moment that no money could buy—someone leaned down and whispered into Little Chang's ear.

"The district Party secretary wants you!"

Even before he had recovered from this shock, Little Chang noticed that the administrative officer had already departed. Naturally, the messenger had no choice but to leave the room silently. And it was just about to start! What a rare chance! He hadn't seen her plead yet, beg to be let off from performing. . . . Nevertheless, he had to go, for the time being.

As Little Chang hurried into the district office, he found Secretary Ting and the administrative officer talking together in low tones. A militiaman, with a rifle across his back, was warming himself by the stove. The expression on Ting's face was grim; there must be some important job to be done. Little Chang's interest in the marriage celebration instantly dissolved.

"I've thought it over," the secretary was saying quietly. "If we supply the peasants with bean-cake, they'll sell us their surplus grain. They've still got some. Even if Wu Hsi-tsai is buying up grain, he probably can't buy much. After all, these peasants in the hill hamlets have had the General Line explained to them thoroughly. Their political consciousness is higher now. Liu has always been a greedy, grasping type. He and Wu Hsi-tsai must be mixed up in some dirty business. But

remember, we want to behave very correctly. If there's really grain beneath these rice stalks, we turn the matter over to the higher authorities for their disposal."

"Right!" The administrative officer began pulling on his gloves.

"Little Chang, what do you say? Will you go with him to Three Trees and watch the road?"

"Sure!"

"Better wait at the fork in the road. Don't go into the hamlet itself."

"Right!"

"You can go home on holiday tomorrow." As Little Chang was leaving, Secretary Ting draped his sheepskin coat over the boy's shoulders. It was colder at night, and out in the open the wind was strong.

The young messenger understood the significance of the order he would be executing. He knew they were fighting rural capitalism, that there was a vital connection between this fight and the school he dreamt of seeing built on the hillside. This was what Secretary Ting had told them about in his talks to the district government workers—hacking out the road to socialism was everybody's job.

With one shoulder forward, Little Chang pushed against the high wind. It was quite dark, but white snow covered the ground. Trudging along the road, Little Chang thought to himself—this is a wonderful holiday! So many things have happened! And now he was going into battle against the ones who wanted to wreck the General Line.

He had been exceptionally busy. For lunch he had eaten only a warmed-over corn muffin. He had been unable to take part in teasing the bride—an event for which he had been waiting all day. But Little Chang was very happy, completely satisfied, though gripped by some of the tension that all scouts feel. That girl from Panther Den who came to register her marriage today, he thought, must be happily sitting on a warm *kang* right now, surrounded by people who've come to congratulate her. I bet none of them know that the district Party committee is out tonight protecting this happiness, protecting them as they go on to socialism, on to collective farms.

And now that he came to think of it, Little Chang realized that he was one of their protectors too. He suddenly felt that he had grown much taller; he seemed to be standing on a mountain top. Little Chang had never had this feeling before.

Around midnight, on the highway east of the hamlet of Three Trees, the administrative officer, the militiaman and Little Chang stopped Liu's big cart as it came loaded with rice stalks from Panther Den. Beneath the stalks they uncovered three hundred bean-cakes which Liu, as a member of the co-op, using Wu Hsi-tsai's money and his own, had bought

up for illegal speculation from the village supply and marketing co-operative. Of course the merchant, who claimed he was only "hitching a ride," was also escorted to the district government office.

Translated by Sidney Shapiro

EARLY VERNACULAR TALES

FAN NING

China's earliest stories in the vernacular appeared within the framework of feudal society. A great development in handicrafts and commerce during the Sung Dynasty (960-1279) was accompanied by growing prosperity in the towns. In the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), a measure of state support fostered the growth of manufactures and commerce, and the townsfolk developed as a social force with a new urban outlook at variance with feudalism. Although this rising force could not free itself from feudal shackles, in economic enterprises and modes of thought alike it often opposed the old order; and it formed the social base for the rise of stories composed in the language of the people.

With the flourishing of the urban class in the Sung Dynasty, there appeared in the cities story-tellers who related tales from history, ghost stories and romances about men and women in real life. In order to have a manuscript to guide them and to be able to pass their stories on, the story-tellers transcribed certain old tales and wrote new ones, using these written texts as their scripts. These are the earliest short stories in the everyday tongue we possess. Gradually these tales spread, and, because they expressed the dissatisfaction of the rising urban class with the feudal order, gave a realistic, moving picture of the society and customs of the time, and presented characters who were true to life, they attracted far more listeners than the imitations of Tang Dynasty stories written by the literati in the classical language. In fact, by the Ming Dynasty a number of literati began to take them as models, thereby accelerating the development of the popular short story form in China.

Most of these stories were based on popular legends expanded and embellished. And since the greater number of the original tales were either brief fantasies or romances based on happenings in real life, the stories in the vernacular derived from them also belong for the most part to one of these two categories. Even the stories which are akin to myths, however, have a strongly human flavour. This is characteristic of all these tales, for their authors found inspiration and material in popular legends, which they treated in such a way as to render them acceptable to the common people.

The authors of these stories make it quite clear what they oppose, what they support, and where their sympathies lie. They have a fellow-feeling for the weak and unfortunate: orphans, widows, peasants, small

tradesmen, craftsmen, and various social outcasts. Particularly striking is their sympathy for women. They oppose all those who oppress honest people and, indignant at the cunning, greed and licentiousness of tyrants, they preach revenge. Their attitude to love, friendship and life in general gives evidence of a humanism which brings these stories close to the people.

The main theme of these tales, illustrated by the most moving incidents, is love and friendship. To depict the unhappy lot of women under the crushing oppression of the feudal system and their revolt against it, the story-tellers created heroines who crave for freedom, happiness and true love, who hold fast to their ideals and stubbornly refuse to compromise with their degrading environment. But their sterling qualities and their longing to break the fetters of feudal conventions in their search for a true companion in marriage could not be tolerated by the society of their time. *The Beggar Chief's Daughter* and *The Courtesan's Jewel Box,* two stories from the Ming Dynasty, portray the contradictions between the feudal system and outlook and the aspirations of the heroines of these two stories. At the same time, through the conflicts in the heroes' minds and their selfishness, the authors expose the rottenness and hypocrisy of feudal morality.

Mo Chi is an ambitious youth with completely feudal ideas, who wants to pass the imperial examinations to become an official. Because he is poor and cannot support a wife he brings himself to marry the beggar chief's daughter, lovely Yu-nu, although he considers her far beneath him. But as soon as he becomes rich and powerful, he loses all feeling for his wife and decides to marry again in order to achieve respectability. By ingeniously changing Yu-nu's family status to satisfy her conceited husband, the author resolves the conflict in a mock-serious manner. In fact, of course, Yu-nu is unchanged. In name alone has she become the daughter of a governor instead of a beggar chief; yet this satisfies the self-importance of a feudal official. *The Beggar Chief's Daughter* throws into sharp relief the contemptible hypocrisy of feudal morality with its concern for appearances instead of true virtue. Through Mo Chi's attempt at murder, which the governor condones, the author shows the intrinsic cruelty of the feudal rulers who posed as upright gentlemen.

The Courtesan's Jewel Box, in addition to describing Decima's contempt for feudal conventions and her courage and aspirations, makes it clear that money was the true ruler of that age. In class society, love cannot be isolated from the life of society to play out a tragedy on its own; and the chief actor in the tragedy of *The Courtesan's Jewel Box* is money. Li Chia in this story, though himself a victim of the inhuman system of absolute parental authority, thinks nothing of buying the favours of singsong girls; and when he is offered a thousand taels of silver readily sells Decima, who has just been rescued from the wretched

life of a courtesan. Indeed, while sitting beside this girl who loves him so dearly, his one thought is: "If I had a thousand taels, it would be easy for me to face my parents." At the most tense moment in the story, it is only the gleam of pearls which makes him repent his action. And Decima justly reproaches him: "I had jewels in my casket, but you, alas! had no eyes." This story paints an unforgettable picture of the sufferings of the common people under feudalism; and Decima's suicide is a powerful denunciation of such a society.

The descriptions of friendship in these popular stories are also typical of the urban outlook. Many of the characters are craftsmen or tradesmen who had to travel from place to place, and during their journeys they needed help and encouragement. A Chinese proverb says: We depend upon our parents at home, and upon our friends abroad. Merchants had to assist each other and be able to trust each other on the road. The willingness to help a friend who was in trouble, regardless of the cost to oneself, was a virtue ranked high by the citizenry of that time.

In feudal China, for the sake of self-preservation, vagrants, thieves and beggars often helped each other. Sometimes, judging by another Ming Dynasty story, *The Merry Adventures of Lan Lung,* they even banded together. However, these vagabonds who had no property of their own made friends not only with ordinary citizens but even with members of the ruling class. Lan Lung, we are told, divided among the poor what he stole; yet when a magistrate asked this thief for his help, he said: "I am nothing but a vagrant. Since you show such regard for me, I will go through fire and water to carry out your wishes." In its attack on the feudal system *The Merry Adventures of Lan Lung* holds a positive message. Besides exposing the corruption and rivalry of feudal officials, the amusing incidents in the story serve as a satire on feudal law and order.

A feature of these stories in the vernacular is the combination of verse and prose which is not to be found in traditional Chinese literature. This form is very similar to that adopted by the Buddhist preachers of the Tang Dynasty in their popular sermons, some of which have been discovered in the Thousand Buddha Caves at Tunhuang. And these sermons, with their lively anecdotes, were evolved from the traditional method of expounding the sacred canon in order that Buddhist doctrine might be made more acceptable to the common people. Because the Sung story-tellers were the direct successors of the Tang preachers, the form of their stories is a modification of that of the earlier sermons, the chief difference between them being that whereas in the Buddhist sermons verse predominates, in these stories prose predominates.

But the subject-matter of these stories is totally different from that of the sermons. The Buddhists preached loyalty, filial piety and acquiescence in the existing order. Moreover, by giving a religious interpretation of all earthly happenings they served the ends of the feudal rulers. But the characters created in these stories stubbornly pursue a happier life on this earth and appear to have little faith in any future existence.

Because Chinese stories in the vernacular were first told in the market-places and had to be easily comprehensible, they evolved certain distinctive characteristics. In the first place, they were couched in the language of everyday speech instead of the classical language used by the scholars of the time. Thus they revitalized literature, which had hitherto been the monopoly and pastime of a privileged minority, and made it accessible to the masses of the people. In the second place, because most of those who listened to these stories had received very little education and were not trained to appreciate complex forms of literature, the stories were given introductions and conclusions to make them easier to follow; and each important development in the plot was clearly and simply expressed to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding. There was no darting from one episode to another, and none of the ellipsis of modern short stories; everything that required saying was said. And the well-knit plots, simplicity and completeness of these tales were admirably suited to the needs of ordinary hearers. Such a form of literature is, of course, closely akin to folk art; and although some may find these stories crude, they possess a specifically Chinese form rooted in the life of the people of the time.

Another distinctive feature of these stories, and an artistic achievement of a very high order, is the great use made of dialogue to express character. In all the conversations between Decima and Li Chia in *The Courtesan's Jewel Box,* for instance, the latter's weakness and incompetence are vividly contrasted with her intelligence and resolution. Through the dialogue the story-tellers depict the clash between different characters and the struggle of strong personalities against violence and oppression. The conflicts and contradictions of actual life occupy a prominent place in these stories.

Owing to the barren life led by feudal intellectuals, China's traditional poets and prose writers in the Ming Dynasty emphasized form at the expense of content, until they became unable to portray the increasingly complex life of society. The literati who condemned the use of colloquial expressions in verse and prose were opposed to any extensive use of dialogue. Under these circumstances, fiction written in the language of the people provided the best means for expressing life in all its complexity and variety with its inherent conflicts.

In short, since these stories give a true and vivid picture of the society of their time, provide a form able to reflect fully all the complexities and contradictions of real life, make brilliant use of the language of everyday speech, and draw rich material from the life of the people and folk tales, they form a worthy part of the Chinese people's literary heritage.

Stories from the Ming Dynasty

THE COURTESAN'S JEWEL BOX

The Tartar hordes are swept away and the Ming empire founded,
Its capital magnificent as phoenixes and dragons;
Upon its left the ocean spreads as far as eye can see;
Upon its right the Taihang ranges stretch to the horizon.
Lances and halberds guard our frontier,
From many states come envoys to pay homage.
A golden age of peace and happiness!
And our great empire will outlast the sun.

So the poet describes the magnificence of Peking. Bounded on the north by mighty passes and overlooking the whole empire to its south, Peking is surely a strategic seat of government which will never be conquered in ten thousand years.

When Emperor Hung Wu first defeated the Tartars, he made Nanking his capital; but Emperor Yung Lo later raised troops in the north to restore order in the land, and moved the capital to Peking. So it came about that the cold, bitter north was transformed into a centre of luxury and splendour.

Nine sovereigns reigned between Emperor Yung Lo and Emperor Wan Li, the eleventh ruler of our dynasty and a wise, bold sovereign, who was virtuous and blessed to a high degree. Emperor Wan Li ascended the throne at the age of ten, and during the forty-eight years of his rule won three wars—against the Japanese general Taira Hideyoshi, the Tangut chieftain Po Cheng-en, and the Miao chieftain Yang Yin-lung. Hideyoshi invaded Korea, while Po Cheng-en and Yang Yin-lung led local risings; but all three were driven away or suppressed. Then distant tribes, struck with awe, hastened to send tribute to the Ming court.

The ruler was exalted and his subjects tasted happiness;
Then all was quiet in the land: the empire was at peace!

Our story is concerned only with the invasion of Korea by Hideyoshi in the twentieth year of Wan Li. When the King of Korea appealed

for help, the Son of Heaven sent troops across the sea to save him; and the Board of Treasury proposed that since the grain and silver allocated to the troops were insufficient for the expedition a special tax should be raised by the sale of places in the Imperial Colleges. To this the emperor agreed.

Now this system had many advantages for those with money. In addition to having a shortened course of study, fewer examinations, and opportunities to make desirable connections, students who paid to be admitted to these colleges were assured of small official posts. Accordingly, the sons of official or wealthy families who did not want to sit for the prefectural examination took advantage of this scheme to purchase a place in one of the Imperial Colleges. So the number of students in both the colleges in Nanking and Peking rose to over one thousand each.

One of these students was called Li Chia or Li Tze-hsien. A native of Shaohsing in Chekiang Province, he was the oldest of three sons of a Provincial Treasurer. Having studied in the prefectural school but failed to pass the examination, he had purchased a place in the Imperial College at Peking under the new system; and during his residence in the capital he went with a fellow-provincial and fellow-student, Liu Yu-chun, to the singsong girls' quarter. Here he met a celebrated courtesan called Tu Wei, who, because she was the tenth girl in the quarter, was also known as Decima.

She was sweetness and loveliness incarnate;
Her fine eyebrows were arched like distant hills;
Her eyes were as clear as autumn water;
Her face was as fresh as dew-washed lotus;
Her lips were as crimson as ripe peaches.
Ah, the pity of it! that this lovely maid
Should be cast by the roadside in the dust.

Decima had become a courtesan when she was thirteen, and now she was nineteen. During these seven years she had met countless young men of rich and noble families who had not hesitated to spend all they possessed for love of her; so the other singsong girls used to say:

When Decima is at the feast,
The poorest drinker drains a thousand cups;
When in our quarter Decima appears,
All other powdered faces look like ghosts.

Though Li was a gay young fellow, he had never seen such a beautiful girl. At his first meeting with Decima he was absolutely charmed by her and fell head over heels in love. And since he was not only handsome and amiable but open-handed and untiring in his pursuit of her, the attraction soon proved mutual. Realizing that her mistress was grasping

and heartless, Decima had long wanted to leave her; and now that she saw how kind and devoted Li was, she wished to throw in her lot with him. Although the young man was too afraid of his father to marry her, they fell more and more deeply in love, passing whole days and nights together in pleasure and remaining as inseparable as if they were already husband and wife. They vowed solemnly never to love anyone else.

Their love was deeper than the sea,
And more sublime their faith than mountain peaks.

After Li became Decima's lover, other wealthy men who had heard of her fame tried in vain to gain access to her. At first Li spent money lavishly on her, and the procuress, all smiles and blandishments, waited on him hand and foot. But when more than a year had sped past, Li's money was nearly exhausted. He could no longer be as generous as he would have liked, and the old woman began to discourage him. The Provincial Treasurer heard that his son was frequenting the courtesans' quarter, and sent letter after letter ordering him to come home; but the young man was so enamoured of Decima's beauty that he kept postponing his return. And later, when he heard how angry his father was with him, he dared not go back.

The proverb says that friendship based on money will end once the money is spent. Decima, however, loved Li so truly that the poorer he grew the more passionately attached to him she became. Her mistress told her repeatedly to send Li about his business and, seeing that the girl refused to do so, she began to insult him in the hope that he would leave in anger. But her insults had no effect on Li, who was naturally of a mild disposition, so she could do nothing but reproach Decima every day.

"In our profession we depend on our clients for food and clothing," she said. "As we speed one guest from the front door, another should be coming in by the back. The more clients we have, the more money and silk we shall heap up. But now that this dratted Li Chia has been hanging around for more than a year, it's no use talking about new clients—even the old ones have stopped coming. We seem to have got hold of a Chung Kuei* who keeps out devils, because not a soul will come near us. There'll soon be no smoke in our chimney. What's to become of us?"

Decima, however, would not quietly submit to this. "Mr. Li did not come here empty-handed," she retorted. "Look at all the money he has spent here!"

"That was before: it's *now* I'm talking about. You tell him to give me a little money today for fuel and rice for the two of you. In other

*According to Chinese mythology, Chung Kuei was a chaser of ghosts.

houses the girls are a money-tree which needs only to be shaken to shower down riches: it's just my bad luck that I've got a girl who keeps the money away. Every day I have to worry how to make ends meet, because you insist on supporting this pauper. Where do you think our food and clothes are coming from? Go and tell that beggar of yours that, if he's any good at all, he must give me some silver; then you can go off with him and I'll buy another girl. Wouldn't that suit us both?"

"Do you really mean it?" demanded Decima.

"Have I ever told a lie?" replied the old woman, who, knowing that Li had not a cent left and had pawned his clothes, thought it would be impossible for him to raise any money. "Of course I mean it."

"How much do you want from him?"

"If it were anyone else, I would ask for a thousand taels; but I'll ask a poor devil like him for only three hundred. With that I could buy another girl to take your place. But there's one condition: he must pay me within three days, then I shall hand you over straight away. If he hasn't paid after three days, I'll give him a good beating, the wretch, and drive him out, gentleman or no gentleman! Nobody will be able to blame me either."

"Although he is away from home and has run out of money," said Decima, "he should be able to raise three hundred taels. But three days is too little. Can't you make it ten?"

"The young fool has nothing but his bare hands," thought the procuress. "Even if I give him a hundred days, he won't be able to get the money. And when he fails to produce it, however thick-skinned he is he won't have the nerve to turn up again. Then I can get my establishment under proper control once more, and Decima will have nothing to say."

"Well, to humour you," she said, "I'll make it ten days. But if he doesn't have the money by then, don't blame me."

"If he can't find the money by then, I don't suppose he will have the face to come back," said Decima. "I am only afraid that if he does bring the three hundred taels, you may go back on your word."

"I am an old woman of fifty-one," protested the procuress. "I am worshipping Buddha and trying to lead a holy life. How could I lie to you? If you don't trust me, I'll put my palm on yours to make a pledge. May I become a dog or swine in my next life if I go back on my word!"

Who with a mere pint pot can gauge the sea?
The bawd, for all her scheming, was a fool
To think, because the scholar's purse was light,
She could so easily frustrate their love.

That night in bed Decima discussed her future with Li.

"It's not that I don't want to marry you," said the young man. "But it would cost at least a thousand taels to buy your freedom, and where can I get that now that all my money is spent?"

"I have already spoken to my mistress," replied Decima. "She wants only three hundred taels, but it must be paid within ten days. Although you have come to the end of your allowance, you must have relatives and friends in the capital from whom you can borrow. If you raise this sum, I shall be yours; and we shan't have to suffer the old woman's temper any more."

"My friends and relatives here have been cold-shouldering me because I have been spending too much time with you," said Li. "Tomorrow I'll tell them that I am packing up to leave and coming to say goodbye, then ask for money for my travelling expenses. I may be able to collect three hundred taels." So he got up, dressed and prepared to take his leave.

"Be as quick as you can!" urged Decima as he was going out. "I'll be waiting for good news." And Li promised to do his best.

On leaving the house, Li called on a number of relatives and friends, pretending that he had come to say goodbye. They were pleased to hear that he was going home, but when he mentioned that he was short of money for his journey they said nothing. As the proverb says: To speak of a loan is to put an end to friendship. They all, with good reason, considered Li as a young rake whose infatuation with a courtesan had kept him away from home for more than a year, and they knew that his father was furious with him.

"Who knows whether he is telling the truth?" they thought. "Suppose we lend him money for the journey and he spends it on girls again, when his father hears of it he will attribute the worst motives to us. Since we shall be blamed in any case, why not refuse altogether?"

"I am so sorry!" said each in turn. "I happen to be short at the moment, so I can't help you." Li received exactly the same answer from each of them, not one of his acquaintances proving generous enough to lend him even ten or twenty taels.

He called at house after house for three days without succeeding in borrowing a single cent; but he dared not tell Decima this and put her off with evasive answers. The fourth day, however, found him in such despair that he was ashamed to go back to her; but after living so long with Decima he had no other dwelling-place and, having nowhere else to spend the night, he went to his fellow-provincial, Liu, and begged a bed of him. When Liu asked why he looked so worried, Li told him the whole story of how Decima wanted to marry him. Liu, however, shook his head.

"I don't believe it," he said. "Decima is the most famous courtesan in that quarter and her price must be at least ten pecks of pearls or a thousand taels of silver. Her mistress would never let her go for three hundred taels. The old woman must be annoyed because you have no money left but are monopolising her girl without paying her; so she has thought of this trick to get rid of you. Since she has known you for a long time, she has to keep up appearances and can't drive you away outright; and, knowing that you are short of cash, she has asked for three

hundred taels in order to appear generous, giving you ten days in which to raise that sum. They believe that if you can't get the money in time, you won't have the face to go back; while if you do, they will jeer at you and insult you so that you can't stay anyway. This is the kind of trick such people always play. Think it over for yourself and don't let them take you in. In my humble opinion, the sooner you sever relations with them the better."

When Li heard this he was filled with misgivings and remained silent for a long time.

"You mustn't make a wrong decision," went on Liu. "If you really want to go home and need money for the journey, your friends may be able to raise a few taels. But I doubt if you could get three hundred taels in ten months, let alone ten days, for people nowadays are simply not interested in their friends' troubles. Those women knew that you could never borrow such a sum: that's why they named this figure."

"I suppose you are right, my friend," said Li.

But, still unwilling to give up the girl, he continued to call on acquaintances to ask for a loan, no longer going back to Decima at night. He stayed with Liu for three days, until six of the ten days had passed, by which time Decima had become so anxious that she sent her little servant-boy out to look for him. The boy found Li on the main street.

"Mr. Li!" he called. "Our mistress is expecting you!"

Li, however, felt too ashamed to go back and said: "I am busy today. I will come tomorrow."

But the boy had his instructions from Decima and, taking hold of Li's coat, he would not let him go. "I was told to find you," he said. "You must come with me."

So Li, who was of course longing for his mistress, accompanied the boy to the courtesans' quarter. But when he saw Decima he was silent.

"What progress have you made?" asked Decima.

Li shed tears and said nothing.

"Are men's hearts so hard," she said, "that you cannot raise three hundred taels?"

With tears in his eyes, Li answered: "It is easier to catch a tiger in the mountain than to find a friend in need. I have been hurrying from house to house for six days, but I have not been able to borrow a cent; and it is because I was ashamed to come to you empty-handed that I have stayed away for the last few days. Today you sent for me, and I come feeling overwhelmed with shame. It is not that I haven't done my best, but people are heartless."

"Don't let the old woman hear you," said Decima. "Stay here tonight, and we'll talk it over." Then she prepared a meal and they enjoyed the food and wine together.

In the middle of the night Decima asked: "Couldn't you get any money at all? What will become of me then?"

But Li had no answer for her and could only shed tears.

Soon it was dawn and Decima said: "In my mattress I have hidden one hundred and fifty taels of silver which I have saved up, and I want you to take that. Now that I have given you half of the sum, it should be easier for you to find the other half. But there are only four days left: don't lose any time." Then getting out of bed she gave the mattress to Li, who was overcome with joy.

Ordering the servant-boy to carry the mattress for him, Li went straight to Liu's lodging, where he told his friend all that had happened that night. And when they unpicked the mattress they found in the cotton padding many silver pieces which, when weighed, totalled one hundred and fifty taels. Liu was very much impressed.

"The girl must really be in love with you," he said. "Since she is so much in earnest, you mustn't let her down. I will do what I can for you."

"If you help me now," replied Li, "I shall never forget it."

Then Liu kept Li in his house, while he went round himself to all his acquaintances. In two days he borrowed one hundred and fifty taels which he gave to Li, saying: "I have done this not so much for your sake as because I am touched by the girl's devotion to you."

It was a happy Li, beaming with smiles, who came to Decima with the three hundred taels on the ninth day—one day earlier than the appointed time.

"The other day you could not borrow a cent," said Decima. "How is it that today you have got one hundred and fifty taels?" And when Li told her about his fellow-student Liu, she pressed her hands to her forehead in token of gratitude. "We must thank Mr. Liu for making our wish come true!" she cried.

They passed the night in great joy together, and the next morning Decima rose early and said to Li: "Once you have paid the money, I shall be able to leave with you. You had better decide how we are going to travel. Yesterday I borrowed twenty taels from my friends which you can take for the journey."

Li had, in fact, been wondering where he was going to get the money for their journey, but had not liked to mention this difficulty. Now he was delighted to receive this twenty taels.

As they were talking, the mistress of the house knocked at the door. "This is the tenth day, Decima!" she called.

When Li heard this, he opened the door to invite her in. "Thank you, aunty," he said. "I was just going to ask you over." And he placed the three hundred taels on the table.

The procuress had never thought that Li would produce the money. Her face fell and she was about to retract, when Decima said:

"I have worked here for eight years, and I must have earned several thousand taels for you in that time. This is the happy day on which I am to start a new life—you agreed to that yourself. The three hundred

taels are here, not a cent less, and they have been paid on time. If you break your word, Mr. Li will take the money away and I shall immediately commit suicide. Then you will lose both the money and me, and you will be sorry."

The old woman had nothing to say to this. After long thought she finally had to fetch her balance to weigh the silver.

"Well, well," she said at last. "I suppose I can't keep you. But if you must go, go at once. And don't think you're going to take any clothes and trinkets with you." She pushed them out of the room, and called for a lock with which she padlocked the door.

It was already autumn. Decima, just risen from her bed and not yet dressed, was still wearing old clothes. She curtsied to her mistress and Li bowed too. Then as husband and wife they left the old woman's house together.

Like a carp escaping from a golden hook,
They scurried off, not to return again.

"Wait while I call a sedan-chair for you," said Li to Decima. "We can go to Mr. Liu's lodging before deciding on anything." But Decima demurred.

"My friends have always been very good to me," she said, "and I ought to say goodbye to them. Besides, they were kind enough to lend us the money for our travelling expenses the other day: we ought to thank them for that." So she took Li to say goodbye to the other courtesans.

Two of these girls, Yueh-lang and Su-su, lived nearby and were Decima's closest friends. She called first on Yueh-lang, who, surprised to see her dressed in old clothes and with no ornaments in her hair, asked what had happened. Decima told her, and introduced Li to her. Then, pointing to Yueh-lang, Decima told Li:

"This is the friend who lent us the money the other day. You should thank her." And Li bowed again and again.

Presently Yueh-lang led Decima into another room to change her clothes, sending at the same time for Su-su. And after Decima had dressed, her two friends brought out all their emerald trinkets, gold bracelets, jade hairpins and ear-rings, as well as a brocade tunic and a skirt, a phoenix girdle and a pair of embroidered slippers, until soon they had arrayed Decima in finery from head to foot. Then they feasted together, and Yueh-lang lent the lovers her bedroom for the night.

The following day they gave another big feast to which all the courtesans were invited; and not one of Decima's friends stayed away. After toasting the happy couple, they played wind and stringed instruments, and sang and danced, each doing her best to give the company pleasure. And this feast lasted till midnight, when Decima thanked each of her friends in turn.

"You were the chief among us," said the courtesans. "But now that you are leaving with your husband, we may never meet again. When you have decided on which day to set out, we shall come to see you off."

"When the date is settled, I shall let you all know," said Yueh-lang. "But Decima will be travelling a long way with her husband, and their resources are rather limited. We must be responsible for seeing that she doesn't have to go short on the way." The other courtesans agreed to this, then left, while Li and Decima spent the night again in Yueh-lang's room.

When dawn came Decima asked Li: "Where are we going from here? Have you any plan?"

"My father is already angry with me," replied Li, "and if he hears that I have married a singsong girl, not only will he make me suffer for it but you will feel all the weight of his anger too. This has been worrying me for some time, but I have not yet thought of a way out."

"A father cannot help loving his son," said Decima, "so he won't be angry with you for ever. But perhaps, instead of going straight home, we had better go to some beauty spot like Soochow or Hangchow for the time being. You can then go home alone and ask some relatives or friends to persuade your father to forgive you. Once you have made your peace with him you can come to fetch me, and all will be well."

"That is a good idea," agreed Li.

The next morning they said goodbye to Yueh-lang and went to Liu's lodging to pack their baggage. When Decima saw Liu she kowtowed to him to thank him for his assistance, and promised to repay him in future.

Liu hastily bowed in return. "You must be a remarkable woman," he said, "to remain loyal to your lover even after he became poor. I merely blew upon the fire in the direction of the wind. Such a trifling service is not worth mentioning."

The three of them feasted all day, and the following morning chose an auspicious day for the journey and hired sedan-chairs and beasts. Decima also sent her boy with a letter to Yueh-lang to thank her and bid her farewell. When they were leaving, several sedan-chairs arrived bearing Yueh-lang, Su-su and the other courtesans who had come to see them off.

"You are starting on a long journey with your husband and you are short of money," said Yueh-lang. "So we have prepared a little gift to express our love. Please accept it. If you run short on your journey, you may find it useful." She told a servant to bring over a gilded box of the type used for carrying stationery; but since this was securely locked, its contents could not be seen. Decima neither declined the gift nor opened it, but thanked them all. By now the chairs and beasts were ready, and the chair-bearers and grooms asked them to start. Liu offered the travellers three cups of wine in parting, and he and the courtesans saw them to Tsungwen Gate where, wiping away tears, they all bade their friends farewell.

Uncertain whether they would meet again,
They bade farewell, with tears on either side.

In due course Li and Decima reached Luho River where they were to take a junk. They were lucky enough to find an official despatch boat returning to Kuachou and, having settled the amount of their fare, they booked places on this junk. Once aboard, however, Li discovered that he had not a cent left. Although Decima had given him twenty taels, it was all gone! The fact was that Li had stayed in the courtesans' quarter until he had nothing but old clothes to wear; so as soon as he had money he naturally went to redeem a few of his gowns at the pawn shop and to have new bedding made. What was left of the silver was enough only for the sedan-chairs and beasts.

"Don't worry," said Decima, when she saw his anxiety. "The present that my friends gave us may prove useful." Thereupon she took a key and unlocked the box. Li, standing beside her, was too ashamed to look into the case as Decima took out a silk bag and placed it on the table.

"See what's in that," she said.

Li picked up the bag, which was quite heavy; and when he opened it he found it contained exactly fifty taels of silver. Decima meantime had locked the box again without saying what else it contained.

"How generous of the girls to give us this!" she exclaimed. "Now we have enough not only for the road but to help towards our expenses when we visit the beauty spots in Soochow or Hangchow."

Surprised and delighted, Li rejoined: "If not for your help, I should have died far from home without a burial place. I shall never forget how good you have been to me." After that, whenever they talked of the past Li would burst into tears of gratitude, but Decima would always comfort him tenderly.

After an uneventful journey of several days, they reached Kuachou Harbour where the junk moored. Li booked another passenger boat, had their luggage put aboard and arranged to set sail the next morning at dawn. It was mid-winter and the full moon was as clear and bright as water.

"Since we left the capital," said Li to Decima as they sat together in the bow of the junk, "we have been shut up in the cabin with other passengers so that we couldn't talk freely. But today we have the whole boat to ourselves and can do as we please. Now that we are leaving North China and coming to the Yangtse Valley, don't you think we should drink a little wine to celebrate and to cheer ourselves up?"

"Yes," said Decima. "I haven't had a chance to chat or laugh for a long time. I feel just as you do."

Li got out the wine utensils and placed them on the deck, then spread a rug on which they sat down together to drink to each other, until they were both under the spell of the wine.

"You had the loveliest voice in all your quarter," said Li, raising his cup to Decima. "The first time that I saw you and heard you sing so divinely, I lost my heart to you. But we have been upset for so long that I haven't heard your heavenly voice for many days. Now the bright moon is shining on the clear waves; it is midnight and there is no one about—won't you sing for me?"

Decima was in a happy mood, so, clearing her throat and tapping her fan on the deck to keep time, she sang. Her song was about a scholar who offered wine to a girl, and was taken from the opera *Moon Pavilion* by Shih Chun-mei of the Yuan Dynasty. It was set to the air known as "The Little Red Peach Blossom."

As her voice reached the sky, the clouds halted to listen;
As her voice reached the waves, the fish frolicked for joy.

Now on another junk nearby there was a young man called Sun Fu, who was a native of Hsinan in Hueichou. He had an estate worth millions of cash, for his family had dealt in salt in Yangchow for generations; and now, at twenty years of age, he too had entered the Imperial College. This Sun was a dissolute young man who frequented the courtesans' quarters in search of amusement or to buy a smile from the singsong girls: indeed, he was one of the foremost in the pursuit of pleasure.

Sun's boat was moored at Kuachou Harbour too on this particular evening, and he was drinking alone to drown his boredom when he heard a woman singing so clearly and exquisitely that not even the song of a phoenix could compare with her voice. He stood up in the bow and listened for some time until he realized that the singing came from the next boat; but just as he was going to make enquiries, the song ended. The servant whom he sent to put discreet questions to the boatman found out that the adjacent junk had been hired by a certain Mr. Li, but was unable to learn anything about the singer.

"She must be a professional, not a respectable girl," thought Sun. "How can I contrive to see her?" Preoccupation with this problem kept him awake all night.

At the fifth watch a high wind sprang up, and by dawn the sky was filled with dark clouds. Soon a snowstorm was raging.

Trees on the hills are hidden by the clouds,
All human tracks are blotted out below;
And on the frozen river in the snow
An old man fishes from his little boat.

Since this snowstorm made it impossible to cross the river, all boats had to remain in the harbour. Sun ordered his boatman to steer closer to Li's junk; and then, having put on his sable cap and fox-fur coat, he opened the window on the pretext that he was watching the snow. Thus

he succeeded in catching sight of Decima, for when she had finished dressing she raised the curtain of the cabin window with one slender white hand in order to empty her basin into the river. Her more than earthly beauty made Sun's head swim, and he fastened his eyes to the spot where she had appeared, hoping to gain another glimpse of her; but he was disappointed. After some reflection, he leaned against his cabin window and chanted aloud the lines by Kao Chi on the plum blossom:

Like a hermit resting on some snow-clad hill;
Like a lovely girl in some glade beneath the moon.

When Li heard someone chanting poetry in the next boat, he leaned out to look just as Sun had hoped he would. For Sun's plan was to attract Li's attention by this means in order to draw him into conversation. Now, hastily raising his hands in greeting, Sun asked:

"What is your honourable name, sir?"

After Li introduced himself he naturally asked to know Sun's name. And, when Sun had introduced himself, they chatted about the Imperial College until very soon they were on friendly terms.

"It must be heaven's will," said Sun, "that this snowstorm should have held up our boats in order that we should meet. I am in luck. Travelling by junk is thoroughly boring, and I would like to go ashore with you to a wineshop where I can profit by your conversation while we drink. I hope you won't refuse."

"Only meeting you by chance," replied Li, "how can I impose on you like this?"

"Oh, come," protested Sun. "Within the four seas all men are brothers."

Then he ordered his boatman to put down the gangplank, and told his boy to hold an umbrella for Mr. Li as he came across. He bowed to Li at the bow and followed him politely ashore.

A few paces brought them to a wineshop. They went upstairs, chose a clean table by the window and sat down. When the waiter had brought wine and food, Sun asked Li to drink; and as they drank they enjoyed the sight of the snow. After they had exchanged the usual platitudes about scholarship, Sun gradually steered the conversation around to courtesans; and now that they had found a common interest—since both young men had much experience in this field—they began to talk frankly and to exchange confidences.

Presently Sun sent his servant away, and asked in a low voice: "Who was the girl who sang on your junk last night?"

Li, only too ready to boast of his conquest, announced truthfully: "That was Tu Wei, the well-known courtesan of Peking."

"If she is a courtesan, how did you manage to get hold of her?"

Then Li told him the whole story: how they had fallen in love, how Decima had wanted to marry him, and how he had borrowed money to redeem her.

"It must, no doubt, be very pleasant," said Sun, "to be taking home a beauty. But will your honourable family approve?"

"I have no anxiety on the score of my first wife," replied Li. "The only difficulty is that my father is rather strict, and I may have trouble with him."

This gave Sun the opening he had been waiting for.

"Since your respected father may disapprove, where do you intend to lodge your beauty?" he asked. "Have you discussed it with her?"

"Yes, we have discussed it," replied Li with a frown.

"And does she have a good plan?" demanded Sun eagerly.

"She wants to stay for a time in Soochow or Hangchow," answered Li. "And when we have visited the beauty spots there, I will return home first to ask friends or relatives to talk my father round; then, when he is no longer angry, I shall fetch her back. What do you think of this plan?"

Sun looked thoughtful for a while, pretending to be very much concerned.

"We have only just met," he said at length, "and you may take offence if a casual acquaintance advises you on such an intimate matter."

"I need your advice," protested Li. "Please don't hesitate to speak frankly."

"Well then," said Sun. "Since your father is a high provincial official, he must be very jealous of your family reputation. He has already expressed displeasure because you visited low haunts: do you think he will allow you to take a singsong girl as your wife? As for your relatives and friends, they will all take their cue from your respected father. It will be useless to ask their help: they are bound to refuse. And even if some of them are foolish enough to plead your cause to your father, once they realize that the old gentleman is against this marriage they will change their tune. So you will be causing discord in your family, and you will have no satisfactory answer to take to your mistress. Even if you enjoy the scenery in Soochow and Hangchow for a time, you cannot live like that indefinitely. Once your funds run low you will find yourself in a dilemma."

Only too conscious that all he possessed was fifty taels, the greater part of which was already spent, when Sun spoke of possible financial difficulties Li nodded and admitted that such, indeed, was the case.

"Now I sincerely want to help you," went on Sun. "But you may not like to hear my suggestion."

"I am very much obliged to you," said Li. "Please speak frankly."

"I had better not," declared Sun. "Casual acquaintances shouldn't come between lovers."

"Never mind about that," protested Li.

"As the ancients said, women are fickle," argued Sun. "And singsong girls in particular are likely to prove untrue. Since your mistress is a well-known courtesan, she must have friends everywhere. There may be some former lover of hers in the south, and she may be making use of you for the journey here so that she can join another man."

"Oh, no, I don't think so," said Li.

"You may be right," replied Sun. "But those young southerners are notorious philanderers; and if you leave your mistress by herself, she may succumb to one of them. On the other hand, if you take her home you will make your father angrier than ever. In fact, there seems to be no way out for you. Now the relationship between father and son is sacred and inviolable. If you offend your father and abandon your home for the sake of a courtesan, you will be universally condemned as a dissolute wastrel. Your wife will not consider you worthy to be her husband, your younger brother will cease to respect you as his elder, and your friends will have no more to do with you. You will find yourself a complete outcast. So I advise you to think this thing out carefully today."

This speech left Li at a complete loss. Hitching his seat nearer to Sun, he demanded earnestly: "What do you think I should do?"

"I have a scheme which would be very much to your advantage," replied Sun. "But I fear you may be too fond of your concubine to consider it, and I will have wasted my breath."

"If you have a good plan to restore me to the bosom of my family, I shall be tremendously grateful to you. Don't hesitate to speak."

"You have been away from home for more than a year, so that your father is angry and your wife displeased with you. If I were you, I would be unable to eat or sleep for remorse. But your worthy father is angry with you only because you have let yourself become infatuated with a courtesan and are spending money like water. You are showing yourself unfit to inherit his property, for if you go on in this way you are bound to bankrupt your family; so if you return home now empty-handed, the old gentleman will vent his anger on you. But if you are willing to part with your concubine and to make the best of a bad bargain, I don't mind offering you a thousand taels for her. With this sum, you can tell your father that you have been teaching in the capital instead of squandering money, and he will certainly believe you. Then peace will reign at home and you will have no more trouble: at a single stroke you will have turned calamity into good fortune. Please consider my offer carefully. It's not that I covet your courtesan's beauty: I just want to do what I can to help you out."

Li had always been a weak character who stood in great awe of his father; so Sun's argument convinced him completely and, rising from his seat, he bowed to express his thanks.

"Your excellent advice has opened my eyes," he said. "But since my concubine has come all these hundreds of miles with me, I can't sever relations with her too abruptly. I'll talk it over with her, and let you know as soon as I gain her consent."

"Break it to her gently," said Sun. "Since she is so fond of you, she can't want to estrange you from your father. I am sure she will help to restore you to your family." They went on drinking till dusk, when the wind dropped and the snow ceased. Then Sun told his servant to pay the bill, and walked hand in hand with Li back to the boat.

You should tell a stranger only one-third of the truth;
To bare your heart to him is far from wise.

Now Decima had prepared wine and sweetmeats on the junk for Li, but he did not come back all day. At dusk she lighted the lamp to wait for him, and when he came aboard she rose to welcome him; but she noticed that he seemed rather flustered and upset. As she poured a cup of warm wine for him, he shook his head in refusal and went without a word to his bed. Decima was disturbed. Having put away the cups and plates and helped Li to undress, she asked:

"What has happened today to make you so sad?"

Li's only answer was a sigh. She repeated her question three or four times until he was asleep, and by then she was so uneasy that she sat on the edge of the bed, unable to close her eyes. In the middle of the night the young man woke up and heaved another great sigh.

"What is preying so heavily on your mind?" asked Decima. "Why can't you tell me?"

Li sat up, drawing the quilt around him, and tried several times to speak; but he broke off short each time and tears poured down his cheeks.

Then taking Li in her arms Decima comforted him with kind words, saying: "We have been lovers for nearly two years and won through a thousand hardships and difficulties; and you have not looked depressed once during all this long journey. Why are you so upset now when we are about to cross the Yangtse and settle down to live happily ever after? There must be a reason. As husband and wife we shall live and die together, so we should discuss our troubles together too. Please don't keep it from me."

After she had begged him several times to speak, with tears in his eyes Li said: "When I was stranded far from home you were good to me and attached yourself to me in spite of every hardship, so that I am inexpressibly grateful to you. But I have been thinking things over. My father is a high provincial official who is a stickler for convention and a very stern man. If I anger him so that he drives us out of the family, we shall be forced to wander homeless, and what will become of us then? That would mean a complete break with my father, and we could not be

sure of a happy married life either. Today my friend Sun from Hsinan discussed this with me while we were drinking; and now I feel quite broken-hearted."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Decima, greatly alarmed.

"A man in trouble cannot see his way clearly," said Li. "But Mr. Sun has thought out an excellent plan for me. I am only afraid you may not agree to it."

"Who is this Mr. Sun? If his plan is good, why shouldn't I agree to it?"

"His name is Sun Fu. He is a salt merchant from Hsinan and a gallant young scholar. He heard you singing last night, so he asked about you; and when I told him our story and mentioned that we would not be able to go home, he offered a thousand taels for your hand. If I had a thousand taels, it would be easy for me to face my parents; and you would have a home too. But I can't bear to part with you: that's why I am sad." When he had said this, his tears fell like rain.

Taking her arms from his shoulders, Decima gave a strange laugh.

"He must be a fine gentleman to have thought out this plan," she said. "You will recover your thousand taels, and I shall no longer be an encumbrance to you if I can go to another man. What could be more reasonable and high-principled? This plan suits us both. Where is the silver?"

"Since I hadn't got your consent, my love," said Li, who had stopped crying, "the money is still with him. It hasn't yet changed hands."

"Mind you clinch with him first thing tomorrow," urged Decima. "You mustn't miss this opportunity. But a thousand taels is a lot of money; be sure it is properly weighed and handed over before I cross to the other boat. Don't let that salt merchant cheat you."

It was now the fourth watch, and since dawn was approaching Decima got up and lighted the lamp to dress herself.

"Today I am dressing to usher out an old client and welcome in a new," she said. "This is an important occasion."

She applied her rouge, powder and scented oil with great care, then arrayed herself in her most splendid jewels and most magnificent embroidered gown. Her perfume scented the air and she was a dazzling sight.

By the time she had finished dressing it was already dawn and Sun had sent a servant to their junk for a reply. When Decima stole a glance at Li and saw that he looked pleased, she urged him to give a reply at once and possess himself of the silver as soon as possible. Then Li went to Sun's boat to announce that Decima was willing.

"There is no difficulty about the money," said Sun. "But I must have the lady's jewel case as a pledge."

When Li told Decima this, she pointed to her gilded box.

"Let them take that," she said.

Then Sun, in great exultation, promptly sent the thousand taels of silver to Li's boat. When Decima had looked through the packages and satisfied herself that the silver was of the finest and the amount was correct, she put one hand on the side of the boat and beckoned to Sun with the other, so that he was transported with joy.

"May I have that box back for a minute?" she asked, parting her red lips to reveal pearly teeth. "It contains Mr. Li's travel permit which I must return to him."

Satisfied that Decima could not escape him now, Sun ordered his servant to carry back her gilded box and set it down on the deck. Decima took her key and unlocked it, disclosing a series of drawers inside; and when she told Li to pull out the first drawer, he found it filled with trinkets, pearls, jade and precious stones, to the value of several hundred taels of silver. These jewels, to the consternation of Li, Sun and the others on the two boats, Decima suddenly tossed into the river.

Then she told Li to pull out a second drawer containing jade flutes and golden pipes, and a third drawer filled with curious old jade and gold ornaments, worth several thousand taels. All these, too, Decima threw into the water.

By this time the bank was thronged with spectators. "What a pity!" they exclaimed.

As they were marvelling at her behaviour, she drew out the last drawer in which there was a casket. She opened the casket and they saw that it was packed with handfuls of bright pearls and other precious stones such as emeralds and cat's-eyes, the like of which they had never seen before and the value of which they could not even guess at. The onlookers cried out loudly in admiration. When Decima made as if to toss all these jewels into the river too, a remorseful Li threw his arms around her and wept bitterly, while Sun came over to plead with her also. But Decima pushed Li away and turned angrily on Sun.

"Mr. Li and I suffered many hardships to come here!" she cried. "But you, to gratify your lust, lied cunningly to him in order to break up our marriage and destroy our love. I hate you! After my death, if I become a ghost, I shall accuse you before the gods. How dared you think of enjoying me yourself!"

Then Decima turned to Li.

"I led the unhappy life of a courtesan for many years," she said, "and during that time I saved up enough to support myself in my old age. But after I met you, we swore to love each other all our lives. When we left the capital I pretended that this box was a present from my friends, whereas actually it contained jewels worth over ten thousand taels of silver with which I intended to fit you out splendidly, so that when you returned to your parents they might feel well disposed towards me and accept me as one of the family. Then I could have remained happily with you ever after. But you did not trust me and were easily swayed by

lies; and now you have abandoned me midway, caring nothing for my true love. I have opened this box in front of all these people to show you that a paltry thousand taels is nothing to me. I had jewels in my casket, but you, alas! had no eyes. Fate must be against me. I escaped from the bitter lot of a courtesan only to be cast aside by you. All of you here today can be my witnesses! I have not been unfaithful to him, but he has proved untrue to me!"

Then all who were present were moved to tears. They cursed and spat at Li, accusing him of ingratitude and disloyalty; while shame, unhappiness and remorse made the young man weep bitterly. He was turning to beg Decima's forgiveness when, clasping the casket in her arms, she leapt into the river. They shouted for help, but there was a thick mist over the river and the current was strong, so she could not be found. How sad that such a beautiful and famous courtesan should fall a victim to the hungry waves!

The watery deep engulfed that lovely form;
The river bore her from the world of men.

Gnashing their teeth in rage, the onlookers wanted to fall upon Li and Sun; and the two young men were so alarmed that they shouted to the boatmen to cast off, escaping in opposite directions. As he stared at the thousand taels of silver, Li longed for Decima; and he sat brooding all day in shame and sorrow until he lost his reason. He remained insane all his life.

As for Sun, he fell ill with fright and kept to his bed for over a month. But he was haunted day and night by Decima's ghost, who cursed him until he died a lingering death; and all men said this was a just retribution for the crime he committed on the river.

When Liu Yu-chun completed his studies in the capital and packed up to return home, his boat also moored at Kuachou; and while he was washing his face by the side of the junk, his brass basin fell into the river. He asked a fisherman to cast his net for it, but the man drew up a small casket; and when Liu opened this he found it full of priceless jewels, pearls and other treasures. Liu rewarded the fisherman well and put the casket at the head of his bed. That night he dreamed that he saw a girl coming over the waves of the river, whom he recognized as Decima. She came up to him and curtsied, then told him how faithless Li had proved.

"You were kind enough to help me with one hundred and fifty taels," she said. "I meant to repay you after we reached our destination, and although I was unable to do so I have never forgotten your great kindness. So this morning I sent you this casket through the fisherman to express my thanks. We shall never meet again." Suddenly awaking, Liu realized that Decima was dead, and he sighed for her for several days.

Later generations, commenting on this, condemned Sun for his wickedness in plotting to obtain a beautiful girl for a thousand taels of silver. Li they considered beneath contempt because, like a fool, he failed to understand Decima's worth. As for Decima, she was a pearl among women; the pity was that instead of finding a husband worthy of her, she wasted her affection on Li. This was like casting bright pearls or rare jade before a blind man, and resulted in her great love changing to hate and all her tenderness vanishing with the flowing stream.

Those who have never loved had best be silent;
It is no easy thing to know love's worth;
And none but he who treasures constancy
Deserves the name of lover on this earth.

THE BEGGAR CHIEF'S DAUGHTER

The bough hangs east above the wall; but west
Its blossoms fall, the sport of breezes now.
The branch that sheds its flowers can bloom again,
But fallen blossoms ne'er rejoin the bough.

These lines were written about a forsaken wife, for a woman's relationship to her husband is like that of the blossom to the bough. Though the blossoms fall, the bough will bloom again; but a fallen blossom can never return to the bough. So a woman should serve her husband well and remain true to him through bitter and sweet alike, not leaving him to seek wealth, or proving fickle, only to repent too late.

In the Han Dynasty there was an illustrious minister whose wife, failing to realize his greatness before he won fame, lived to repent bitterly that she had left him. What was his name, and where did he come from? He was Chu Mai-chen, a native of Kuaichi. While yet poor and unrecognized, he shared with his wife a thatched hut in a wretched lane and went to the hills every day to cut firewood to sell in the market. He was so fond of studying that he always had a book in his hand. Even when shouldering a pole with two loads of firewood suspended from it he would carry an open volume, from which he declaimed with great gusto as he walked. The market people, who knew his ways, could foretell the woodcutter's approach from the sound of his reading. Out of pity for the poor scholar they liked to buy from him; and since Chu never haggled over prices he sold his firewood more quickly than anyone else. If shallow-brained youngsters or children gathered round to poke fun at the woodcutter-scholar, he simply ignored them.

One day Chu's wife, going out to draw water, was horrified to see a group of children skip after her husband, clapping their hands and laughing. As soon as Chu returned from the market, she began to scold him.

"If you want to study, don't sell firewood. If you want to sell firewood, don't study. You're not a fool or a lunatic, so why carry on like this at your age and set all the children laughing? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"I sell firewood because we have to eat, and study because I hope to become rich and famous," replied Chu. "The two things are not incompatible. What does it matter if they laugh?"

"If you could become rich and famous you wouldn't be selling firewood." His wife gave a scornful laugh. "Did you ever hear of a woodcutter who became an official? What nonsense you do talk!"

"There is a time for wealth and a time for poverty," countered Chu. "A fortune-teller foretold that I should win fame at fifty. Remember the proverb: You cannot measure the sea with a bucket. You should not underestimate me."

"That fortune-teller must have been making fun of you because you looked such a fool," scoffed his wife. "Don't you believe it! By the time you're fifty you won't even be able to carry your faggots, and then we shall starve to death. Official indeed! I can't see you an official, unless the King of Hell is waiting to employ you as his clerk!"

"Chiang Shang was still a fisherman by the river Wei at eighty," protested Chu. "Then King Wen of Chou carried him off in one of his carriages and appointed him Grand Patriarch. In our dynasty the prime minister Kung-sun Hung was still a swineherd at Tunghai when he was fifty-nine. He met the present emperor and was made a noble only after he was sixty. If fame comes to me at fifty, although I shall have triumphed later than Kan Lo,* I shall have succeeded earlier than the other two statesmen. You must just have patience."

"Stop quoting history at me!" snapped his wife. "That fisherman and swineherd were brilliant, learned men—you're only a bookworm! Even if you study till you're a hundred, you'll still be the same good-for-nothing. It was just my luck to marry a man like you! When children jeer at you, I lose face too! If you won't listen to me and give up your books, I'm not going to stay with you. We had better go our own ways, instead of acting as a drag on each other."

"I am forty-three this year," replied Chu. "Another seven years and I shall be fifty; so you don't have much longer to wait. How can you be so heartless as to leave me? You will live to regret it."

"The world is full of woodcutters," rejoined his wife. "What would I have to regret? If I stay with you, I shall starve long before the seven

*Kan Lo became a minister at the age of twelve during the Warring States period (403-221 B.C.).

years are up. You had better do a good deed and let me go, so as not to have my death laid at your door."

When Chu saw that his wife had made up her mind to leave him and that nothing he said could dissuade her, he sighed.

"Very well," he said. "I only hope you will marry a better man than I."

"That shouldn't be difficult!" she retorted.

After curtsying to him she marched triumphantly off, without so much as a glance behind. And Chu, sighing, wrote the following verse on his wall:

A wife should be a faithful mate,
However poor her man may be;
'Tis not that I deserted her;
'Tis she that has forsaken me.

In Chu Mai-chen's fiftieth year, Emperor Wu issued a decree calling for talented men and Chu went to the capital, presented a memorial to the throne, and was declared eligible for an official post. Then he was recommended by a fellow provincial, Yen Chu. The emperor assumed that Chu, a native of Kuaichi, must understand conditions there; so he appointed him governor of that district, and Chu set off by post carriage to take up his appointment. When the local officials heard that the new governor was on his way, they conscripted a large number of men to repair the road, one of the conscripts being the second husband of Chu's former wife. This woman, tousled and barefoot, was carrying her new husband food when, amid great bustle and commotion, the governor's equipage arrived. And looking up from the roadside she saw her first husband! The governor in his carriage recognized her too, and ordered his attendants to take her in a carriage to his official residence. Overcome with shame, his wife kowtowed in remorse; but Chu asked to see her second husband, and very soon the man arrived. As he knelt on the ground, not daring to look up, Chu laughed.

"This fellow doesn't look much better than Chu Mai-chen," he said to his wife.

The woman kowtowed again and again, cursing her previous lack of insight, and begged permission to serve the governor all her life as his concubine or slave. Then Chu ordered a bucket of water to be fetched and poured out in the courtyard.

"Spilt water cannot be recovered, and neither can I take you back," he said. "But since you were once my wife, I shall give you some ground in my back garden to cultivate with your husband so that you don't starve."

As she went out with her husband, people pointed at her and said: "That woman used to be the wife of the new governor."

Then she felt too ashamed to face the world; so when they reached the back garden she threw herself into the river and was drowned.

Unnatural wife, to leave her husband so,
And spurn a scholar virtuous but poor.
Had she but known that water spilt is gone,
She would have left him to his books before.

Another poem tells us, however, that this tendency to worship wealth and despise poverty is all too common. Chu's wife was not the only one to leave her husband because he was poor.

All men are judged by worldly fame or failure—
A dragon in the mud is hard to find;
And if few wives are true through all privation,
We need not blame this wife for being blind!

After this story about a wife who forsook her husband, we shall tell another about a husband who deserted his wife. The same contempt for poverty and worship of wealth, the same disloyalty and ingratitude, won him universal censure for his heartlessness.

Though Hangchow was the capital of the Sung empire and a wealthy city during the Shao Hsin period (1131-1162), it abounded in beggars. The beggars had a chief whom they addressed as "Master," who controlled all their activities and levied a daily tribute on all the alms they received. If rain or snow prevented them from begging, he would prepare gruel to feed them; he also provided them with tattered clothing. So, like slaves who dared not offend their lord, the beggars obeyed their chief implicitly.

With the regular tribute the chief received from his followers, he practised usury; and if he did not gamble or squander his money on sing-song girls, it was easy for him to become a man of substance. The post was such a reliable source of income that no man in his senses would think of relinquishing it. But it had one drawback. The title did not sound well. No matter how much property a beggar chief might acquire or how many generations of wealthy forbears he could boast, he was king solely among beggars and beyond the pale for ordinary citizens. No one outside his family would respect him. He could act the great man only in his own home.

But although this was the case, society, as we know, is divided into two great classes, the respectable and the low; and only prostitutes, actors, bondservants and official underlings belong to the second category, not beggars. Beggars may have no money, but no stigma attaches to them. You have only to think of Wu Tzu-hsu of the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 B.C.), who fled from his country and played his flute for food in a market-place in the kingdom of Wu. Or Cheng Yuan-ho of the Tang Dynasty, who at one time sang and begged for a living but later prospered

and slept under silk coverlets. Such men reflect credit on the profession. So although this class of citizens is generally looked down upon, it is unquestionably superior to prostitutes, actors, bondservants and official underlings. Enough, however, of this digression.

Our story is about a beggar chief in Hangchow named Chin Lao-ta, whose forefathers had followed the same profession for seven or eight generations. A man of property, Chin had fine houses, fertile fields, handsome clothes, good food, grain to fill his granaries, money to fill his pockets, and a troop of servants and maids to wait on him. Though not the richest, he was one of the wealthiest men in the capital. And because Chin aspired to respectability, he ceded his title to a fellow clansman named Scabby in order to retire and live in comfort, severing his disreputable connection with all the beggar tribe. Such is the force of habit, however, that people in that district persisted in referring to him as the beggar chief. He could not rid himself of the name. Chin was now over fifty and his wife had died leaving him no son but an only daughter named Yu-nu, a girl of remarkable beauty.

The maid was rare as flawless jade,
And fair as any flower in May;
Attired in palace robes she seemed
Some beauty of a bygone day!

Chin prized his daughter above jewels. He had her taught to read while yet a child, and at fifteen or sixteen she could write poems in various metres or dash off impromptu verses. She was a fine needlewoman too, and a skilled performer on many musical instruments; for she excelled in everything she did. And Chin had set his heart on marrying this paragon to a gentleman. But though it was not easy to find a girl like this even in famous old families, because she was the daughter of a beggar chief she was not approached by eligible suitors. And as her father would not marry her to a common tradesman, at eighteen she was not yet betrothed.

One day a neighbour called and told Chin: "By Taiping Bridge there lives a handsome, learned young scholar of twenty named Mo Chi. Because both his parents have died and his family is poor, he is still unmarried; but recently he passed the examination qualifying him to join the Imperial College, and he would be willing to live with his wife's family after marriage. Why don't you ask him to be your son-in-law?"

"That is a very good suggestion," said Chin. "May I trouble you to be the matchmaker?"

The neighbour consented, and went straight to Taiping Bridge to find the young scholar.

"I'll be frank with you," he told Mo Chi. "Their ancestors were beggar chiefs, but Mr. Chin gave that up long ago. She's a good girl,

and the family is rich. So if you don't think it beneath your dignity, I'll help to arrange a match between you."

Mo Chi was silent.

"I can neither support myself nor find a wife," he was thinking. "If I stoop to marry this girl and live with her family, I shall be killing two birds with one stone. I am in no position to care if others laugh at me."

"Yours is an excellent proposal, sir," he said to the matchmaker. "But I am too poor to buy presents for the bride. What can I do?"

"You won't have to buy so much as a sheet of paper," replied the other. "Leave it all to me."

When the neighbour took Mo Chi's reply to Chin, an auspicious day was chosen for the wedding; and, instead of sending gifts to the bride, Mo Chi actually received new clothes for his marriage from his father-in-law. When he discovered that Yu-nu was both lovely and talented, he was overjoyed; for without spending a cent he had got a beautiful wife and a comfortable home. He felt he was in heaven! As for his friends, knowing his poverty they forgave him for marrying into such a family. None of them laughed at him.

When the young couple had been married for a month, Chin prepared a sumptuous banquet and bade his son-in-law invite all his scholar friends to honour them with their presence. But after they had been feasting for six or seven days in succession, Chin's clansman Scabby heard about it and was offended—with good reason too.

"He's a beggar chief, so am I," fumed Scabby. "The only difference between us is that his family had the job for several generations and piled up a lot of money. As one of his kin I should be invited to drink at my niece's wedding; but he has invited outsiders to celebrate instead and they have already been feasting for six or seven days, while I have not even received an invitation card! His son-in-law is only a scholar, not a minister or councillor of state. Am I not Yu-nu's uncle? Am I not good enough to sit at the same table? Why should he look down on me like this? I'll go and cause trouble, to spoil their feast!"

He called together some fifty or sixty beggars to go with him to Chin's house. This is how the beggars looked:

In filthy knotted rags and broken hats,
They carry threadbare rugs and tattered mats;
With batons of bamboo,
And battered rice bowls too,
They swarm the rich man's gate and raise
A frightful how d'ye-do.
They do their tricks with monkeys, dogs and snakes,
Bawl clapper rhymes till every rafter shakes.

When Chin opened the gate to find out the reason for this din, in rushed Scabby with all his beggars to raise pandemonium. Striding

straight up to the feasters Scabby helped himself to the good wine and food, shouting as he did so:

"Call the young couple to pay their respects to their uncle!"

The scholars took to their heels in alarm, followed by Mo Chi. Old Chin could do nothing but apologize profusely to the beggars.

"Today my son-in-law was the host," he told Scabby. "I had no say in this. I shall prepare a special feast some other time to show how sorry I am."

He distributed largesse to all the beggars and asked them to take two jars of his best wine as well as some chicken and geese to Scabby's house for a feast there. The confusion lasted till dark, when finally the trouble-makers dispersed. Yu-nu was crying with rage in her room; and that night Mo Chi stayed with a friend, returning only the next morning. At the sight of his son-in-law Chin blushed for shame, for he had lost face completely; and Mo Chi was considerably upset too, but like his father-in-law he said nothing of his feelings.

When dumb men take wormwood, though great their distress,
Their dread of its sharpness they cannot express.

Yu-nu, ashamed of belonging to such a low-class family, determined to encourage her husband to make his way in the world. She urged him to study hard, and spared no expense to buy all the books, ancient and modern, which he might need. Neither did she begrudge money to invite scholars to practise essay-writing and study the classics with him. She also gave him a generous entertainment allowance so that he might enlarge his circle of acquaintances and thereby increase his reputation. In this way Mo Chi's scholarship improved daily and his fame spread, until at the age of twenty-three he passed the highest examination and became a member of the Hanlin Academy. After the feast to welcome the new academicians, he started riding home triumphantly in his new black gauze cap and palace robes; but as he drew near Chin's house, all the people on the street gathered round to stare and the children pointed their fingers at him.

"Look!" they cried. "The beggar chief's son-in-law has become an official!"

Mo Chi had to put up with such comments as he rode along, for he could not very well create a scene in the street. And when he arrived home and saw Chin, he still paid his father-in-law every outward respect, although he was thinking resentfully:

"If I'd known how successful I was going to be, I could have waited to marry into a noble family; but now I've got a beggar chief as my father-in-law. I shall never be able to live this down! Even when we have children, they will be descended from a beggar chief and people will point the finger of scorn at them. Well, what's done is done, and my wife's

behaviour is exemplary; she hasn't committed any of the seven sins for which I could divorce her. How true the saying is: Marry in haste, repent at leisure!"

He went about looking thoroughly depressed; and although Yu-nu asked several times why he was so sad, he would not tell her. The truth was that Mo Chi's good fortune had made him forget all his wife had done for him when he was poor. Indeed, his utter disregard for all her assistance shows that his heart was not in the right place.

Some days later, Mo Chi was appointed the Civil Officer in the Wuwei Military Area. His father-in-law prepared a farewell feast for him, and this time the beggars dared not come to make trouble. Since Wuwei was not far from the capital and could be reached by river, Mo Chi decided to take Yu-nu with him to his post; and after travelling for a few days by junk they reached Tsaishih Creek, by the north bank of which they moored. That night a full moon made all as bright as day; so Mo Chi, unable to sleep, dressed and went out to enjoy the moonlight from the bow of the boat. There was no one in sight and, as he brooded bitterly over the disgrace of having a beggar chief for his father-in-law, a wicked thought flashed through his mind.

"If this woman were dead, I could marry another and rid myself of that everlasting shame."

Immediately he went to the cabin to call his wife up to watch the moon.

Yu-nu was fast asleep, but Mo Chi woke her and insisted on her getting up. Unwilling to refuse her husband, she threw some clothes over her shoulders and stepped to the cabin door to look up at the moon. Then Mo Chi, taking her by surprise, dragged her to the bow and threw her into the river. This done, he quietly woke the boatmen.

"Row on at once!" he ordered. "If you make good time, I shall reward you well."

Unaware of all that had passed, the boatmen hastily cast off and rowed rapidly away, not pausing until they had gone nearly four miles. After they had moored again, Mo Chi told them that while watching the moon his wife had fallen into the river, and he had been powerless to save her. Since he gave the men three taels of silver as a tip, they understood very well what had happened but dared say nothing. There were some foolish maids on board who believed that their mistress had really fallen into the river by accident, but after crying for some time they thought no more of the matter.

As chance would have it, soon after Mo Chi's boat cast off, the newly appointed Governor of Huaihsi, Hsu Teh-hou, moored his boat just at that part of the creek where Mo Chi had pushed Yu-nu into the water. Chatting and sipping wine before going to bed, Hsu and his wife were looking at the moon through their cabin window when they heard a woman crying on the bank. She was weeping so pitifully that Hsu im-

mediately ordered his boatmen to investigate, and they found a woman sitting alone on the shore. Invited aboard and asked whence she came, she told Hsu that she was the wife of the Civil Officer of Wuwei.

When Yu-nu was thrown into the river, she was utterly terrified and feared her last moment had come. But she felt something support her feet beneath the water and carry her to the shore, where she struggled up the bank. Upon looking round, however, she could see nothing but a vast expanse of water. The boat had gone. Then she realized that her husband despised her now that he was great, and wanted to drown her so that he could marry into some respectable family; so, although she had escaped with her life she had nowhere to go, and the consciousness of her plight made her weep bitterly.

At the governor's request she told him her whole story from beginning to end, weeping as she spoke. And Hsu and his wife, moved to tears, comforted her.

"Don't cry now," they urged. "We will make you our goddaughter and think of some way to help you."

Yu-nu bowed in thanks. Then Hsu told his wife to give her dry clothes into which to change, and bade her rest in the back cabin. He made the servants address her as their young mistress, and forbade the boatmen to breathe a word of that night's happenings.

After some days Hsu arrived at his post. And since the Wuwei Military Area was within his jurisdiction and he was the civil officer's superior, Mo Chi was among the many subordinate officials who came to pay their respects to the new governor.

"He is a handsome fellow," thought Hsu, upon first seeing Mo Chi. "What a pity that he should stoop to such a dastardly deed!"

A few months later Hsu told his subordinates: "I have a daughter who has her share of talent and beauty; and since she has reached the marriageable age, I would like to find a good husband for her who would be willing to live in our family. Can you suggest anyone suitable?"

All the officials had heard that young Mo Chi had lost his wife, so they recommended him, declaring that with his unusual talents he would make an ideal son-in-law for Governor Hsu.

"I thought of him too," said Hsu. "But a man who has won success so early in life may be ambitious. He probably won't want to live as part of our household."

"He comes from a poor family," rejoined Mo Chi's colleagues. "With you as his father-in-law, sir, he will be as lucky as a reed protected by a fine tree. What objection could he have?"

"If you think it possible, will you suggest the match to Mo Chi?" asked Hsu. "Propose it as your own idea, to see what his reaction is. Don't say that I wish it, for fear of embarrassing him."

Accordingly, Mo Chi's colleagues spoke to the young man, offering to be his matchmakers. Mo Chi was only too eager to get on good terms

with high-ranking officials, but an alliance by marriage with his superior had been beyond his wildest dreams.

"If you can arrange this," he answered joyfully, "I shall be eternally grateful."

"Just leave it to us," they assured him, and went back to report to the governor.

"It is very kind of Mo Chi to consent," said Hsu. "We are so fond of this daughter that I fear we have spoiled her; that is why we don't want her to leave our house when she marries. Since Mo Chi is young and has a will of his own, we are afraid they may have occasional disagreements which would distress us very much. We must make this clear beforehand, and hope he will bear with her. Only on this understanding dare we invite him to our home."

When this was announced to Mo Chi, he agreed unconditionally. He was no longer a poor scholar now, but a civil officer; so he sent gilt paper flowers and presents to the bride's house. The auspicious day was fixed, and he was positively itching in his eagerness to become the governor's son-in-law.

Meanwhile Hsu asked his wife to tell Yu-nu: "The governor does not think a girl of your age should remain a widow, so he wants you to marry a young palace graduate. Please don't refuse!"

"Though I come from a low family," replied Yu-nu, "I know how I should act. As I married Mo Chi I should be true to him all my life. Even though he forsook me because we were too low for him, and acted so cruelly and wickedly, I must do what is right. It would be wrong to marry anyone else." After saying this she burst into tears.

Then Mrs. Hsu, realizing that she was sincere, told her the truth.

"This young palace graduate is no other than Mo Chi. My husband is angry with him for his callousness, but wants to bring you together again; so he has pretended that you are his own daughter and asked his colleagues to arrange this match. Mo Chi has agreed readily, and tonight he is to become our son-in-law. You can have your revenge when he enters the bridal chamber."

Then Yu-nu dried her tears, powdered her face and adorned herself for the wedding. When evening came, Mo Chi dressed himself smartly with a gilt paper flower in his cap and a red sash over his shoulders, and rode to the governor's house on a fine horse with a decorated saddle and two groups of musicians in front. All the officials escorted the bridegroom to his new home, and the road was lined with cheering spectators.

On fine white horse, with cymbals and with drums,
See where the handsome, lordly bridegroom comes!
His last ties broken with the beggar chief,
For his ill-fated wife he feels no grief.

That night carpets were spread and coloured silk hung in the governor's house, and trumpets and drums sounded to herald the bridegroom's arrival. Upon reaching the gate Mo Chi alighted from his horse, and Hsu in robe and belt of state came out to welcome him. Then all the other officials took their leave, and Mo Chi entered the inner quarters. The bride, with a red silk veil over her face, was helped in by two maids; then the master of ceremonies called upon the young couple to bow to heaven and earth, to the bride's father and mother, and finally to each other. After this, the newly-wed pair were escorted to the bridal chamber for their wedding feast.

By this time Mo Chi felt he was in heaven, and his happiness defied description. With his head in the air he swaggered to the bridal chamber. But no sooner had he entered it when from behind the doors on both sides darted seven or eight maid-servants, some young, some old, armed with sticks and bamboos. Strokes rained down on his shoulders and back until even his gauze cap fell off; but though he cried out with pain he could not escape. At last, in desperation, he fell to the ground and shouted:

"Father-in-law! Mother-in-law! Save me!"

Then he heard a girl's voice order: "Don't beat the brute to death. Bring him to me."

At that the blows stopped. Tweaking his ears, tugging at his arms, and turning a deaf ear to all his protests, the maids lifted him almost off the ground to carry him to his bride.

"What have I done to deserve this?" Mo Chi cried.

But when he looked up, whom should he see seated calmly under the bright candlelight but his former wife, Yu-nu!

"Ghosts! Ghosts!" shrieked Mo Chi, frightened almost out of his wits.

The maids burst out laughing, and Hsu came in.

"Don't worry," said the governor. "This is no ghost but the goddaughter I found at Tsaishih Creek."

Then Mo Chi's heart stopped pounding so fast, and he made haste to kneel down and kowtow.

"I admit my guilt," he acknowledged. "Please pardon me!"

"This has nothing to do with me," replied Hsu. "It is my daughter's forgiveness you should ask."

But Yu-nu spat in her husband's face and cursed him.

"You heartless brute!" she cried, "don't you remember Sung Hung's saying? A man should not forget the friends he made when he was poor; a prosperous man should never forsake the wife who shared his poverty! You came to my family empty-handed, and it was thanks to our help that you were able to study and win fame. That is how you gained your present success. I was looking forward to sharing your splendour, little knowing you would be so ungrateful as to think no more of all that had passed. But forgetting our love and repaying kindness

with cruelty you threw me into the river! Luckily Heaven took pity on me and Governor Hsu rescued me and made me his goddaughter. How could you be so heartless as to murder me in order to marry again? How dare you look me in the face today?"

Then breaking down and sobbing bitterly, she heaped curses on him for his ingratitude and cruelty. Covered with shame, Mo Chi had nothing to say. He could only kowtow and beg to be forgiven. When Hsu felt that Yu-nu had reviled her husband enough, he helped Mo Chi to his feet.

"Don't be angry now, daughter," he said to Yu-nu. "Your husband has repented, and I fancy he will always treat you respectfully in future. Though you were married before, you are making a fresh start today. Please spare him further reproaches for my sake."

To Mo Chi he said: "You brought this on yourself, son, and you can't blame anyone else for it. Tonight you must just accept your punishment. But I shall ask your mother-in-law to put in a word for you." So saying, he left the chamber.

After a short time the governor's wife arrived, and reasoned with Yu-nu until she persuaded her to forgive Mo Chi. The next day Hsu prepared a feast for his son-in-law, and returned him all his wedding presents.

"A girl can accept wedding presents once only," he said. "You must have sent gifts to the Chin family, so I cannot accept any more."

When Mo Chi bowed his head and said nothing, Hsu went on: "Your contempt for your father-in-law so poisoned your relationship with your wife that you nearly committed a fearful crime. Now I am only a governor, I fear my official status is too low for you."

Mo Chi blushed scarlet and bowed again and again to apologize.

He dreamed of an alliance with the great,
And little thought to meet his wife again;
But beaten, cursed, and covered with disgrace,
The wicked man's ambitions proved but vain!

From this time onwards Mo Chi and Yu-nu lived together more happily than before. Hsu and his wife treated Yu-nu as their own daughter and Mo Chi as if he were indeed their son-in-law, while Yu-nu looked on the old couple as her own parents. Then Mo Chi, moved by their example, invited Chin to live with them for the remainder of his days. When eventually Hsu and his wife died, Yu-nu mourned for them like a daughter to repay their kindness. And for generations after this the Mo family and the Hsu family remained on intimate terms.

A loyal man wins praise throughout his life,
But cursed be he who spurns a loving wife!
A murdered wife may come to life again:
So all attempts to thwart the gods are vain!

THE MERRY ADVENTURES OF LAN LUNG

Great thieves have keen intelligence and guile,
And practise many a cunning trick and wile;
Enlist these gifts, my prince, for law and order,
And they will beat the foeman on our border!

In ancient times, Lord Meng Chang is said to have kept three thousand protégés, many of whom were nighthawks and pilferers. When he was detained against his will by the King of Chin, one of the king's favourite concubines sent him a message.

"I hear that Lord Meng Chang has a white fox fur coat worth a thousand pieces of gold," she said. "If he will give it to me, I will put in a good word for him so that he is allowed to go home."

Now Lord Meng Chang had already presented the only white fox fur he possessed to the King of Chin, who kept it in the palace treasury. How was he to procure another? One of his light-fingered protégés made a proposal.

"I can steal like a dog," said this fellow. "I'll get it for you from the palace."

What did he mean by this? He meant that he could imitate a dog's bark; so, pretending he was a dog, he vaulted over the palace walls as easily as if he had wings and stole the fur coat for the concubine, who then pleaded successfully for his master's release. That same night Lord Meng Chang hurried to Hanku Pass and, fearing the king might change his mind and come after him, was anxious to cross the border at once. When he learned that the gate did not open till cockcrow, he was frantic. Then another of his protégés said:

"I can crow like a cock. That's what's needed now."

He gave a long crow exactly like a cock's; and when he had done this two or three times all the cocks in the neighbourhood started crowing, the porter hearing them opened the gate, and Lord Meng Chang made good his escape. This lord had many protégés; but it was these two mimics who helped him to escape from the King of Chin. So it seems that all arts, no matter how humble, have their uses. Nowadays, however, only success in the civil service examinations leads to an official career—no other accomplishments are recognized. And when men of great wit and cunning are given no scope, many of them take to evil courses. If they were employed according to their ability they could make themselves useful, and this would prevent them from becoming thieves and outlaws.

In the Sung Dynasty there lived in Hangchow a famous thief called Here-I-come. This was not his real name, of course; but when stealing he left no trace behind him save these three words written large on the

CHOU YING (c. 1506-1566): A Midsummer Morning

wall; and only after seeing this inscription the next day would the inmates of the house look around and discover their loss. If not for this writing not a soul would have known of his presence, so great was his skill.

The citizens of the capital were so harassed by this housebreaker that many of them appealed to the government, and the city magistrate ordered his constables to make a careful search for Here-I-come. Since they did not know his name, they had no idea whom to arrest; but after being punished for their failure they redoubled their efforts. And no thief, however cunning, can conceal himself for ever. Sooner or later the authorities are bound to get on his track. So by dint of searching hard the constables finally caught the man and haled him before the magistrate, reporting that they had arrested Here-I-come. Though they did not know his name, this was undoubtedly the culprit.

"What proof have you?" demanded the magistrate.

"We have made a thorough investigation, Your Honour," replied one of the constables. "There can't be any mistake."

"I am a good citizen," protested the prisoner. "I'm not that Here-I-come. The officers were desperate to make an arrest; so they've made me a scapegoat."

"This is the man," insisted the constable. "Don't listen to a thief, Your Honour."

"We had a lot of trouble finding this fellow," put in some of the others, seeing that the magistrate was still dubious. "If Your Honour is taken in by his lies and lets him off, we shan't be able to catch him again."

Although the magistrate wanted to release the prisoner, he felt there might be something in what his subordinates said; and if he let the real thief go, he could hardly order his men to arrest him again. So he sent the man to gaol, where the prisoner promptly set about wheedling his gaoler.

"I know it is the rule that a man should offer the gaoler money when he enters gaol," he said. "But all I had on me was taken by those constables. I have some silver though, under a broken brick in the shrine of the Mountain God Temple; and I'd like to give that to you, brother, to show my respect. You can pretend you are offering incense there to get it."

Not certain whether to believe him or not, the gaoler ran over to have a look; and sure enough he found a packet containing more than twenty taels of silver. Was he pleased! After that he treated his prisoner very well, and they gradually became the best of friends.

"I have nothing here with which to show how I appreciate your kindness," said the prisoner one day. "But I have another package under the bridge. I'd like you to have that as a token of my respect."

"The bridge is always thronged with passers-by," objected the gaoler. "How can I take anything with so many people watching?"

"Take a basket of clothes, brother, and pretend to wash them in the river," said the other. "When you've got the packet, just put it in the basket and cover it with clothes. Isn't that easy?"

By following these instructions, the gaoler secured the package without being seen and found that it contained more than one hundred taels of silver. His joy and gratitude knew no bounds and, beginning to look on the prisoner as his own kinsman, that evening he bought wine to drink with him.

"I would like to go home tonight for a visit," said the prisoner as they were drinking. "I promise to come back before dawn. Will you let me out?"

"I can't very well refuse him," thought the gaoler, "after accepting so much from him. But what will happen if he doesn't show up again?"

"Don't worry, brother," said the other, seeing him hesitate. "Those constables brought me here as a substitute for Here-I-come, but the magistrate couldn't condemn me because there is no real evidence against me. I am bound to be released sooner or later, so why should I try to escape? Please set your mind at rest: in less than four hours I shall be back."

The gaoler saw that there was reason in what he said.

"It's true that he hasn't been found guilty," he thought. "Even if he disappears, it shouldn't be too serious; and I can spend some of this silver he's given me to hush the matter up. Besides, there's always the chance that he might come back." So he agreed to let the prisoner go.

Instead of leaving by the door, the prisoner vaulted up on to the roof without making a sound on the tiles and vanished. Before dawn, while the gaoler was still in a stupor from the wine they had drunk the previous night, the man leapt down again from the roof, shook the gaoler and said:

"Here I am! Here I am!"

"So you kept your word!" exclaimed the other, starting up.

"How dare I risk getting you into trouble by not coming back?" asked his friend. "I am very grateful to you for letting me out, and I've left a little token of my gratitude in your house. You might collect it now and come straight back. I shall probably be saying goodbye to you before long, because I expect to be released soon."

Although at a loss to understand him, the gaoler hurried home.

"I was just thinking of sending you a message," said his wife. "Before dawn this morning, I heard a noise on the roof and a packet dropped into the room. When I opened it, I found it was full of gold and silver plate! The gods must have sent us this!"

Realizing that this was the gift from his prisoner, the gaoler hastily signed to his wife to be quiet.

"Hush!" he said. "Put it away. We'll sell the plate later piece by piece."

Then he hurried back to thank his friend.

Presently, when the magistrate took his seat in court, many people came to report cases of theft. Six or seven families had been robbed during the night, and on the wall of each house the thief had written "Here I come!" These indignant citizens begged the authorities to arrest the criminal.

"I didn't think that man we committed to prison the other day was the real thief," said the magistrate. "Apparently Here-I-come is still at large, and we have wronged an innocent man."

He ordered the gaoler to release his prisoner immediately and the constables to arrest the genuine thief by a certain date. Although the magistrate did not realize that he was releasing the true Here-I-come, the gaoler was well aware of the fact. But he was so impressed by the thief's extraordinary skill—and so well bribed—that he kept his mouth shut.

But say, readers, when a thief is so cunning could he not be employed for worthier ends? No more, however, of these tales of former dynasties.

During the Chia Ching period of our own dynasty there lived in Soochow a marvellous thief called Lan Lung,* about whom many tales are told. Although a robber, he was loyal to his friends and fond of a joke; so, many of his adventures make amusing stories.

Think you thdt thieves love only plunder?
This daring burglar was a wonder.
His kindliness and princely ways
Secured him high renown and praise!

Up the first lane before Hsuanmiao Temple in the east quarter of Soochow lived this man whose real name we do not know, but who called himself Lan Lung and was generally known by this nickname. Before his birth his mother, who lived in a village, was caught in the rain one day while out walking and took shelter in a deserted temple built in honour of the god called Straw Sandals. The rain poured down without stopping until at last she fell asleep, and as she slept she dreamed that the god came to her. Nine months later she gave birth to Lan Lung who, from his childhood, was small but brave, cunning and open-handed.

His limbs were soft as if he had no bones,
His step was light as if he rode the breeze;
He leapt on roofs or rafters with one bound,
And climbed up walls and parapets with ease.
He changed his tactics as the time required,
Could plan like lightning where to hide his loot;

*Lan Lung means "Lazy Dragon."

Could make the noise of rat or cat or cock,
And imitate the sound of drum or flute.
He gave impersonations to the life,
So all who saw them would have sworn them true.
He came and vanished like a sudden storm —
A finer thief than this you never knew!

In addition to his great skill Lan Lung had some remarkable abilities and habits. From childhood he could walk up a wall in his boots and imitate the accents of thirteen provinces. He could go for several nights without rest or sleep, for days at a stretch without food or drink, like a hermit. Sometimes he would consume several pecks of rice and several gallons of wine at a sitting, yet not feel satisfied. At other times he would go for days without food, yet not feel hungry. With straw ashes in the soles of his shoes, he walked without a sound. And when he fought, he moved as swiftly as the wind—not even the white monkey in the Tang Dynasty story or the "Flea-on-the-Drum" in the novel *Water Margin* could have been more nimble. Birds of a feather flock together, and since Lan Lung could not hide his talents he naturally mixed with other young loafers and took to stealing. In those days there were several clever thieves including: The Reed, so called because of his extraordinary thinness; The Hawk, who could hide himself behind beams; and White Waistband, who had an iron hook attached to one end of his white waistband with which he climbed up or down. These three men had a great reputation in Soochow, but as soon as they saw Lan Lung's dexterity they knew that they were outclassed.

Lan Lung had never owned much property, and after he became a thief he left his home to drift from place to place, so that none knew where to find him. When he wandered about by broad daylight in public or slipped into some house, his shadow only could be seen flitting past—never the man himself. He would often pass the night in a rich man's house, curling up to sleep like a hedgehog among the rafters, under the raised floor of a pavilion, behind the screen or in the hall, as the fancy took him. And, whenever opportunity offered, he would steal.

Lan Lung's constant transformations and his habit of sleeping all day won him the nickname of Lazy Dragon. He was also known as Plum Blossom, however, because after stealing anything he would invariably sketch a plum blossom on the wall—in white chalk if it was a dark wall and in charcoal if the wall was white.

There was a great storm at the beginning of the Chia Ching period, when sea serpents raged among the hills near Tungting Lake and a cliff by Taihu Lake crumbled to reveal an ancient tomb and a red lacquered coffin containing many jewels, all of which were promptly stolen. When news of this reached Soochow, Lan Lung happened to be sailing with some friends on the lake, so he made his way to the spot. The vines binding

the coffin had been severed and nothing remained inside but a skeleton, while beside the tomb lay a broken stone tablet bearing an undecipherable inscription. Lan Lung realized that this must be the coffin of some ancient nobleman, and out of compassion for the dead he sealed it up again, hired some local labourers to pile up earth, and poured a libation of wine over the new grave mound. This done, he was preparing to leave when his foot touched something in the grass, and stooping down he discovered an old mirror which, unknown to all, he hastily hid in his stocking. On his return to the city, his first act was to go to a quiet spot and clean the mirror. Its glittering surface was only four or five inches across, and the knob on its back was surrounded by monsters, sea-fish, dragons and waves. The whole was encrusted with a green patina stained by cinnabar and quicksilver and gave, when tapped, a clear tinkling sound. Knowing that this was a rarity, Lan Lung kept the mirror on him; and when night fell he discovered that it emitted light which made all around as bright as day. After that he carried it with him wherever he went and found it a great boon, for now he no longer needed a light at night. While others dreaded the dark, he could walk about as if it were day; and this made it even easier for him to steal.

Though a thief by profession, Lan Lung had a number of virtues: he never ravished women, never robbed good people or those in distress, and never broke his word. In fact, he was just and generous and would give away all he stole to the poor. All his dislike was for wealthy misers and moneyed men who had got rich by unjust means, whom he loved to mock by his pranks. Thus wherever he went people flocked to him, and his fame spread.

"I have neither parents nor family to support," he would say with a laugh. "So I borrow from those with a superfluity of wealth to help the poor. It is Heaven's will that the haves should help the have-nots—this is not simply my idea of justice."

One day Lan Lung heard that a great merchant had a thousand taels ready for a weaver named Chou, and determined to lay hands on that silver; but being slightly tipsy that day he missed the place and landed by mistake in a poor man's house where almost the only furniture was a large table. Having made an entrance, however, Lan Lung did not want to leave at once, so he hid himself under the table. Presently the master of the house sat down to a meal with his wife; but their fare was poor, and the husband's face was worried.

"That debt has fallen due," he told his wife, "but I have no means of paying it. I see no way out but suicide."

"You mustn't take your own life!" protested his wife. "You had better sell me, and with the money you can start a small business."

Their tears were falling like rain when they were startled to see Lan Lung leap out from under the table.

"Don't be afraid," said he. "I am Lan Lung. I am here by mistake —I was really looking for a merchant I had heard of. You seem to be in a bad way, so I shall give you two hundred taels to help you out. Take heart, and don't do anything desperate."

The unhappy couple, who knew him by reputation, bowed.

"If you will be so kind, we shall owe our lives to you," they said.

Then Lan Lung went out. Two hours later there was a thud within their closed door, and when they looked they found a cloth bag containing two hundred taels of silver—money Lan Lung had taken from the merchant. They nearly danced for joy. And later they set up a tablet bearing Lan Lung's name before which they did reverence as long as they lived.

A man who had played with Lan Lung as a boy lost all his money when he grew up, and was in rags when he met his former friend on the street. He hid his face with his fan for shame and would have gone past, but Lan Lung laid hold of him.

"Don't I know you?" asked the thief.

The other admitted in embarrassment who he was.

"Have you come to this!" exclaimed Lan Lung. "Tomorrow I shall take you to a rich man's house to get some money. But don't say a word to anyone about it."

The other knew Lan Lung's ability and knew, too, that he always kept his word; so the next evening he sought him out and accompanied him to the mansion of an official.

The crows were winging through the dusk,
A mist had swathed the leafy trees,
No creature moved, no sound was heard,
But all was hushed in woods and leas.

Bidding his friend wait outside, Lan Lung leapt on to a tree and vaulted over the wall. He was away for a long time. Crouching with bated breath outside the wall, the poor man waited until dogs started barking and rushed towards him with bared fangs. As he ran around the wall to escape, he heard a faint splash on the other side of the wall; then something like a water bird alighted from a tree, and he saw Lan Lung—wet through and thoroughly crest-fallen!

"For you I nearly lost my life!" panted Lan Lung. "There are piles of gold in there—bushels of it! But no sooner did I get the gold than dogs outside started barking and woke the people inside, who came after me. So I had to throw away the gold and take to my heels. It's too bad for you."

"You usually get whatever you want," said his friend. "If things have turned out like this today, it must be owing to my bad luck." He sighed and was very sorry for himself.

"Don't worry," said Lan Lung. "I'll do something for you another day."

So his friend left disconsolately.

More than a month had passed when Lan Lung met the fellow again on the road.

"I really can't carry on any longer," lamented the poor man. "Today I had my fortune told, and received a very lucky omen. The fortune-teller said I should come into sudden wealth thanks to a friend. I think that friend must be you—who else could it be?"

"Yes," said Lan Lung with a laugh. "I had nearly forgotten. I filched a box of gold and silver for you that day; but I was afraid that if I gave it to you then and the official raised a hue and cry, you might not be able to hide it. So to be on the safe side I left the box in the pool inside his courtyard. Now over a month has passed without any trouble; he must have given up hope of recovering it, and it should be safe to collect it. Let's go back there tonight."

As soon as it was dark the poor man called for Lan Lung, and before long they reached the place.

Swift as bird upon the wing,
He darted through the flowery brake;
Bold as dragon in the waves,
He cleaved the waters of the lake.

In a flash Lan Lung came back with a box on his back. Hastily repairing to a quiet spot, they opened the box, illumined it with the mirror, and saw that it was crammed with gold and silver. But Lan Lung took nothing. Without even troubling to find out how much there was, he gave the whole box to his poor friend.

"These treasures should last you a lifetime," he said. "Make good use of them, and don't be like foolish Lan Lung who has never been able to keep any property."

The poor man thanked him and took his advice. He used the money to set himself up in business, and later became a wealthy man. Such generosity was typical of Lan Lung.

You may say: No doubt Lan Lung was very skilful, but did he never run into trouble?

Well, readers, it is true that sometimes luck went against him and he found himself in a tight corner; but with his ready wit he could usually extricate himself. One day, for example, when he entered a house and found a wardrobe open, he slipped inside, meaning to steal some clothes. But before the inmates of the house went to bed they locked the wardrobe with a padlock so that he was a prisoner! As soon as he found he could not get out he hit upon a plan. Wrapping some clothes

tightly round himself and making a big bundle of some more garments which he set against the door, he imitated the noise of a rat gnawing clothing.

When the master of the house heard this, he called for the maid.

"Why have you shut a rat in the wardrobe?" he shouted. "Do you want to ruin all our clothes? Hurry up and open the wardrobe to drive it out!"

The maid brought a torch and unlocked the wardrobe. But the moment she opened the door the bundle of clothes fell to the ground, and swift as thought Lan Lung rolled out after it, knocking the torch out of the maid's hand so that she gave a shriek. Afraid that more people would gather and make it difficult for him to escape, he seized the bundle, tripped the maid up, and was off. When the master got up and stepped on the maid, thinking she was the thief he started kicking and beating her; and she screamed at the top of her voice until the rest of the household heard the noise and rushed in. But when they lighted a torch, they found the master struggling with his own servant; and by the time peace was restored Lan Lung was far away.

The fame of Lan Lung, the marvellous thief, spread far and wide until Police Commissioner Chang heard of him and ordered his sergeants to bring this man to him.

"Are you the chief of the thieves?" he demanded.

"I am no thief, much less their chief," replied Lan Lung. "I have never been convicted in court or involved in a single case of robbery. I happen to know a few tricks and sometimes play pranks on my relatives and friends; but if I have done anything wrong, I beg Your Honour to overlook it. If ever you have need of me, you may be sure I shall gladly go through fire or water to oblige you."

The commissioner was impressed by his nimble appearance and frank speech; he considered that with no evidence it would be difficult to convict this thief; and now Lan Lung had promised to work for him and might prove useful. Accordingly he decided not to arrest him. As they were talking, a man named Lu who lived near the West Gate presented a cockatoo with a red beak and green plumage to Commissioner Chang, who bade him fasten the bird's chain to the eaves.

"I have heard that you are wonderfully light-fingered," said the commissioner to Lan Lung with a smile. "Though you claim merely to have played pranks but never stolen, you must have robbed a good many people in your time. And though I mean to pardon you, I would like to see your skill. If you can take this cockatoo of mine tonight and return it to me tomorrow, I promise to let you off."

"That should not be difficult," rejoined Lan Lung. "Allow me to take my leave now. I shall return you your bird tomorrow morning." He then bowed and left.

The commissioner ordered two night watchmen to guard the cockatoo carefully, threatening them with severe punishment if anything should happen to the bird; so the two guards stayed glued to the spot. Although their eyelids were heavy they tried hard not to sleep, dozing off to waken again at the slightest sound as the hours dragged painfully by.

At the fifth watch, just before dawn, Lan Lung made an opening in the roof and let himself down into the commissioner's library. On a clothes-hanger he saw a dark-brown silk cloak, on the table a cap, and on the wall a small lantern inscribed with the title: Police Commissioner of Soochow. At once an idea came to him. Donning the cape and cap, he took out the smouldering spill he carried, blew up the flame and lit the lantern. Then holding the lantern so that its light would not fall on his face and imitating the old commissioner's voice, walk and manner to the life, he opened the door and walked out into the corridor. Since there was little moonlight then it was quite dark, and the two exhausted guards were nodding at their post.

"It is growing light," said Lan Lung, patting them on the shoulder. "You need not watch any longer. Off with you!"

As he spoke, he raised his arm to take the cockatoo by its chain, then swaggered back to the library. The two watchmen had been having a hard time of it trying to keep their eyes open, and this sudden dismissal was as welcome as an imperial amnesty to a condemned man. Not suspecting for a moment that anything was wrong, they were off like a streak of smoke.

Soon day dawned and the commissioner came out. When he saw that the cockatoo had gone, he shouted for the guards; but they were nowhere to be seen. He ordered them to be summoned, and they arrived still half asleep.

"I told you to watch that cockatoo!" bellowed the commissioner. "Where is it now? Why did you leave your posts?"

"At the fifth watch you came out yourself, sir," protested the guards. "You took the bird inside and told us to be off. Why do you ask *us* where it is?"

"Nonsense!" roared the commissioner. "When did I come out? You must have seen a ghost!"

"It really was you, sir. We were both here. How could we both see something that wasn't there?"

The commissioner began to be suspicious. On going back to the library he happened to look up, so he saw the hole in the roof and knew how the thief had entered; and while he was puzzling over the matter he was told that Lan Lung had come to return the cockatoo. Commissioner Chang went out smiling to ask how he had done it, and was surprised and pleased when Lan Lung explained how he had masqueraded in the police officer's cloak and cap and taken the cockatoo to the library. The commissioner treated Lan Lung well thereafter; and the thief for his

part took the police officer various presents in exchange for Commissioner Chang's trust and protection. It is, alas! all too common for police officers to protect thieves.

What makes a cat content to sleep with mice?
Why, both desire the same delicious fare.
If those who capture thieves are thieves themselves,
No wonder thieves are rampant everywhere!

Another time Lan Lung was standing with a few cronies by a tavern at the North Gate, when a young Fukienese gentleman whose boat had moored by the river bank ordered his attendants to air his clothes and bedding on deck. The bright silks and satins dazzled all who saw them, but they marvelled most at one coverlet of a rare and seldom seen material from the West. When Lan Lung's friends saw how the gentleman flaunted his wealth, they said:

"If we could filch that foreign coverlet from him, it would be rather a joke. Here's a chance for you to show your skill, Lan Lung. What are you waiting for?"

"I don't mind getting it for you tonight," chuckled Lan Lung. "Tomorrow you can return it to him and ask him for money for a few drinks."

After visiting a bath-house and washing himself clean, he returned to the riverside to watch for his opportunity. He waited till ten o'clock when the Fukienese gentleman and his friends, drowsy and half drunk, spread their bedding together on the cabin floor, blew out the lamp and lay down. Then swift as lightning Lan Lung leapt aboard, burrowed under the quilts and, chatting in the Fukien dialect, rolled this way and that so that the others complained they could not sleep. Still mumbling sleepily in Fukienese, Lan Lung jostled his bedfellows and created such a disturbance that he was able to take the foreign coverlet. Rolling it up he opened the cabin door, walked out and jumped ashore without any of the passengers realizing what had happened.

When dawn came and the loss of this valuable coverlet was discovered, a hubbub broke out aboard; and the gentleman, very much upset, discussed the matter with his friends. Although it was not worth going to court over a coverlet, he did not like to do nothing; so he offered a reward of a thousand cash to anyone who would recover it for him.

Then Lan Lung and his friends went to the boat.

"We have found the coverlet," they said. "If you give us the reward to buy wine, we guarantee to return you your bedding."

The gentleman ordered a thousand cash to be brought immediately and promised that this should be theirs as soon as his property was brought back.

"You might send a servant with us to fetch it," suggested Lan Lung.

The gentleman bade his steward accompany them, and they repaired to a Hueichou pawnshop where they found the coverlet.

"This comes from our boat," said the steward. "How did it get here?"

"Someone brought it in this morning," replied the pawnbroker. "When we saw that it wasn't a local product we smelt a rat and wouldn't give him the money. 'If you don't trust me,' he said, 'I'll find a friend to be my guarantor. You can be weighing out the silver for me while I fetch him.' When we agreed he left, and that was the last we saw of him; so we knew it must be stolen property. Since it belongs to your boat, take it. And if that fellow comes back, we shall catch him and send him over too."

They took the bedding back to the Fukienese and told him what the pawnbroker had said.

"We are strangers here," said the young gentleman. 'I am quite satisfied to have recovered my property—why should we look for the thief?"

He gave the thousand cash to Lan Lung and his friends, who spent it in the tavern. The man who went to pawn the coverlet had, of course, received instructions from Lan Lung to leave it there while they went to claim the reward. This was just one more of his many tricks.

A little theft is not a crime,
If even scholars rob the dead.
No, pilfering is just a joke,
*As great philosophers have said!**

A practical joker like Lan Lung knew how to make things hot for anyone who annoyed him. Once a party of thieves invited him to go with them by boat to Huchiu Mountain to drink and enjoy the scenery. At Shantang they moored behind a rice shop and passed through the shop to buy fuel and wine; but the rice merchant, who objected to having this boat moored at his back door and these pleasure-seekers passing in and out, swore at them and tried to drive them away. The thieves were protesting indignantly when Lan Lung winked at them.

"Since he doesn't want us to pass through his shop, let's move further downstream and find another landing place," he said. "Why lose your tempers?"

He bade the boatmen cast off, but the thieves were still angry.

"It's not worth arguing with such people," said Lan Lung. "Tonight I'll get even with them."

They asked what he proposed to do.

"Find me a boat this evening," said Lan Lung. "And leave me a

*Chuang Tzu tells a story about Confucian scholars who were grave-robbers.

keg of wine, a hamper of food, and a stove and fuel to heat the wine. I mean to row back to enjoy the moon all night. You'll understand my scheme tomorrow—there is no need to disclose it now."

That night after feasting at Huchiu they went their different ways, having agreed to meet Lan Lung early the next morning. He kept only a good drinker as his drinking companion and an able punter, who returned with him on the small boat to the rice shop. The shop was already closed, and since there were many boats on the river that evening with passengers aboard fluting, singing and enjoying the moon, the men in the rice shop went to sleep suspecting nothing. Lan Lung moored his craft close by the rice shop's back door.

He had observed during the day that there was a rice bin in one corner of the shop over the water next to the back door; so now he took from his sleeve a small knife, cut out a knot in the wooden door, took from his pocket a bamboo tube, thrust the tube through the hole into the bin, and gave it a gentle shake. Immediately rice from the bin started cascading down the tube like water; but the noise Lan Lung made by toasting the moon and shouting and laughing as if he were tipsy drowned the swish of the rice. Passing boats had no inkling of what was happening, much less the shop people sleeping inside.

In the early hours of the morning when rice stopped flowing from the tube, Lan Lung knew that the bin was empty; and by then their cabin was full too, so he bade the boatman cast off and they punted slowly away. Presently they reached a quiet spot where all the thieves had gathered as arranged, and Lan Lung explained what he had done. They clapped and roared with laughter as Lan Lung bowed.

"Divide this between you," he said, "as a token of my thanks for last night's party." He himself took nothing.

Not till the rice shop assistants opened that bin did they discover that it was empty; but they could not conceive when or how the rice had disappeared.

There was a time in Soochow when hundred-pillar caps were all the rage, and every young man of fashion swaggered about in one. The Taoist priests of White Cloud Monastery near Nanyuan also bought such caps in secret, to wear when they went out to enjoy themselves disguised as laymen. One summer day they decided to set off for Huchiu Mountain the following morning, so they booked a boat and ordered a feast. The third son of Weaver Wang was friendly with these Taoists and often joined them on their jaunts in which each paid his own way; but since he always expected others to treat him and was rowdy after drink, the priests decided not to ask him this time. Young Wang got wind of their scheme, however, and was annoyed at being left out; so he asked Lan Lung to help him spoil their fun. Lan Lung agreed, slipped into White Cloud Monastery and stole the priests' Taoist caps.

"Why didn't you take their new caps?" asked Wang. "What use are these priestly caps?"

"If they lost their new caps, they wouldn't go to Huchiu Mountain tomorrow," replied Lan Lung. "What fun would that be? Don't you worry. Just see what trick I play on them tomorrow."

Mystified as he was, Wang had to let Lan Lung have his way.

The next day the priests disguised themselves as young gentlemen in light gowns and caps, and set off by boat on their pleasure trip. Dressed in black, Lan Lung followed them aboard and squatted at the helm, so that the Taoists took him for one of the crew, while the boatmen thought he was the gentlemen's attendant. When the boat started the priests unbuttoned their clothes and took off their caps to drink and make merry; and Lan Lung seized this opportunity to pick up the new caps and stow them in his sleeves, substituting for them the priestly caps which he had stolen the previous day and kept in his pocket. When they reached the bridge and moored, Lan Lung jumped to the bank and made off. The priests were about to put on their gowns and caps to stroll ashore when they discovered that their hundred-pillar caps had gone, while neatly folded and piled in their place were the priestly caps of gauze which they usually wore!

"How extraordinary!" they exclaimed. "Where are our caps?"

"Don't ask us," said the boatmen. "You put them there yourselves. There's no hole in the boat: they can't be lost."

The Taoists looked round once more, but still found no trace of their caps.

"There was a small fellow in black aboard who has gone ashore now," they said to the boatmen. "Call him back, will you? He may have seen our caps."

"He isn't one of us," said the boatmen. "He came with you."

"He wasn't with us!" the priests shouted. "You must have worked in league with a thief to steal our caps. Those caps cost several taels apiece. Don't think you can get away with this!"

They seized the boatmen and would not let them go; and when the men protested indignantly and loudly a crowd gathered on the bank to watch, and a young man stepped forward and leapt aboard.

"What is all the trouble about?" he asked.

The priests and the boatmen told their different versions of the story; and since the priests knew this man they thought he would help them. But with a stern look he started reproaching them.

"You are all Taoist priests," he said. "Naturally you would come aboard in Taoist caps. Your own caps are here. What hundred-pillar caps could you have? You are obviously blackmailing these boatmen."

When the onlookers heard that these were Taoist priests who had their caps there but were accusing the boatmen of taking some other

caps, they raised an indignant outcry. Some local idlers and busybodies even stepped forward shaking their fists.

"Curse these thieving priests!" they cried. "Let's beat them up and send them to the magistrate!"

"Don't beat them!" cried the young man, waving his hand to stop the bullies. "Let them go!" Then he leapt ashore.

Fearing trouble if they delayed, the priests urged the boatmen to cast off at once. Their fine caps gone and their disguise seen through, they could not roam the mountain in any case; so they started glumly back, their money wasted and their pleasure spoilt.

Now who was the man that jumped aboard? It was young Wang. Lan Lung let him know after he changed the caps; so while the priests were raising a hubbub, Wang came forward to show them up and teach them a lesson. Having reached their destination, the Taoists were still refusing to let the boatmen go when Wang sent a man to return their caps and tell them: "Next time you decide to have a feast and show off these caps, be sure to let Master Wang know."

When the priests received this message, they realized that young Wang had made fools of them and guessed that this was Lan Lung's work, because they had heard of his fame and knew he was Wang's friend.

At that time, in the neighbouring county of Wusih, there lived a magistrate who was notorious for his rapacity.

"The magistrate of Wusih has piles of gold and jewels in his yamen," someone told Lan Lung. "And all his treasures are ill-gotten gains. Why don't you relieve him of some of them to distribute among the poor?"

Lan Lung thought this was a good idea. He went to Wusih and crept stealthily one night into the magistrate's mansion, where he was struck by the luxury that met his eyes.

With silk and cloth the chests were crammed,
With precious stones the shelves were rammed,
With silver ingots all the floors were strewn.
The pots were not of earthenware,
But all of gold or silver rare;
Each poker was of ivory there,
Of precious horn each spoon!
The ruin of many homes, indeed,
Was caused by this official's greed;
He squeezed the whole place dry by wicked rule;
But while he strained each nerve to squeeze yet more,
He styled himself Protector of the Poor!

There was more wealth here than Lan Lung could count.

"The gates are locked," he reflected, "and watchmen keep sounding their clappers and bells outside. It will be difficult to take much."

Then he saw a small cask which was so heavy that it must contain gold or silver; and he was taking this when it occurred to him: "Since this is the yamen, I had better make sure that the magistrate doesn't punish innocent people tomorrow." Taking out his brush he painted a plum blossom on the wall by the shelf, then quietly left by way of the eaves.

Two or three days later the magistrate, looking through his treasures, discovered the loss of a small cask containing more than two hundred ounces of gold, which was worth over a thousand taels of silver. Then his eye fell on the plum blossom drawn near by, which looked recently sketched. He was dumbfounded.

"This is obviously not the work of any of my men," he thought. "But who could enter my chamber and coolly draw this plum blossom as his sign? This is no common thief. I must catch this fellow."

He summoned some sharp-witted police officers to look at the mark left by the thief, and the constables were amazed when they saw it.

"We know who it is, Your Honour," they announced. "But he can't be caught. This is the work of Lan Lung, the wonder thief of Soochow. Wherever he goes he draws a plum blossom as his mark. His is no ordinary skill, for he can come and go in the most miraculous manner; and he is so loyal to his friends that he has many devoted followers. To try to catch him would stir up worse trouble than the loss of some gold or silver. You had better let him go, Your Honour. It is not safe to offend him."

"You scoundrels!" declared the magistrate angrily. "If you know who it is, why can't you catch him? You must be in league with this thief and trying to protect him. I've a good mind to have you all beaten; but I'll let you off for the time being so that you can go out and arrest him. And I warn you: if you fail to bring him to me within ten days, you will pay with your lives!"

When the police dared not answer, the magistrate ordered his secretary to draw up a warrant for two of the constables to take, and to inform the magistrate of Soochow and other officials concerned that he wanted this criminal apprehended.

Much against their will, the two constables travelled to Soochow, and no sooner had they entered the West Gate than they saw Lan Lung standing there. They patted him on the shoulder.

"Friend!" they said. "We don't mind your robbing our magistrate; but why did you have to show off by drawing the plum blossom? Now he has ordered us to arrest you by a certain time. What do you say to that?"

"Don't worry, friends," replied Lan Lung coolly. "If you'll step into a tavern with me, we can sit down and talk."

He took them to a tavern where they chose a table and started drinking.

"This is my proposal," said Lan Lung. "Since your magistrate is so keen to arrest me, I certainly won't make things difficult for you. But if you will give me one day's grace, I shall send a message to him which will make him cancel the warrant and countermand his order for my arrest. How about it?"

"It's all very well to say that," rejoined the constables. "But you took rather a lot from him—all gold he said it was—so how can he just let the matter drop? If we go back without you, we'll get into trouble."

"Even if you insist that I go with you," reasoned Lan Lung, "I haven't got the gold any more."

"Where is it then?"

"I shared it with you as soon as I got it."

"Stop joking, old fellow!" they protested. "You'll find this no laughing matter in court."

"I've never lied in my life," retorted Lan Lung, "and I'm not joking. You've only to go home to see." He lowered his voice to whisper: "You'll find the gold in your gutters."

The officers knew his skill. "If he makes a statement like this in court," they reflected, "and if it's true that there are stolen goods in our homes, we shall be considered his accomplices."

"Very well," they agreed. "We dare not ask you to come with us. What do you propose to do?"

"If you go back first," said Lan Lung, "I'll follow immediately; and I guarantee that the magistrate won't dare press the matter. I would never do anything to land you in trouble." Then he took from his belt about two ounces of gold and gave it to them. "This is for your travelling expenses," he said.

As flies to blood, so officials are drawn to money. The constables' eyes sparkled at the sight of that ruddy, glittering gold, and they pocketed it with broad grins. The suspicion that this gold probably came from the magistrate's cask made them more reluctant than ever to arrest Lan Lung.

When they had left, Lan Lung travelled by night to Wusih. He got there the following morning and entered the magistrate's house after dark. This magistrate had a wife and a concubine, and since he was sleeping this night with his wife, his concubine was alone in her bed. Lifting her bed curtain Lan Lung groped about till he found her glossy hair coiled in the shape of a dragon, and gently clipped most of it off. Then he found the magistrate's seal box, prized it open, put the coil of hair inside and closed the box again. This done, he drew another plum blossom on the wall, and slipped away without touching a single other thing.

The next morning, upon waking, the concubine was surprised to feel her hair tumbling about her neck; and when she put up her hand and

found her long tresses gone, she gave a shriek which roused the whole household. Everybody came rushing to find out what had happened.

"Who played this cruel trick and cut off my hair?" sobbed the concubine.

This was reported at once to the magistrate, who hurried over. When he found her shorn like a nun in her bed, he could not imagine what had happened; but he was grieved and horrified at the loss of her lovely hair which had floated down like dark clouds.

"Last time gold was stolen, and the thief has not yet been caught," he mused. "Now another bad man has been here. Nothing else matters very much; but what if he has taken my official seal!"

He called quickly for his seal box which was brought to him, sealed and locked as usual. Upon opening it, he was relieved to find the seal still in the top compartment; but then he noticed some hair, and the removal of the top shelf revealed a thick coil of hair underneath. He examined his other treasures, but nothing was missing. Then he saw another plum blossom on the wall, making a pair with the first.

"What, again!" uttered the magistrate in consternation. "Finding me after him in earnest, he has played this trick as a warning. By cutting off my concubine's hair, he means to show that he can cut off my head! By putting the hair in the seal box, he means that he can take my seal. This man is a thoroughly dangerous character! The constables were right the other day to advise me not to offend him. If I don't stop, I shall get into great trouble! The gold is a trifle; I can make it up by squeezing a few rich men. I had better let this matter drop."

He hastily ordered the two officers sent to Soochow to be recalled, and cancelled the warrant.

Upon leaving Lan Lung, the two constables had gone straight home to search their gutters as the thief had directed; and, sure enough, each found a sealed packet of gold bearing the date of the theft in the magistrate's yamen. Not knowing when Lan Lung had planted this money there, they could only suck their fingers in amazement.

"It's a good thing we didn't arrest him," they said. "If he confessed and they found the stolen goods here, we should never have been able to clear ourselves—not if we had a hundred tongues. But what answer are we to give the magistrate?"

They were worrying over this with their assistants when a messenger arrived from the yamen and, thinking he had brought a warrant for their arrest because they had failed to catch the thief by the time appointed, they were even more alarmed. It turned out, however, that he had brought a countermand. And when the constables asked the reason, the messenger told them what had happened in the yamen.

"The magistrate has had the fright of his life!" he said. "How dare he arrest Lan Lung?"

Then the two officers realized that Lan Lung had kept his promise by going back to the yamen to play this remarkable trick.

Towards the end of the Chia Ching period the magistrate of Wuchiang was a crafty, cruel officer whose greed and corruption were notorious. One day he sent a trusted runner with presents to Soochow to request Lan Lung to call on him in Wuchiang County. Lan Lung accepted the gifts and went.

"In what way may I be of service to Your Honour?" he asked.

"I have long heard of your fame," replied the magistrate. "And I want to entrust a secret mission to you."

"I am nothing but a vagrant," replied Lan Lung. "Since you show such regard for me, I will go through fire and water to carry out your wishes."

Then the magistrate dismissed his attendants in order to speak freely.

"The imperial inspector has reached my county and means to find fault with me," he said. "I want you to go to his yamen and steal his official seal, for then I can make him lose his job. That would please me, I can tell you! If you succeed, I shall reward you with a hundred taels of silver."

"I shall bring you the seal without fail," promised Lan Lung.

He was away for half the night, coming back with the inspector's seal which he courteously presented with both hands to the magistrate.

"How clever you are!" exclaimed the magistrate, overjoyed. "Even that maid Red Thread in the Tang Dynasty story, who stole a gold casket with such skill, could do no more."

Hastily rewarding Lan Lung with a hundred taels, he bade him leave quickly for another county.

"Thank you, Your Honour, for your gift," said Lan Lung. "But may I ask what you intend to do with the seal?"

"With this seal in my hands," chuckled the magistrate, "I shall stop him from taking any action against me."

"I am so grateful for your kindness," said Lan Lung, "that I would like to offer you some advice."

"What is it?"

"I hid myself for half a night above the rafters in the inspector's office, and I saw him going through the official reports by lamplight, writing swiftly and issuing fair orders. This shows that he is a quick-witted, capable man, and no trick can fool him. I would advise Your Honour to send the seal back to him tomorrow, saying that it was found during the night by a watchman but that the thief has escaped. Even if he has his suspicions, he will be grateful to you and a little awed, and will certainly not find fault with you."

"How can I stop him from having his way if I return his seal?" demanded the magistrate. "No, no, that doesn't make sense. Be off with you now, and don't worry about me."

Then Lan Lung dared say no more but left quietly.

The next day when the inspector opened his seal box, he found it empty. He ordered all his household attendants to make a thorough search, but they could find nothing.

"The magistrate knows that I have a low opinion of him," he thought. "Since this is his territory, he must have his spies everywhere; so he has sent someone to take my seal. Well, I know how to deal with him."

Ordering his attendants to say nothing of his loss, he sealed the box as before; then on pretext of illness he stopped attending office, ordering all official documents to be sent to the chief of police for the time being. The magistrate knew that this was not a real illness and laughed up his sleeve; but after several days etiquette demanded that he call on his superior officer to inquire after his health. When the inspector heard that the magistrate was at the gate, he ordered his attendants to open the side door and invite his guest into the inner chamber where he lay in bed. There he chatted pleasantly about local customs, questions of administration, taxes and duties, speaking frankly and cordially and offering his visitor one cup of tea after another. Puzzled by these signs of cordiality, the magistrate was beginning to feel rather embarrassed. But as they were chatting, word was suddenly brought that the kitchen had caught fire; and attendants, runners and cooks rushed in.

"The fire is coming this way!" they shouted. "Run, Your Honour!"

The inspector's face fell. Hastily rising, he picked up his seal box, which was locked and sealed, and gave it to the magistrate.

"May I trouble you to keep this safely for me in your office for the time being?" he requested. "And will you send men to put out the fire immediately?"

The magistrate was panic-stricken, but dared not refuse: he had to leave with the empty box. By then all the local firemen had gathered, and they put out the fire. Only the two kitchens were burned; all the offices were uninjured; and the inspector ordered the gates to be closed. Everything had happened in accordance with the instructions he had given after his seal was lost.

When the magistrate reached home he thought: "The inspector has put this empty box in my hands. If I return it like this, when he opens it and finds the seal missing he will hold me responsible."

In vain he racked his brains: he could not think of a way out. Finally he had to moisten and remove the sealing paper, put the stolen seal back into the box and seal it up again. The next morning when the inspector had taken his seat in court the magistrate returned the box, and the inspector asked him to stay while he opened it and put his seal on all the documents he had left unsigned. That same day the inspector

announced his departure and left Wuchiang. He told the provincial governor about this theft, and together they reported the magistrate's evil deeds to the government and had him dismissed.

He schemed to harm another. But, instead,
His sins were visited upon his head!

After Lan Lung became so well known, he was occasionally suspected of thefts committed by others. When a dozen silver ingots disappeared from the treasury of the Soochow prefectural government, the officers said: "The thief has left no trace. He may be Lan Lung."

Lan Lung had, in fact, had nothing to do with this theft; but when he saw that he was considered responsible, he decided to get to the bottom of the business. Suspecting the warden of the treasury, he hid himself one night in a dark corner of the yamen, then went to eavesdrop outside the man's room.

"Since I took that silver," he heard the warden say to his wife, "everybody has started suspecting Lan Lung. That's a stroke of luck. But Lan Lung will never plead guilty; so tomorrow I'm going to write out a detailed account of his thefts and send it to the prefect. Then, you may be sure, he will be arrested and have to shoulder the blame."

"This looks bad!" thought Lan Lung. "I had nothing to do with this, but now the warden who stole the silver in his charge wants to clear himself by pinning the theft on me. And since all officials stick together, and my record isn't exactly spotless, I shall never be able to prove my innocence. It would be better to fly. I don't want to be tortured for something I didn't do."

He left the same night for Nanking, where he roamed the streets as a blind fortune-teller. But some time later a man called Chang from Taichang County in Soochow Prefecture, who was very good at spotting thieves, happened to visit Nanking and knocked into Lan Lung on the street.

"This blind man looks odd," thought Chang.

A closer look satisfied him that this was Lan Lung in disguise. He took him aside to a quiet spot.

"There is a warrant out for your arrest," said Chang, "because of that silver you stole from the treasury. That's why you've fled here and disguised yourself like this. But you can't deceive me."

Lan Lung took Chang's hand.

"You know me," he said. "You should be able to clear this matter up for me, instead of taking the same line as the rest. That silver was stolen by the warden of the treasury himself—I heard him admit as much to his wife when they were in bed. I swear this is the truth. But he was plotting to put the blame on me and I was afraid the prefect might believe him, so I fled here. If you will go to the yamen to report the

matter, you will receive the government reward and clear me at the same time; then I shall make you a present too. Don't spoil my trade here now."

Since Chang had been commissioned by the prefectural government to investigate this theft, now that he had a reliable clue he left Lan Lung and went back to Soochow to make a report. And when the warden of the treasury was examined and the silver found in his house, Lan Lung's innocence was established. After receiving a government reward for solving this case, Chang went back to Nanking where he found Lan Lung still walking the streets as a blind man. Chang went up to him and nudged him.

"Your Soochow trouble has been cleared up," he said. "How is it you've forgotten your promise to me the other day?"

"I didn't forget it," replied Lan Lung. "Look in your rubbish heap at home and you will find a little token of my gratitude."

Chang was very pleased, for he knew that Lan Lung never lied. He took his leave of the thief and went straight home where he found a package of gold and silver buried in the ashes of his rubbish heap next to a glittering dagger! Then Chang shot his tongue out in dismay.

"This man's really dangerous!" he muttered. "He's put this dagger here with his gift so that I won't dare to interfere with him another time. Heaven knows when he hid these here—his skill is amazing! I certainly won't risk offending him again."

When Lan Lung learned from Chang that he had been cleared in Soochow, he knew that he was in no immediate danger; but he feared that if he remained a thief he would be arrested in the end, so he decided to give up stealing and make an honest living as a fortune-teller. He stayed for a few years in Changkan Temple where he died eventually of old age. Although so celebrated a thief, he was never bastinadoed and never had his arm tattooed in punishment, while even today the citizens of Soochow like to relate his endless pranks and tricks. Such a prince of thieves is infinitely superior to those men in official robes who say one thing but mean another, and will commit any injustice in their greedy search for personal gain. With his wonderful skill, if Lan Lung had been able to spy behind the enemy's lines or to lead a surprise attack at night, he could have achieved great deeds. Unfortunately he lived in a time of peace when literary attainments alone were highly regarded, and his escapades could merely furnish material for the gossips.

Half the world are thieves today —
True! But this we can't gainsay:
One like him—so just and brave—
Must be dubbed an honest knave!

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang

Mei Lan-fang and Chou Hsin-fang

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary on the stage of two outstanding Chinese actors

MA SHAO-PO

Chinese opera has developed its distinctive national character over the course of many centuries. In its contemporary form it is a unity of singing, acting and dancing. Through this synthesis of arts forged into an effective means of expression, and with certain theatrical conventions which are peculiar to the Chinese stage—including such conventionalized gestures as those indicating the opening or closing of a door, entering a room, riding, etc., which are highly concentrated expressions or exaggerations of ordinary actions—it provides spectacles of extraordinary brilliance and truth to life. Among all the many types of Chinese opera, Peking opera enjoys pride of place.

Both Mei Lan-fang and Chou Hsin-fang were born in 1895. When they appeared in their first roles, Peking opera was already a mature art form that had originated over a century previously and developed out of several local operatic forms native to Peking in Hopei, Kunshan in Kiangsu, Iyang in Kiangsi and to Anhwei, Hupeh, and Shensi Provinces. Nevertheless in their fifty years on the stage these two artists have greatly enriched their chosen art. They have contributed many important innovations. While jealously guarding its great traditions and achievements they have helped to pioneer its advance to the future.

Their life as artists has not been an easy one. But by steadfast and imaginative work based on an acceptance and development of the inherently realist tradition of Peking opera, they have succeeded in raising this art to the highest levels of expressiveness and beauty. In these fifty years they have created a gallery of characters that have left an indelible impression on audiences.

A dramatic role becomes artistically effective only when the actor succeeds in making it live by bringing out its light and shade, presenting it in bold relief and in its development as a character. Only then will it hold and sway an audience, grip their imagination for long afterwards and, inspiring them with a more elevated morality, enrich their spiritual life. These two artists have achieved outstanding dramatic effectiveness because they have understood that the first duty of an actor is convincing characterisation and that the first step in achieving this is to fully comprehend the personality of the character represented and how he thinks as well as his historical background and environment.

Mei Lan-fang and Chou Hsin-fang go to immense pains to enter fully into their stage roles, so as to be able to project this inner life of their characters across the footlights. They realise too that it is not merely a matter of the right approach, that they must have at their disposal a complete mastery of stagecraft, of the art of dramatic presentation. Both have had a strict and thorough professional training. By dint of hard work in their youth, they early achieved a rare distinction in the singing, acting, recitative and dancing which are essential to any leading role in Peking opera. With this preparation, and while never ceasing to improve their technique, they have tackled the problems of conveying to their audiences in the most effective way the inner life of their characters, that is, achieving an organic unity between the form and content of the drama. In this search for the most expressive means, they pay minute attention to every nuance of rhythm and harmony. They are infinitely demanding when it comes to clarity and correctness of enunciation in speech or song. They rehearse a gesture, step or other movement over and over again until they achieve the maximum of expressiveness and beauty.

They regard technique not as an attribute of singing or dancing, as an end in itself, but as a means of conveying the emotion hidden behind the external appearance and actions of the character represented.

Mei Lan-fang's approach to his role in *Fairness Defies Tyranny* (Yu Chou Feng) and Chou Hsin-fang's in *Sweeping Up the Pine Leaves* (Sao Sung Hsia Shu) may help to illustrate more exactly what I mean.

The story of the first play is as follows:

Chao Kao, an ambitious minister of the Chin Dynasty (221-207 B.C.), aspires to the imperial throne. He marries his daughter Yen-yung to Kuang Fu, but when he finds that the latter is not prepared to fall in with his plans, his regard turns to hatred. Stealing a sword from the Kuang family, he uses it in an attempt to assassinate the emperor. The attempt fails but he succeeds in throwing the blame on the Kuangs. The Kuang family is imprisoned; Kuang Fu himself, however, succeeds in escaping with the help of his wife, Yen-yung, who then returns to her father.

The emperor on a visit to Chao Kao, sees Yen-yung. Captivated by her beauty he wishes to take her as his concubine. Chao Kao eagerly consents but Yen-yung refuses to betray her husband. Following her maid's suggestion, she feigns insanity. She tears her clothes and disfigures her face. She pretends to mistake her father for her husband and mocks at his plans.

Nevertheless, the next day she is sent to the palace. She insults and laughs at the emperor and keeps up the pretence even in the face of his threats to have her executed. Finally convinced that she really is insane, he reluctantly gives her up.

Scene from "Fairness Defies Tyranny"

Mei Lan-fang plays the role of Chao Yen-yung. He gives a poignant and expressive portrayal of a woman stricken by fate and torn by conflicting emotions. She is distraught at the separation from her husband and the calamity that falls on his family. But her grief is coupled with mounting anger when she learns of her father's plan to give her to the emperor. She is in a bitter dilemma: her relentless enemy also commands filial respect as her father.

Mei Lan-fang uses dance as well as song and action to show us a modest woman moved by deepest grief, loathing anger and shame; feigning to be insane, laughing and mocking at her persecutors. He creates a complex, finely balanced contrast between the heroine's acts in pretended madness and her very real anguish.

The well-deserved popularity which Mei Lan-fang has achieved in this role is due to the faultless technique and lyrical beauty of his singing, dancing and acting, the masterly way he conveys the emotions which sway the heroine. Withal and most significant, he brings out the sterling character of Chao Yen-yung, showing her as a courageous rebel, fighting back with every means at her disposal against persecution by father and emperor.

While Mei Lan-fang is famous for his roles as a *tan* or young female character in Peking opera, Chou Hsin-fang has made his name as one of the outstanding *lao sheng* or aged male character actors of the day. The story of *Sweeping Up the Pine Leaves* is as follows:

Tsai Po-chieh is a scholar of ancient times who, leaving his parents and wife at home, goes to the capital to take up an official appointment.

There he marries the daughter of Prime Minister Niu. Time passes but he neglects to send any message home. Famine meanwhile strikes his native district. His faithful wife Chao Wu-niang goes begging to support his parents. She herself feeds on husks and chaff, giving all the food she has to them. Despite her sacrifices, however, both the old people die of hunger. She sells her hair to provide them with a proper funeral and then decides to go and seek out her husband.

She tells her plans to her kindly neighbour Chang Kuang-tsai, who makes her a present of some silver and a lute to help her on her journey. He also promises to care for the graves of her parents-in-law.

After Wu-niang's departure, a messenger from her errant husband arrives. He finds Chang Kuang-tsai sweeping up the pine leaves at the grave of Tsai's parents. Chang speaks with indignation of Tsai's unfaithfulness.

Sweeping Up the Pine Leaves is a short episode from a long play known as *The Story of the Lute* (Pi Pa Chi). Many actors have played the role of the old man Chang Kuang-tsai, but in Chou Hsin-fang's hands, he takes on a new and special significance for the audience.

Chou Hsin-fang's interpretation of this role brings out more vividly what is the main conflict in the play—not the domestic troubles of the Tsais, but the conflict between moral rectitude and amoral corruption. It is by upholding the moral attitude as represented by Wu-niang, the filial daughter-in-law, and Chang Kuang-tsai, a man with a deep sense of justice and love of his fellow men, that a telling blow is dealt against the depravity of the faithless Tsai Po-chieh and his like.

Scene from "Sweeping Up the Pine Leaves"

Chang Kuang-tsai becomes the very embodiment of a kind-hearted and steadfast old man, ever willing to help those in difficulty, intolerant of injustice and evil, and always hopeful of setting wrongs right.

In his very first moment on the stage Chou Hsin-fang brings out the main traits of this fine character.

Chou Hsin-fang has entered so completely into his role that he succeeds in making us aware of the innermost springs of his actions. He knows that an actor cannot be true to his role unless he is able through outward gestures to reveal the inner development of the character portrayed. And he bends every expressive movement of his body and limbs to this end. In his scene with the messenger, the old man's song expresses the indignation of the people with Tsai Po-chieh's faithlessness. He uses now melancholy melodies, now vigorous, agitated rhythm to express this wrath. Chou Hsin-fang's sharp and uncompromising treatment of the conflict between moral rectitude and turpitude never fails to evoke an intense emotional response from his audience.

Mei Lan-fang and Chou Hsin-fang hold that an actor truly determined to give a realistic appraisal of his role cannot confine himself to traditional forms by slavishly following precedent. They believe that acting should in every case be a fresh creative process based on, but not tied down to, traditional art. These two artists have consistently followed this progressive, creative path. They made an outstanding contribution to the development of Peking opera by helping to prevent it from hardening into an empty shell of tradition.

By the close of the Manchu Dynasty (it fell in 1911), Peking opera had already evolved a rigid division of female roles into a number of prototypes based on general lines of character, class and age. Each type specialised in singing, acting, recitative or dancing and acrobatics. An actor was expected to specialise in one type only. This, added to all the other conventions, was bringing the art to a state of paralysis. As a result of this, though actors might give displays of their own particular technique, they were seriously handicapped in creating a role and expressing emotion.

Many actors before Mei Lan-fang tried to break down this traditional division of the female roles. Mei Lan-fang continued and greatly advanced these attempts. He never ceased his efforts to improve and enrich the stagecraft of the classic opera, and the technique of singing, acting, recitative and dancing in female roles. He achieved a real synthesis of these theatrical arts as a means of projecting dramatic character. He also introduced a number of valuable innovations into the melodies, costumes and make-up used in female roles. He has, for instance, brought a new expressiveness to his dancing by drawing on the dance tradition of the fighting roles and other female roles of Peking opera, on various other local operatic forms and even directly from contemporary daily life.

Chou Hsin-fang has made distinguished contributions to Peking opera from the side of the male roles. He brings a mastery of traditional stagecraft to his dramatic characterisations, but he has never allowed this respect for tradition to fetter his imagination in creating new roles. In his childhood his tutor taught him *The Four Scholars* (Szu Chin Shih), *The Unfilial Son* (Ching Feng Ting), *The Beating of the Traitor* (Ta Yen Sung) and other plays in which the roles he played were without any really distinctive character. He was not satisfied, however, until he had breathed life into these roles and made them dramatically interesting and convincing, and closely linked with the people. Taking traditional Peking operatic art as a basis, he defied conservative prejudice about learning from other local operatic forms and modern theatrical art. In creating his new roles he selectively adapted what he learnt from these sources.

Mei Lan-fang and Chou Hsin-fang have set an inspiring example of modesty in learning from others and patience in teaching. They have never taken their art lightly. Right up to the present they continue to review and revise their scripts and interpretations.

The great art of these two men is inseparably associated with their high moral character. Like others of their profession they suffered from oppression by imperialism and internal Chinese reaction. Their own bitter experiences in old China and the influence of the people's struggle for emancipation gradually awakened their political consciousness. They have drawn spiritual strength from the people and learnt from the roles they play, and, in turn, their creative work has enriched the spiritual life of the people. This is the reason why, although they lived and worked the greater part of their life in the old society, they never debased their art, but tried to the best of their ability to infuse it with the patriotic spirit and democratic ideas of their time.

Since liberation, contact with their new audience—the workers, peasants and soldiers—has instilled fresh life into their art. In the old society they struggled upwards indomitably, like plants all but trapped beneath a rock. Now that rock has been rolled aside and they are growing freely and untrammeled.

These two artists deeply love their country and their people. Following the Japanese invasion of Northeast China in 1931, Mei Lan-fang staged *Resistance to the Chin Invaders* (Kang Chin Ping), *The Sorrow of Death* (Sheng Sze Hen) and other plays on patriotic themes as an encouragement to the people in the struggle against the aggressor. When he was forced to live in Shanghai under Japanese occupation, he stood firm against the enemy and, growing a moustache, temporarily retired from the stage.

In protest against the policy of appeasement pursued by Chiang Kai-shek after the Japanese invasion of Northeast China, Chou Hsin-fang

produced *The Capitulator* (Hung Cheng-chou) and other plays. They too encouraged the people in the struggle against the Japanese invaders. After the outbreak of the War of Resistance to Japanese Aggression on July 7, 1937, he organized a troupe in Shanghai and staged *The Two Captured Emperors* (Hui Chin Erh Ti), *The Wrath of the Captured Princess* (Hsiang Fei Hen), *The Lost Love* (Tung Hsiao-wan), *The Fall of the Szechuan Kingdom* (Wang Shu Hen), *The Martyr Wen Tien-hsiang* and other patriotic plays.

Mei Lan-fang and Chou Hsin-fang are held in high esteem by the people and government of New China. They were invited to attend the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference which established the People's Republic of China. They have been elected deputies to the First National People's Congress. Now as leaders of state theatres and the Institute of Chinese Opera, both are unsparing in their efforts to put art at the service of the workers, peasants and soldiers and to carry through the reform of Chinese opera. They also play a full part in the wider struggle to build socialism in China and defend peace and democracy throughout the world.

At the age of sixty they show a youthful vigour in work, study and life. Over the past few years, they have toured the country giving many performances to the new audiences of liberated China. They have performed for the People's Liberation Army men at home and for the Chinese People's Volunteers in Korea. Wherever they go, they receive an eager and appreciative welcome.

The victory of the revolution and the advance of economic construction have brought the Chinese people a better life, and this in turn has given rise to an ever-increasing demand for a richer cultural life. They love and esteem their own great artistic tradition. "Let all flowers blossom; let the new emerge from the old" is the slogan which their great leader, Chairman Mao Tse-tung, has given for the guidance of artists. With this guidance, Chinese drama is flourishing as never before in its long history.

Jointly sponsored by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, the Federation of Chinese Writers and Artists and the Union of Chinese Stage Artists and Playwrights, a meeting was held in Peking in April 1955 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the stage life of Mei Lan-fang and Chou Hsin-fang. It was a tribute to the outstanding achievements of these two great artists and yet another proof of the respect and love in which art and artists are held by the Chinese people and their government.

The Chinese people are proud of these two talented actors. The creative path they have travelled during the past fifty years is the road of realism and patriotism. Their achievements have become a treasured part of the wealth of Chinese drama.

New Plays

"ACROSS RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS"

First produced in Peking in November 1954, *Across Rivers and Mountains* is a play in six acts, eight scenes, about the historic Long March of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army. Chen Chi-tung, author and producer of the play, himself participated in the Long March and has for many years been engaged in cultural work in the Chinese People's Liberation Army.

To get the background of this play we must go back to the year 1927, when Chiang Kai-shek betrayed the revolution, broke up the Kuomintang-Communist united front, and attempted to wipe out the young Communist Party of China. On August 1, that year, Chou En-lai and Chu Teh led over thirty thousand troops in a rising at Nanchang, Kiangsi province, against the Kuomintang reactionaries. This force succeeded, after suffering heavy losses, in joining up with the revolutionary detachments under Mao Tse-tung to form the nucleus of what later became the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army.

In spite of ruthless attacks launched against it by the reactionary Kuomintang regime, the young Red Army grew rapidly with the spread of the agrarian revolution led by the Communist Party. By 1930, it had grown into a force of sixty thousand men, more than half of which were stationed in the Central Revolutionary Base in Kiangsi.

Alarmed at the Red Army's growing power, from the end of 1930 to 1934 Chiang Kai-shek raised a force of more than two million men and waged five successive campaigns of "encirclement and annihilation" against the Red bases.

The Japanese invasion of China's Northeast in 1931 had made resistance to the foreign aggressor the burning question of the day, so it was decided that the Red Army should march to the Northwest to prepare for the war that had to be waged against the Japanese invaders. The Red Army units withdrew from their bases in Kiangsi in October 1934 and started on the historic Long March. Led by Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh, the army passed through eleven provinces and defeated 410 Kuomintang regiments which tried to bar its way. The 8,000-mile journey was beset with incredible difficulties. The Red Army suffered heavy losses but finally reached northern Shensi in October 1935. There, a new revolutionary base was built for the war against Japan.

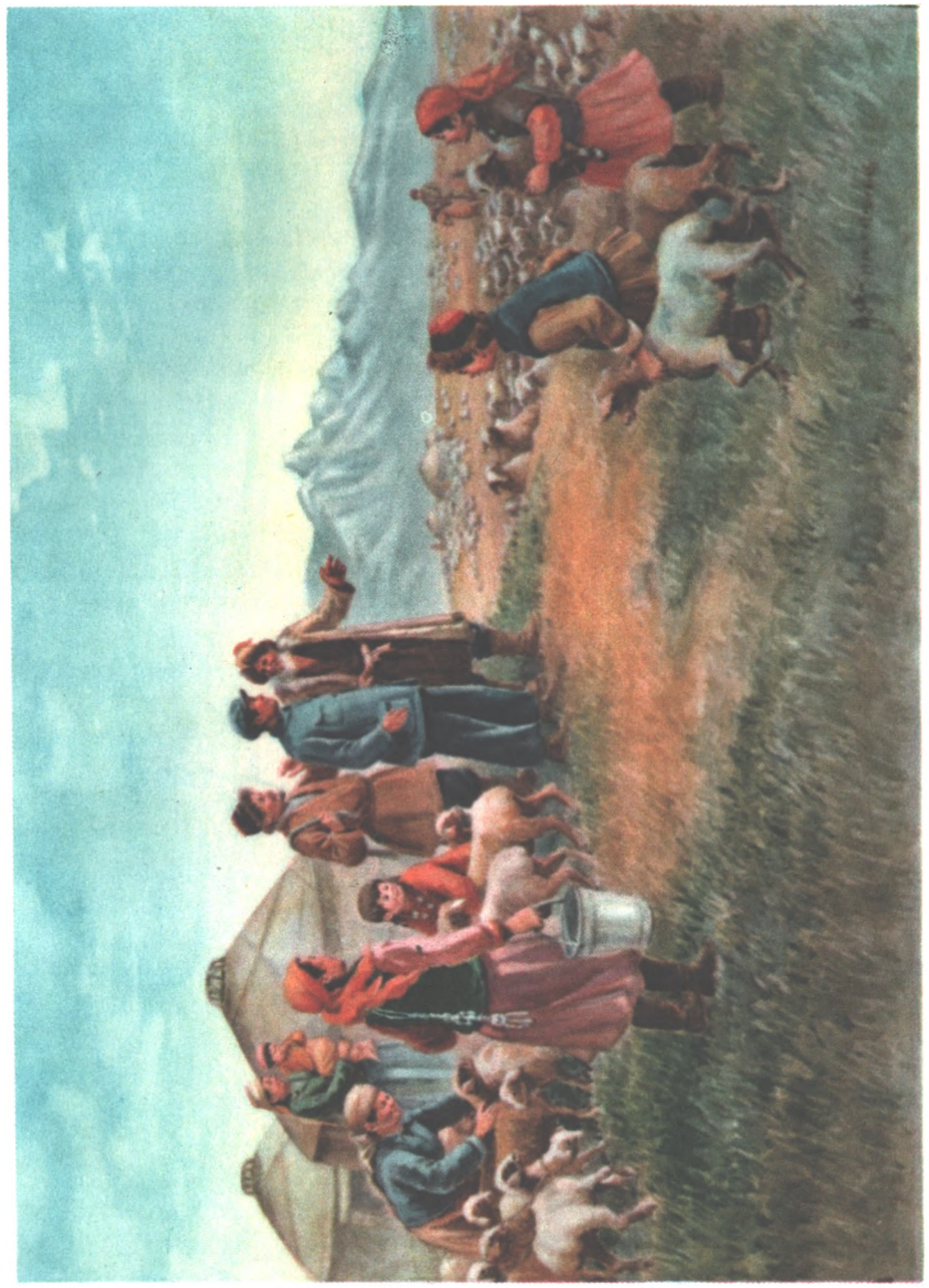
Across Rivers and Mountains centres around some of the most important events of the Long March. The action opens just after the Tsunyi Conference of January 1935. This was a landmark in the history of the Chinese Communist Party. It was here that Mao Tse-tung's leadership of the Party was finally established—a leadership which henceforth enabled the Chinese revolution to progress undeviatingly from victory to victory.

The curtain rises on the Red Army's second attack on Loushankuan in Kweichow province. This was the first victory gained after the Tsunyi Conference.

The Red Army on its first arrival and stay in the area had organized and armed the people. A village people's government was set up. But when the Red Army moved out temporarily, landlords and local tyrants returned with Kuomintang reinforcements. Just as these villains set about mopping up the local revolutionaries the Red Army makes its second surprise attack on Loushankuan. The Kuomintang forces are overpowered in a mere twenty minutes. The people, determined not to fall under the Kuomintang yoke again, flock to join the revolutionary ranks. Chou, a 16-year-old youth, who has avenged the death of his father, is brought to the political instructor of a Red Army battalion by his mother. She pleads that he be admitted to the ranks, despite his youth.

As long as enemy forces were ranged against the people it was clear that a protracted struggle would have to be waged wherever possible. Helped and encouraged by the Communist Party, the people of Loushankuan are more determined than ever to organize and arm themselves to defend the fruits of the revolution. When the Red Army leaves the area, its commander hands captured Kuomintang rifles to the newly elected head of the village government, a former chairman of the peasant association. He expresses his confidence that the people will build another strong Red Army unit with these weapons. An experienced revolutionary is also left behind to help the villagers in their struggle. It was thus, in the words of Mao Tse-tung, that the Red Army sowed the seeds of revolution wherever it went on its Long March.

The second act of *Across Rivers and Mountains* deals with the difficulties met by the Red Army as it marched through the area inhabited by the Yi people, one of China's national minorities, on the border between Szechuan and Sikang provinces. The oppressive policies which the Kuomintang reactionaries pursued against the national minorities made it difficult to establish relations with these people. The national minorities had come to identify these hateful policies with the Han people in general, and the Yi people were no exception. The Yi people, not knowing the policy of the Chinese Communist Party towards national minorities—a policy of equality, mutual help and friendship—or why this army has entered their area, oppose the Red Army's advance. Bold tactics are needed to win the trust of the Yis. While the chief-of-staff of the Red Army is



HSUEH CHUN-YI: In the Mountains of Sinkiang

sent to negotiate with the Yi chieftain, advance units are forbidden to offer armed resistance to attacks by the Yi people. Some Red Army officers, like Lo Shun-cheng, the deputy commander of a battalion, think such an order is tantamount to "putting your neck out for the enemy to hack at." A heated argument ensues with other Red Army officers. But it is cut short when the Party policy is proved correct in actual practice. Chief-of-staff Liu Po-cheng and the Yi chieftain become sworn brothers. All misunderstandings removed, the Yi people provide guides for the Red Army.

The crossing of the Tatu River was one of the most dramatic episodes on the Long March. The Tatu flows turbulently over hidden reefs and rocks between two mountain ranges. It was in this very area that a detachment of the Taiping revolutionaries under the famous peasant leader Shih Ta-kai had been overtaken and annihilated by Manchu troops in 1863. Now the Red Army is hard pressed, with several hundred thousand Kuomintang troops with modern arms at its heels. The Tatu must be crossed. But the only means of crossing they can find is one damaged boat. The old boatman who owns the boat is convinced that nobody can cross the rising river in such circumstances. But the Red Army officer who questions the old boatman is equally confident that a way can be found. His confidence is founded on his trust in the Communist Party leadership and the boundless loyalty of the Red Army officers and men to China's revolution, their unswerving will to victory. Everyone in the Red Army knows that they have to cross the river, that there is no way back. The revolution can only go forward. Somehow they patch up the boat, and in the face of concentrated enemy fire from the opposite bank, eighteen men make a perilous but successful night crossing over the swirling waters of the Tatu, paving the way for the whole army.

After scaling the Big Snow Mountains the Red Army reached the Maoerhkai Tibetan area on the border of Sikang and Chinghai provinces. A month was spent in this area, resting and regrouping. During this period, the Tibetan people, another of China's national minorities, had the opportunity of seeing how different this army was from all other armies in Chinese history, how well they treated the people with whom they came in contact, and that they really were a people's army. The people warmly responded to these friendly ways. Li Yu-kuo, the sick and wounded political instructor of a Red Army battalion, is billeted with a Tibetan family. When the time comes to move over the uninhabited marsh lands, he has a hard time persuading his Tibetan hosts to let him go. They do their best to persuade him to stay, but Li Yu-kuo decides that, sick and wounded though he is, he must carry on with the others and take his place in the struggle ahead. The only concession he makes is to accept the horse the Tibetan family presses him to take, and let their son escort him for a while.

The fourth act shows the Red Army crossing the desolate swampy grasslands on the border of Chinghai and Sikang provinces. These swamps stretch for hundreds of miles. They can swallow up an unwary traveller without trace. Officers and men of the Red Army suffered incredible hardships on this stage of their march. Their uniforms were in rags, they improvised coats of blankets and sheepskins against the driving wind and snow. When they ran out of rations, they ate wild herbs; when even these grew scarce, they actually boiled their leather boots and belts. Hunger, fatigue and sickness took their toll. More and more men fell, never to rise again. After a whole month of persevering advance, the Red Army finally left the terrible grasslands behind. What enabled these men and women to perform such feats of endurance? It was their political consciousness, the political consciousness of the proletariat that sustained them in their most difficult moments. Even little Chou, the runner, can find enough strength in himself to get out of the swamps by telling himself that his number isn't up yet, that he too has a job to do in the building of a socialist society. A squad leader at the point of death expresses the indomitable spirit of these heroic men when he looks forward to the triumph of the revolution and the ending of the people's oppression by local tyrants, warlords and imperialists. This is the spirit which finds its most striking and forceful expression in Li Yu-kuo, the battalion political instructor whose death is a climax of the play.

The Red Army buried its dead on the grasslands and set out for the Latsekou Pass. This is of great strategic importance because it guards access to the wide Northwest plain. It was the last formidable obstacle on the path of the army to its new base.

A short episode is introduced here to show the foolish over-confidence of the Kuomintang command. They fully realised the importance of the pass. Their chief-of-staff predicts: "If the Reds break through this pass they'll be like tigers out of their den. They'll be like an irresistible flood; Latsekou will be like a break in the Yellow River dykes. The flood will spread over the whole of the Northwest plain. . . ." But assuming that the Red Army must have been reduced to just a few thousand men as a result of the rigours of the Long March, the Kuomintang was sure it could hold Latsekou. The Kuomintang commanders are panic-stricken when thirty thousand Red Army men break through their defence. They fall to cursing each other and Chiang Kai-shek.

In order to present the historical truth about the Long March in manageable dramatic form, the author of *Across Rivers and Mountains* has had to take some liberties with actual happenings. He shows major events of the Long March through the activities of one battalion of the Red Army. Or, more precisely, the audience is made to feel the throbbing pulse of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army as a whole through the experiences of a few typical characters.

The playwright has placed special emphasis on Li Yu-kuo, the battalion political instructor. Li, who was in his late twenties, had once been a landlord's farmhand. But in 1928, he ran away in revolt against the misery and insults he had suffered, and joined the Red Army. He had studied and learned about the revolution and become a political instructor on the Long March. Simple in his life and undogmatic, he never loses touch with the rank and file. His high political ideals, his youthful yet sober-minded spirit, are a constant source of inspiration to the people around him, even in the midst of battle. At the Tatu River, for instance, it is he who restrains acting battalion commander Chao Chih-fang when the latter is inclined to lose his temper in the face of the difficulty of crossing, as time runs short and the river rises steadily. Li tells Chao then: "The Party promoted you to your present post of battalion commander. That means you must have confidence in your ability to carry out the task the Party assigns you. We are no longer herding cattle at home. It's no use flying into a temper. What you need now, is calmness."

Li Yu-kuo's determination and selfless devotion to the revolutionary cause are vividly brought out in the scene showing the Red Army's crossing of the grasslands. The horse which Li is riding—a gift of a Tibetan family—drops dead under him. To avoid burdening his comrades and to cheer them up, he not only refuses to be given special attention but, making light of his wound and illness, challenges his orderly to see which of them can walk faster. Despite his festering wound, a stomach bloated from the indigestible food he has been eating, and dizzy spells from exhaustion, he still shows himself as cheerful as ever, and imparts this optimism to all his comrades. Only when he learns that the Red Army's high command has ordered their horses butchered and that he has been given the divisional commander's share of the horseflesh, does Li Yu-kuo lose his self-control and burst into tears. He explains to a comrade: "This means the whole army has run out of food completely. Even Chairman Mao has to trudge on an empty stomach through the slush and bogs, against wind and snow. . . ."

But just at that moment, a Kuomintang cavalry detachment is discovered ahead of the Red Army. The latter immediately gives chase, shoots some of their horses and captures others. Li Yu-kuo orders that the flesh of the shot horses be distributed to all the units, and the live ones be sent to the high command to replace those that had been butchered. . . . "Let the revolution advance on horseback!" This is Li Yu-kuo's last order. As he speaks these words, he falls back dead.

Chao Chih-fang, another leading character, is several years younger than Li Yu-kuo. They had worked together for the same landlord from childhood. One day, when the landlord was abusing Li more than usual, Chao gave the landlord a good thrashing. Both were then forced to flee and they joined the Red Army.

In the second attack against Loushankuan, Chao Chih-fang, then a company commander, saves the life of the deputy battalion commander and helps to rout the enemy. During the Red Army's march through the area inhabited by the Yi people, Chao resolutely follows the Party's policy towards national minorities and obeys orders. He makes no bones about opposing the deputy battalion commander when the latter expresses his unwillingness to carry out what he regards as the suicidal orders of his superiors. Despite his momentary lapse into impatience, he shows great perseverance, bravery and growing ability at the crossing of the Tatu River. Chao has nothing but love and respect for his comrades-in-arms. Li Yu-kuo is like his own brother and he does all he can to take care of the wounded political instructor. Li's sister, Feng-lien, is Chao's fiancée. A Party propagandist in the Red Army, she is inured to the hardships of the Long March along with the best of them. Her estimate of Chao is that the task of the moment fills him completely, that "in battle he knows nothing but battle."

Lo Shun-cheng, the deputy battalion commander, is, in many respects, a contrast to Chao Chih-fang. Also a son of the working people, Lo is intensely loyal to the revolution, simple, straightforward, brave in battle, persistent in struggle. As an officer, however, he lacks deep political understanding. At one crucial moment he definitely lags behind the rapidly developing revolutionary situation. During the events in the Yi people's area, he is criticized for not understanding the Party's policy towards nationalities and for his failure to carry it out properly. When Chao Chih-fang is promoted from commander of the First Company to acting commander of the battalion, Lo Shun-cheng receives him as a superior with mixed feelings: relief, on the one hand, because Lo is honest enough to recognize that he himself is not able to shoulder the responsibility of leading the whole battalion alone; and he also knows that Chao, over ten years his junior, is far more capable than himself in many ways. Lo himself has recommended Chao Chih-fang for this post more than once, and is glad the appointment is finally made. On the other hand, however, he reflects rather bitterly on the difficulty of being a good revolutionary. "How is it that, hard as I try, I cannot do my work well? Today I don't understand this Party policy, tomorrow I don't understand another. Is it that I don't want to carry out the Party's policy towards national minorities?" But these reflections do not spring from worries over his own personal interests. He feels only the true revolutionary's regret at his own shortcomings. This regret stems from Lo's devotion to the revolution. It is this devotion that enables him finally to correct his mistakes and go forward again, helped by his comrades-in-arms. When it comes to the battle for Latsekou Pass, Lo Shun-cheng plays his part in the victory and is subsequently promoted to battalion commander, with Chao Chih-fang as political instructor to succeed the dead Li Yu-kuo.

Other characters in *Across Rivers and Mountains* are drawn with clarity and force: Li Feng-lien, the woman propagandist, the army runner little Chou, the commander of the Second Company, Wang Teh-chiang. Such men and women became steeled on this historic march; they became united as one, helping and influencing each other. They matured into some of the finest sons and daughters China has produced.

"THE TEST"

The Test, a new five-act play by Hsia Yen, the well-known playwright, is about the people who are building China's socialist industry. It was warmly received when produced by the Peking People's Art Theatre in May this year.

During the war of resistance to Japanese aggression, Hsia Yen wrote eleven plays. Eight of these were on war themes and the double oppression suffered by the intellectuals from Japanese imperialism and Kuomintang fascist rule. Despite all that the Kuomintang did to prevent these plays from being shown, they were performed in various parts of the country, thanks to the courageous efforts of revolutionary theatre workers. Whether produced on rough stages rigged up with boards and matting in villages near the front lines or in big theatres in inland cities, they exerted considerable influence. In those difficult days they gave fresh courage and inspiration to the people. They taught the intellectuals particularly how to stand firm in the struggle and fight on no matter what the difficulties. Hsia Yen's plays called on intellectuals to put their trust in the working class, as the revolutionary class that would enable them to lead a new life in the new society of the future.

Mao Tse-tung once said that every Chinese of today would be faced with three tests: the war of liberation, the land reform and socialist construction. Those who successfully stood the tests of the war of liberation and of the land reform are now faced with the final test: the building of socialism. This is a struggle for a new society; it is, at the same time, a struggle between one's old and new self, a struggle to rid oneself of bourgeois ways of thought and life as the nation enters a socialist society. This is the theme of *The Test*. Hsia Yen shows how necessary it is for an intellectual of petty bourgeois origin to overcome the limitations of his upbringing in the old society by vigorously remoulding himself in the new.

The Test is the story of two friends, Ting Wei and Yang Chung-an, who had gone to school together as children and later joined the liberation struggle that was to lead to the triumph of the revolution. For many years, Yang was Ting's subordinate in various posts. In early 1941, dur-

ing the treacherous Kuomintang attack upon the Communist-led New Fourth Army, Yang rescued Ting from the Kuomintang encirclement. After liberation, the two were separated by their work: Ting went into the educational field, while Yang became deputy director of a factory that had been badly damaged by the Kuomintang before its retreat.

The factory is to produce the much needed electrical equipment for industrial construction in China's First Five-Year Plan; this has to be done with old machinery, with people who have to overcome their own shortcomings inherited from the old society, and with new assignments cropping up all the time. But by organising a united effort based on the workers' keen consciousness of the importance of their work for the revolution, Yang succeeds. This success, however, goes to his head.

When the play opens he has already become a smugly complacent bureaucrat. He has an inflated idea of his own importance and is completely blind to contributions made by others. He takes all the credit for every new success. He has forgotten the modesty and spirit of self-criticism that should characterise a member of the Communist Party. He has developed an exaggerated idea of the role of the individual and is much concerned with questions of individual prestige. Selfish, bourgeois ways of thought have got the better of him. He brushes aside the frequent accidents in the workshops and turns a blind eye to the irregular methods used to keep production going. Interested only in production figures, he buries himself in the documents piled on his desk. He doesn't even bother to read the daily newspaper. He indulges in lengthy speeches to the workers and likes to hear the sound of his own voice coming from the loudspeaker. He is so occupied with talks and meetings that he neglects more urgent matters. His mind is becoming a closed book. His whole moral character is degenerating.

Yang's old friend, Ting, is appointed director of the factory. Ting has never worked in a factory before, but he is unpresuming and determined to learn his new job thoroughly. It doesn't take him long, however, to discover the truth about things in the plant: the irregular methods of work, Yang's swollen-headedness, his ignoring of the workers' complaints and the recurring accidents that result. It is clear that Yang is mainly to blame for this state of affairs. Ting is patient. He decides to learn more about the situation and how to remedy it. The show-down, however, is forced sooner than Ting expects.

Hsu Ta-min, an enthusiastic and straightforward young worker, is fed up with the chaotic state of affairs under Yang's bureaucratic leadership. When he criticizes Yang to his face in public, Yang is outraged and insists that Hsu be transferred to another job.

Such an attempt to suppress criticism from below is incompatible with Party principles. As factory director, Ting overrules Yang's decision. He tries to get Yang to see where his individualism is leading

to, but Yang refuses to recognize his mistakes. He thinks that his old comrade is manoeuvring to displace him completely.

Ting knows that a Communist's highest aim must be to serve the people and that he must measure everything in the light of this aim. At a Party committee meeting, he severely criticizes Yang and again tries to make him see his errors. The Party committee decides to give Yang a public warning, and the factory management demotes him. Young Hsu is appointed deputy director in his place.

There are no trick twists to this plot. Every character is brought sharply into focus. Yang, for example, is so corrupted by individualism that he is blind to the real state of affairs around him. By letting the action of the play disclose Yang's failings, the playwright succeeds in giving a convincing, true to life picture of him, without excessively exaggerating and caricaturing his weaknesses.

Ting's mature character stands in sharp contrast to Yang's unstable disposition. He is cool-headed, humble, full of the love of life, and keenly interested in the new things around him. He studies and works hard to master whatever task is assigned him. Keeping his head in the midst of the prevailing confusion he quickly succeeds in discovering what the main problems are. He cannot allow the people's cause to suffer because of Yang's mistakes; but neither can he allow Yang, a man who braved death in the people's cause, to be ruined by his own individualism.

This is one side of the revolutionary. In private life, Ting is a good husband and father. He discusses things with his wife to point out that revolutionary principles cannot be sacrificed even for friendship's sake. He helps his daughter in her studies. He pays particular attention to and has confidence in the young generation. He supports Hsu Ta-min's fight against bureaucracy, because he knows that such a fight must be waged if socialist construction is to succeed. Ting is no pasteboard figure of the writer's imagination. New China is producing more and more people like Ting.

Hsia Yen has also succeeded in creating a memorable character in Yang's wife, Wang Hui, energetic, progressive, typical of the women of New China. Under by no means easy conditions she raises a family of five children and works well for the revolutionary cause as a trade union official. In vivid contrast to the old-fashioned ideal of the wife who completely subordinates herself to her husband, Wang Hui has an independent character. Aware of her own responsibility in the matter she is worried by her husband's mistakes. She flatly refuses when Yang asks her to write to the Party newspaper to refute the criticisms levelled against him. When the Party committee decides to give Yang a public warning, Wang Hui does her best to help her husband understand his faults and try to overcome them. Though not one of the main characters in the play, she shows us nevertheless what women of New China are like.

Hsu Ta-min is representative of the young generation of China which is being educated and raised by the Communist Party. When Hsu realises that Yang's bureaucratic ways are hampering production, he throws himself with spirit into the struggle for better ways of doing things. On the other hand, brought up in the old society, Hsu has his failings, too—sometimes he loses confidence and is overcome with doubts. But in the long run he is steeled in the struggle. He speaks naturally and with deep feeling and wins the audience's sympathy and support.

The Test is a successful play. Its author has a thorough grasp of life in New China. He has succeeded in bringing to life on the stage a number of typical characters whose conflicts reflect some of the major questions of present-day life in China.

Introducing

"THEATRE"

Theatre is a monthly periodical published by the Union of Chinese Stage Artists and Playwrights. It first appeared in January 1954.

Theatre sets out to give regular constructive criticism of all important theatrical productions in China; to facilitate constant exchange of experience between people active in the dramatic field; to discuss what reforms are necessary in Chinese opera and drama; to develop the realist tradition in our drama; and to make available knowledge of Soviet and other progressive experience in stagecraft.

Theatre also pays close attention to the political movements of our time and tries to show how the theatre can best play its part in them. Its very first issue had an article by Tien Han, chairman of the Union, entitled "A Bright Road to Travel," which stressed that all in the dramatic field in China had to help with the general tasks of the country during its transition to socialism. He recommended all in this field to study Marxism-Leninism with greater keenness, so as to improve their political understanding and enable them through their art to educate the masses in the spirit of socialism.

Chinese dramatic groups went to Korea on several occasions to perform some of China's best plays for the Chinese People's Volunteers and for Korean audiences. In the spring of 1954 some nine thousand stage artists gave performances for the Chinese People's Liberation Army at various stations in China. These events were duly reported by *Theatre*. It has also printed articles by such famous artists as Mei Lan-fang, Chou Hsin-fang and Cheng Yen-chiu, giving their impressions of these goodwill tours.

The critical notices of plays in *Theatre* are justly famous, and have helped raise the standard of China's dramatic art and its appreciation. The 1954 productions of which it printed critiques include *Heroic Truck Drivers*, a play about the transport corps of the Chinese People's Volunteers in Korea by the young dramatist Huang Ti, produced by the Chinese Youth Art Theatre; *Across Rivers and Mountains*, a play about the epic

Long March of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army in 1934-35 by Chen Chi-tung, produced by the drama group of the Political Department of the Military Council; *Liu Hu-lan,* an opera about a young peasant girl who died for the revolutionary cause, staged by the Central Experimental Opera Theatre; and *Tiger Hunt,* adapted as a Peking opera from an episode in the famous old novel *Water Margin* and produced with many daring innovations in stagecraft by the company attached to the Institute of Chinese Opera.

Theatre also analysed a number of foreign plays staged in Chinese. There was *Prague Remains Mine,* a play about the Czech people's hero Julius Fucik by Buryakovsky, a Soviet playwright, put on by the Chinese Youth Art Theatre; *The Only Way to Live,* a play about American sabotage in Eastern Germany by Sofronov, another Soviet writer, produced by the Peking People's Art Theatre; and *The Rosenbergs* by the Polish playwright Leon Kruczkowski, produced by the Shanghai People's Art Theatre. All these plays were immensely popular, and deserved the thorough analysis *Theatre* made of them, in the course of which it did not hesitate to point out certain flaws apparent in the staging, which detracted from their general excellence. The value of such frank analysis is self-evident.

Theatre has on occasions been sharply critical of plays. For instance, it contended that *Yuan Ming Yuan,* a new play referring to an act of vandalism perpetrated in Peking in 1860 by the British and French armies, expressed an untenable and unpatriotic point of view. Several operas, like *The Leper Girl* and *Plum Blossoms Under the Snow,* harped too much on superstitions of the feudal past. Such criticisms are criticisms based on principle, and are inevitable in the struggle which takes place when progressive ideas in art are ousting backward ones—a struggle which is going on all over China today and in which workers in the theatrical world are playing an active part.

A great controversy is raging in art circles today about the reform of traditional Chinese opera. Chinese opera, despite its long-standing tradition of realism, has, it is contended, still not fully rid itself of defects which are a hang-over from the old feudal society. Because of these defects, Chinese opera cannot yet fully satisfy the demands made upon it by the people of present-day China. *Theatre* is much concerned with this question. For instance, in its October 1954 issue it published "Further Necessary Reforms in the Art of Peking Opera," by Ma Shao-po, who is deputy director of the Institute of Chinese Opera.

Last November and December the Union of Chinese Stage Artists and Playwrights organized four discussions between dramatists and well-known performers of Peking opera. Controversy on how this reform could best be effected was very heated. The main speeches delivered at the four meetings were printed in *Theatre,* besides a number of articles on this subject. Li Lun, a critic, gave his views on reforming

Chinese opera. Lao Sheh, equally well-known as novelist and playwright, took as his theme "rashness and conservatism" in operatic reform. The playwright Sung Chih-ti added what he called "a few ideas," and Wu Tsu-kuang, a playwright and producer, dealt with "some practical problems." Ma Yen-hsiang, who is a theatre critic as well as a dramatist, asked "What stands in the way of further improvement in the staging of Peking opera?" The doyen of the Chinese operatic stage, Mei Lan-fang, contributed "As I understand the art of performing Peking opera." Chao Shu-li, the writer on contemporary village life, gave his views on reform, and the playwright Hsia Yen called on all concerned to "struggle to improve and develop Chinese operatic art in this new age."

All these articles and speeches agreed that reforms had to be introduced if traditional Chinese opera was not to reach a dead end. They also agreed that the series of reforms introduced after liberation was a great step forward in improving the appearance of the scene; bringing stage direction into a well-planned system; and improving the acting and music accompaniment. But when it came to the practical side of opera reform, there was a great diversity of views. Some, like Lao Sheh and Wu Tsu-kuang, considered Peking opera a complete whole, an art form unique in its symbolism. The slightest change might destroy the whole art, so "keep to the established system if at all possible," was their advice. Others, like Ma Yen-hsiang and Sung Chih-ti, held that outmoded practices in Peking opera which impeded its further development should be reformed. Among such practices they include the soliloquies by which characters of the play introduce themselves; the custom that the only stage decorations are a table and two straight-backed chairs; and that of painting the face for certain types of characters, which really impedes acting and expression. This latter group held that modern settings and lighting effects should be introduced, that Peking opera could and should be able to mirror the present-day life of the people, and that, for this purpose, the bonds of the old forms must be shattered. This controversy has spread to the whole country. The Union of Chinese Stage Artists and Playwrights is continuing to arrange discussions on operatic reform, and *Theatre* is playing its part by publishing different views on this question.

In order to give performers an opportunity of summing up their stage experience and publicizing whatever in it is of lasting value, *Theatre* opens its pages to actors and actresses who write about their artistic development and their experience in creating certain roles. Articles on these lines are a great help to the beginner on the stage because of the wealth of concrete detail they contain.

A number of other articles in *Theatre* also deserve mention: "How I Learned to Act in Peking Opera" by the vice-chairman of the Union of Chinese Stage Artists and Playwrights, Ouyang Yu-chien; and two

articles from a series of interviews with Hsiao Chang-hua, a veteran artist of Peking opera, dealing with the art of the clown and ensemble.

Ouyang Yu-chien's article describes in detail the rigorous training he had to go through while learning to sing and act, his difficulties in learning recitative, and how he studied dancing and acrobatics. The present vice-chairman of the Union of Chinese Stage Artists and Playwrights also tells of the understanding he gained of Peking opera during his apprenticeship and gives details of some of his later interpretations. Not only can performers in Peking opera learn a great deal from this article, but all actors will find it valuable reference material.

In an interview about the function of the clown in Peking opera, the veteran performer of such roles, Hsiao Chang-hua, gives many examples from his own experience. He carefully analyses the thoughts and emotions to be expressed, and shows the importance of a correct understanding of one's role. He points out that in different plays the clown has different functions and represents persons of different social position; that an actor must first have a thorough understanding of the psychology and social implications of a role before he can correctly portray it.

In a second interview, Hsiao Chang-hua, emphasizing that "two plays cannot be enacted on the same stage simultaneously," makes the point that all the actors must co-operate to create an ensemble, a really rounded performance. "The blossoms and the leaves of a peony tree must set each other off!" He is against performances in which "a peony blossom appears without any leaves," and cites minor parts like those of the messenger, guard, aide-de-camp and manservant in several plays to illustrate his point. The veteran artist insists that even the smallest parts must have artistic life.

Chinese dramatists, producers and actors have for many years been greatly interested in the principles of stage performance evolved by Stanislavsky. These were introduced into China in the thirties by progressives in the dramatic field. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, they have been given more and more attention and study, and an effort is being made to apply them in actual practice on the Chinese stage. At readers' requests, *Theatre* has published a number of articles on Stanislavsky's principles, such as "Learn from Stanislavsky," and "Chekhov, the Moscow Art Theatre, and Stanislavsky," by the well-known director Chiao Chu-yin. "Every demand raised by Stanislavsky," says Chiao Chu-yin, "forces stage artists to make continuous study of all the realities of life—the fountain-head of art. Without study of this kind, no truly creative work is possible."

Theatre also serialized a Chinese translation by director Sun Wei-shih of Golchakov's "Lessons to Be Learned from Stanislavsky's Stage Productions," which won a Stalin Prize. It pays special attention, in almost

every issue, to introducing the rich dramatic art of the Soviet Union to China.

In the winter of 1954 the Soviet State Folk Dance Company, and the Stanislavsky Nemirovich-Danchenko Moscow State Musical Theatre came to China to give performances. This visit symbolized the friendship and solidarity between the two countries, and was extremely important in the cultural and artistic life of our people. In introducing them, *Theatre* published a series of articles by Ho Ching-chih, author of *The White-haired Girl*, the famous actor Chang Yun-chi, and others.

The October 1954 issue gave details about performances of Soviet plays on the Chinese stage since the birth of New China.

In response to the call of the World Peace Council, in 1954 *Theatre* published articles commemorating the great playwrights whose anniversaries fell that year—Aristophanes, Chekhov and Fielding; Shakespeare and the great Russian dramatist Griboyedov were also commemorated. These articles not only familiarized Chinese readers with their works, but played a part in the present struggle for peace and the preservation of world culture. The magazine also published articles that serve as reference material, like "Chekhov in China" and "Shakespeare in China."

To celebrate the eighty-fifth birthday of Yablochkina, chairman of the All-Russian Theatrical Society, *Theatre* published a translation of her autobiographical "Sixty-five Years at the Maly Theatre." The story of the life-long struggle of this veteran artist has been a great inspiration to young performers on the Chinese stage.

Theatre reported in advance on the 1954 programme of every one of the important theatres in the capital; it also introduced to its readers the Chinese Youth Art Theatre, the Peking People's Art Theatre and the Opera Company of Honan Province. Such reports have great value as reference material for all connected with the stage in China.

Theatre reports regularly on dramatic events all over China. The drama festivals organized by various provinces and cities have proved a great help to the movement for improving China's dramatic art. *Theatre* sent special reporters to places where such festivals were held and gave them full and critical publicity.

In its short life, *Theatre* has already proved itself invaluable to both the professional and the amateur. The rich material for study as well as the enjoyment it provides has made it indispensable to all theatre lovers.

Cultural Events

An Important Victory on the Cultural Front

Since the May Fourth Movement of 1919, China's progressive writers and artists have taken an active part in the people's revolutionary struggle, fighting shoulder to shoulder together with the whole Chinese people to achieve the liberation, freedom and independence of their country. The enemies of the Chinese people have always hated progressive literature because they know it is a powerful weapon against them, and have not hesitated to use persecution, imprisonment, assassination and other means in their attempts to destroy it. Led by the great Chinese writer, Lu Hsun, the progressive writers under Kuomintang reactionary rule fought a long and brave struggle and won great victories. The enemy, however, was unwilling to admit defeat. Having failed in open combat, they tried to infiltrate our revolutionary ranks to undermine them from within. Hu Feng provides an example of this. He styled himself a "leftist writer" but he has now been exposed as a counter-revolutionary.

Masquerading as a leftist writer, Hu Feng insinuated himself into the field of progressive literature more than twenty years ago. He has written a number of poems, published half a dozen books of literary criticism, and before liberation edited first the magazine *July* and then *Hope*. Through these magazines he organized an anti-Marxist literary clique to propagate his bourgeois idealism and his idealist approach to art, to undermine the progressive literary movement, and thereby prevent young patriots joining the revolution.

Hu Feng always claimed to be a Marxist-Leninist and declared himself a staunch supporter and champion of "realism" in order to deceive readers and young people; but his realism has nothing in common with socialist realism based on Marxism-Leninism. What Hu Feng means by realism is what he calls "subjective fighting spirit" and the application of this spirit to objective reality. According to Hu Feng, the degree of realism in a work is determined by the extent to which the writer has exerted his "subjective fighting spirit." This emphasis on subjectivism instead of faithfulness to reality is in itself counter to realism. Moreover, Hu Feng's conception of "subjective fighting spirit" is nothing but bourgeois idealism; for he believes that a writer who is faithful to his art can dispense with advanced political thought and a progressive world outlook. Such a theory, of course, serves the cause of the bourgeois reactionaries.

With this standpoint, Hu Feng considers that a writer has no need for proletarian ideology, and hence no need to share the thoughts and feelings of workers, peasants and soldiers, and no need to join the masses and take part in their struggles. "Where are the people?" he writes. "They are all around you.... Where is your starting point? It is at your feet. Where there is life there is struggle." Such arguments, in fact, encourage writers to remain in their own restricted circle and not to identify themselves with the common folk, especially with the workers, peasants and soldiers. The actual effect of such a theory is to isolate authors from the people and to make them the slaves of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois thought.

A faithful stooge of the reactionaries, Hu Feng consistently slandered the masses of the people, especially the peasants. In the peasants he sees only "backward feudal characteristics" or, to use his jargon, "the wounds of spiritual servitude." He deliberately ignores the political consciousness of the Chinese people. Hu Feng has closed his eyes to the gigantic advances made by the Chinese people during the last thirty years of their revolutionary struggle. Similarly he despises the cultural heritage created by our forebears. In his pamphlet *On the Question of National Form* he devotes many pages to an attack on folk literature, considering even such masterpieces as *Water Margin** as "feudal literature." He sees nothing revolutionary or democratic in such works. "It is hard to find even the shadow of a democratic viewpoint here," he writes. This is exactly the same disdainful attitude which the war criminal Hu Shih** adopts towards the Chinese people's cultural heritage. Such an attitude is typical of the most reactionary cosmopolitanism.

Hu Feng has persistently advocated a bourgeois idealist world outlook and idealist approach to art which serve the reactionaries' ends. At first this was regarded as only an ideological problem. Many prominent writers and critics made continuous efforts to help him in the hope that he would correct his misconceptions and join sincerely with the Chinese people in building up a socialist culture. He was elected a deputy to the National People's Congress, a member of the national committee of the All-China Federation of Writers and Artists, a council member of the Union of Chinese Writers and to the editorial board of the magazine *People's Literature*. But instead of mending his ways, Hu Feng went from bad to worse. In July 1954, he openly challenged the Communist Party when he sent the Central Committee of the Party a manuscript entitled *Some Proposals in Regard to Literary Problems*. In these proposals he declared that writers should not study Marxism-Leninism or join and serve the masses; he opposed the development of our cultural heritage as well as the view that literature should serve contemporary political tasks; and he attacked the leadership of the Party in literature and art.

The Chinese people still hoped that Hu Feng would turn over a new leaf, little suspecting that he was actually the head of an organized counter-revolutionary group. On May 13th, 1955, *The People's Daily* in Peking published thirty-four letters written by Hu Feng to a member of his clique before the liberation. These letters were sent in by the recipient, Shu Wu, a former follower of Hu Feng, who has now repudiated the ideas and policies of his leader. They prove that Hu Feng has long engaged in counter-revolutionary activity among progressive writers, hated and opposed the Communist Party and all revolutionary literary work under its leadership, and detested the progressive writers and revolutionary intellectuals who have rallied round the Party. During the fascist Kuomintang regime, when the Chinese people were fighting for their liberation under the leadership of the Communist Party, Hu Feng venomously described the Party as "the ruling clique" and those responsible for Party leadership in the literary field as "the high and mighty," "the great government inspectors," or "those high officials." He slandered progressive writers and revolutionary intellectuals as "philistines," "politicians," "worms," and "devils." He declared himself "determined to die at his post" and ready to use every means in a struggle to the death—not against the feudal, comprador and fascist forces supported by the Kuomintang reactionaries in the world of letters, but against the revolutionary literary movement led by the Chinese Communist Party as an integral part of the Chinese people's revolution.

After liberation, Hu Feng made yet more desperate attempts at sabotage, adopting more secret and systematic means than before. From the sixty-eight letters to his followers published in *The People's Daily* on May 24th one can see how, using false names and veiled allusions, he urged his followers to insinuate themselves into the Communist Party or

*A fourteenth-century novel by Shih Nai-an, also translated as *All Men Are Brothers*.

**For further information on Hu Shih, see *"The Controversy over the "Dream of the Red Chamber," Chinese Literature*, No. 2, 1955.

other revolutionary organizations in order to set up bases from which to extend his influence, and instructed them to obtain secret information and to steal confidential documents of the Party. From these letters one can also see how after liberation, knowing that the People's Government was stable and literary workers were united, he had to resort to double-faced tactics, "not attacking" openly but "even echoing whenever possible" the Party and the people. In secret, however, he redoubled his efforts; for he speaks of "whetting my sword and watching for an opportunity," and "using the strategy of Monkey,* who slipped inside his enemy's belly" to carry on counter-revolutionary activities.

As soon as Hu Feng saw that his offensive had failed, he directed his followers to beat a retreat while he himself immediately wrote an article entitled "My Self-criticism," describing himself as a man who had been devoted to the revolution for many years and always acted "in accordance with the political programme of the Party." He hoped in this way to disguise his true character, so that he could lie low for a time until he had an opportunity to take up his nefarious activities again.

The "opportunity" for which Hu Feng was waiting was obviously the re-establishment of a counter-revolutionary regime and the collapse of the people's revolutionary government.

On June 10th, *The People's Daily* published another sixty-seven letters written by Hu Feng and his followers, which make it clear that he and his clique were, in accordance with their strategic plan, advancing systematically towards their goal. They were actively "preparing conditions, more conditions and still more conditions." They wanted to "devote themselves to influencing the masses," "build up mass support" and then "look for big objectives."

The letters published have brought to light the long concealed secret that Hu Feng has always maintained close contact with Chiang Kai-shek's secret agents. It is now proved that Hu Feng and his leading followers whole-heartedly supported and participated in the civil war against the people launched by Chiang Kai-shek. One of the most prominent members of the clique, Ah Lung, for instance, whom Hu Feng described as a "poet" and "literary critic" who has "followed the path of revolution for twenty years," was formerly an instructor in military tactics with the rank of major under the Kuomintang general, Hu Tsung-nan, who led the offensive against Yenan. On July 15th, 1946, while undergoing training in the Kuomintang Military Academy near Chiang Kai-shek's residence in Chungking, Ah Lung wrote to Hu Feng of Chiang Kai-shek's plan for a military offensive against the people.

"As to the political situation, everything here is enveloped in optimism," he wrote. "So let me tell you something to make you happy too. In three months we can smash their main strength (the strength of the People's Liberation Army —Editor), and in one year liquidate them. He (Chiang Kai-shek—Editor) recently called a conference of officers above battalion rank, and issued certain instructions. His self-confidence has made everybody more cheerful than ever. . . . It must be done; the pus must be drawn."

This illustrates the hatred of Hu Feng and his clique for the Chinese people's struggle for liberation.

The Chinese Communist Party, which led the people in their struggle for liberation, incurred the most bitter hatred of Hu Feng and his clique. According to the letters published by the press, another important member of Hu Feng's clique, Lu Yuan, worked in the Sino-American Co-operation Organization (SACO)—an organization of secret agents jointly operated by the American imperialists and Chiang Kai-shek, notorious for its fiendish torture and butchery of Party members and progressives. When writing to Hu Feng, Lu Yuan used to describe the Party as "Those vile Communist bandits." After liberation, as China grew daily more powerful and the people's livelihood improved daily, these traitors' hatred for the revolution became completely frenzied. Another prominent member of this clique, Chang Chung-hsiao, for instance, wrote to Hu Feng on July 27th, 1950, "During the last two years my temperament has changed a good deal. I hate virtually everybody. . . . I detest this social order."

Yes, they hate everybody, hate the Chinese people who, having gained freedom and independence, are now creating a happier life. This hatred pervades the thoughts and feelings of Hu Feng's clique, finding concrete expression in the counter-revolutionary conspiracy which he headed. The aim of the conspirators was to undermine the Communist Party, sabotage socialist construction, socialist reform and the work of the people's state. Hu Feng is no "writer"; he is a dangerous political enemy of the Chinese people.

Not long ago, in accordance with the demands of writers and artists throughout the country, the presidiums of the All-China Federation of Writers and Artists and of the Union of Chinese Writers resolved to dismiss Hu Feng from all his offices in these two organizations, from the editorial board of *People's Literature*, and from membership of the Union of Chinese Writers, and proposed to his constituency that he should be removed from his position as a deputy to the National People's Congress. The continuous discovery of new material concerning Hu Feng's treasonous activities confirms the correctness and necessity of these measures. These resolutions have won the unanimous and wholehearted support not only of all writers and artists but of the whole Chinese people.

To expose the crimes of such a pernicious counter-revolutionary as Hu Feng and to expel him from the revolutionary literary ranks is, as many of our outstanding writers and artists have pointed out, an important victory in our revolutionary cause. It is like successfully removing a malignant cancer from the body. As they advance to create a socialist culture in China, our writers and artists are now more united than ever before.

*The hero of the sixteenth-century novel *Pilgrimage to the West*. Monkey had supernatural powers which enabled him to change into an insect and slip inside his opponent.

Commemorating Four Great Men of Letters

In answer to the call of the World Peace Council, the people of the world are this year commemorating the 150th anniversary of the death of Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, the 100th anniversary of the death of Adam Mickiewicz, the 200th anniversary of the death of Charles Louis de Secondat Montesquieu, and the 150th anniversary of the birth of Hans Christian Andersen.

Chinese readers are not unfamiliar with the works of these great men, for many of them have had a wide circulation in China for many years. Montesquieu's ideas, for instance, were introduced to China in 1902.

These four great men of world culture had a common ideal, and a common aim inspired all their actions: it was to build for the people a free, peaceful and happy life, free from the menace of war. The Chinese people have long had the same ideal; this aim too has long been the goal of their endeavours. This is why these names are so dear to them.

The works of the great German poet and dramatist, Schiller, were read and discussed by patriotic youth of China as early as the 1920's. In 1924 his life and works were introduced to readers in an essay on "Goethe and Schiller" printed in the *Students' Magazine*, which was read in all parts of the country. The following year his masterpiece, *William Tell*, was published in Chinese. Three versions of it were soon available. In 1933, in the third year of the occupation of China's Northeast by the Japanese

Mao Tun speaks at the Peking meeting

imperialists, the *Northeast Monthly* serialized it in eleven issues. In 1936, the year before the Japanese imperialists launched their all-out war of aggression against China, a fresh translation was issued by a progressive book publisher in Shanghai. This gives some indication of the admiration which the Chinese people had for Schiller's writings at a time when they themselves were engaged in a life and death struggle for freedom and independence. Another of his masterpieces which enjoys great popularity in China is *Wallenstein,* translated by Kuo Mo-jo, poet and president of the Academia Sinica of China. Kuo Mo-jo also translated his "Fishermen's Song" which appeared first in his *Selections of German Poetry* and later in a collection of his translations of poems. Chinese readers and audiences have enjoyed other dramas of Schiller, including *The Robbers, The Maid of Orleans* and *Treachery and Love.*

In an article written in 1907, the great realist writer Lu Hsun introduced to China the life and works of the patriot Polish poet, Adam Mickiewicz. He especially recommended *Forefathers' Eve, Konrad Wallenrod* and *Grazyna.* In 1929, in another essay Lu Hsun explained his reasons for bringing the works of the great Polish poet to the attention of the Chinese people. He wrote: "Mickiewicz lived in a period when Poland was oppressed. He called on the people to avenge their wrongs, to fight for freedom. He could readily command the sympathy of the Chinese youth of twenty or thirty years ago." And this also is the reason why his works have been published in large numbers since the liberation of China. His narrative poem, "Pan Tadeusz," was published in 1950, and in 1954, the Writers' Press issued *Selected Poems of Mickiewicz.*

When Montesquieu's ideas were introduced to China in 1902, they had a definite influence on the progressive reform movement of that time. Lin Shu, a noted scholar, translated the *Persian Letters* into Chinese many years ago. He also

wrote a commentary on Montesquieu's genius for satire, which was published in the *Eastern Miscellany,* a popular magazine of the day.

Chinese children love the fairy tales of the great Danish writer, Hans Andersen. His most famous ones, like "The Emperor's New Clothes," "The Little Match-girl" and "The Ugly Duckling" are read by Chinese children in their school books. In 1925, in commemoration of the 120th anniversary of his birth, the popular monthly, *Story Magazine,* published two special issues devoted to his stories. He is held in fact in the greatest affection by readers both old and young in China. Some of his stories were translated by Mao Tun, the present Chairman of the Union of Chinese Writers, and Cheng Chen-to, the present Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Since 1924, twenty-three collections of translation of Hans Andersen's fairy tales have been published. Since the liberation a selection of his fairy tales have been translated especially for school-age children.

The Chinese people have the deepest respect for the achievements and contributions made to culture by these four great men. In commemoration of their life and work this year, the People's Literary Press, a state publishing house, has brought out new editions of their representative work and some volumes of selections including Schiller's *Wallenstein,* re-translated by Kuo Mo-jo; Mickiewicz's "Pan Tadeusz," translated by Sun Yung; *A Selection of Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales* and Schiller's *Treachery and Love, The Maid of Orleans, The Robbers,* and *William Tell,* the *Selected Poems of Mickiewicz* and Montesquieu's *Persian Letters.* The China Youth Press issued a special *Selection of Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales* for children with reprints of drawings by the distinguished artists Pedersen and Frolich who won fame with their illustrations to Andersen's fairy tales.

The anniversaries of these four great men of letters were widely celebrated in China. Special features in their honour were published in the national press of Peking; many literary journals published essays written by those who had made special study of their works. Many meetings were held by literary groups in various places to discuss their works. Libraries sponsored exhibitions of their writings and Chinese translations. The commemorative exhibition opened on May 4 by the National Peking Library showed some two hundred books written by these four great writers as well as editions in twenty-six different languages and the early Chinese translations of their works. In addition to all this, introductions to their works, the story of their lives and several readings of their works were broadcast over the national networks. These various activities have been of immense help to Chinese readers in getting a fuller understanding of their literary achievements and their world-wide influence.

These activities reached a fitting conclusion in the commemoration meeting, which was jointly sponsored in Peking by the Chinese People's Committee for World Peace, the Chinese People's Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, the All-China Federation of Writers and Artists, the Union of Chinese Writers, the Union of Chinese Stage Artists and Playwrights and the Political Science and Law Association of China.

The meeting was attended by leading members and representatives of various people's organizations, well-known partisans of peace, poets, writers, dramatists, legal experts, actors and actresses, artists and workers in many other fields. The many foreign guests present included members of the diplomatic corps in Peking, partisans of peace, writers, artists and scientists. Prominent among them were the three guests specially invited to the meeting: Willi Bredel, the writer, member of the Academy of Art of the German Democratic Republic and winner of the First Class State Prize; Kazimierz Budzyk, Professor of Warsaw University, an historian of Literature, and Sven Moller Kristensen, Professor of Literature of Aarhus University in Denmark, a specialist in the study of Andersen.

Mao Tun, Chairman of the Union of

Chinese Writers gave an address to the meeting entitled "For the Cause of Peace, Democracy and the Progress of Mankind!" in which he paid tribute to the achievements of the four great writers and their contributions to the culture of mankind. The three specially invited guests in their addresses dealt with some of the main aspects of their thoughts.

This meeting was a joyous and moving occasion. The Chinese people have the deepest respect and love for these great men. As Mao Tun said in his address: "Schiller, Mickiewicz, Montesquieu and Andersen all fought for the common cause of mankind, that is why their achievements will live on in the hearts of the people the world over. That peaceful, friendly, free and happy life for which they all longed has become a reality in one-third of human society; and more and more honest people are being drawn into the struggle for that cause. The Chinese people have the greatest respect and sincerest friendship for the people of Germany, Poland, France and Denmark, among whom these giants of human culture were born."

The Arts Flourish Among the Peasants

Chinese peasants, who now own the land they till, have not only proved to be good at production, but displayed an equally high degree of wisdom and capability for culture and art. The enormous improvement in their everyday life, which they can see and feel for themselves, based, as they know it to be, on the successful movement for mutual aid and co-operation, not only gives added zest to their enthusiasm for work, but increases their demands for a full cultural life. This has resulted in an upsurge of peasant poems, songs, dances, dramas and painting.

With the ready help of the people's government, working through the departments for cultural affairs, and with the help of professional writers and artists and their organizations, the peasants, like the workers,* take an active part in all forms of cultural activities. They organize groups for choral work, orchestral folk music, quick-patter ballads, amateur dramatics and so on. Such cultural centres are now to be found throughout the length and breadth of China's countryside, even in the smallest and most isolated hamlets.

Talent comes from all types of country workers . . . lads and lasses, old and young, tractor drivers, cowherds, all take part, and in every place show themselves to be possessed of marked dramatic gifts. They turn naturally to dramas, songs, ballads, what you will, after the day's work, and at festivals they do it on the grand scale. Nearly always the performances are written or adapted by the peasants themselves, and even the most traditional have a topical and local flavour. The great Spring Festival, which begins with the New-Year's Day of the lunar calendar, is the height of the dramatic season. The festival performances go on for almost a month, each group or individual doing his best to outdo his own best, or to outdo the other fellows!

This year, in March, Peking was privileged to see and appreciate a National Festival of Amateur Music and Dancing. Amongst the talented performers were many peasants from thirteen provinces, among them representatives of nine nationalities. All the performances deserve mention, but one cannot help picking out some, of outstanding interest and beauty . . . that given by the choir of twenty boys and girls from Anhwei, for example . . . even the down-to-earth but beautiful names of the folk songs they delighted us with evoke memories: "Tea-picking Song," "Rice Husking," "Dragon Boat," "Thrashing the Wheat." Lovely songs, lovely words, lovingly sung; impressing the audience deeply with the strength of the peasants' feeling for their life and work now. From Heilungkiang came the operetta "Barrow Dance." As it is performed now, it turns on the quite new custom for China, of sending gifts to the dependants of a PLA man. This is a natural and sweet development of the old dance, which was just of an old man with his wheelbarrow. The peasants have good reason to respect and love their own army. And the new angle given to an old theme was most happily done. "Happy New Year," from Shansi, with a delightful old peasant of sixty-one in the leading role, spoke for itself of the general rejoicing over successful work and rich harvests. Then there were the famous Chinese drum dances, from Shensi, Hopei and Shantung. Magnificent, stirring drums! How they brought back to us the valour and courage of our peasants.

There were several versions of one favourite old story "Oyster Fairy," of which special mention must be made of that from Chekiang. The operetta "Liu Hai Plays with the Frog Fairy," adapted from a local opera by Anhwei peasants most successfully, combined folk dance with classical opera-mime.

The beauty and poetry which lies in

Scene from the "Oyster Fairy"

A sketch by Li Ke-yu

China's national minorities was also revealed. The distinctive costumes, their different harmonies and instruments further delighted the audiences. The Chuang love song, for instance, of maidens singing of their love as they work, on one bank of a river, while the boys on the other side listen with longing and eventually splash over, only to be left with handkerchiefs from the girls, who run modestly away, spoke of sweetness and grace. The "Fan Dance," from the Korean area in Kirin Province, which dates back over a thousand years, was particularly beautifully performed. Two other operettas, one by Tung peasants, and one by Chuangs, both, interestingly enough, dealt with brave and noble women. The first, an epic story of how a woman avenges her husband, and the second, of a working peasant woman who outwits a local despot.

The "Flower Drum Dance" is both song and dance, to the accompaniment of gongs and drums. In the old days this dance was almost the last hope of peasants, pathetically enough. In times of drought or loss of land to landlords, the peasants were forced into trying to earn their living through going round with this dance, and begging. The very name still tends to bring back these bitter memories in some areas. But now, and since liberation, the peasants no longer need to degrade their cultural heritage in this way. Now it is used as an expression of joy and happiness, and new content is instilled into it. One young girl,

* See "The Workers Enter into Their Heritage," *Chinese Literature*, No. 2, 1955.

who took part in the performances, told how her two drumsticks (made of flexible bamboo) were handed down in her family for at least three generations, and that her grandmother, her mother and her aunts had all used them to earn their living. No longer, she knows, do they have to think of the day's meal when they play! No longer do they approach a landlord's house cautiously, fearing the watchdogs. As the girl said herself, "When I use my two drumsticks, I do it in another world. Look at me now, performing in Peking! Now, when I finish, I don't have to beg. Instead, I am greeted with thunderous applause." Simple words, but of what significance.

Japanese Novelist Sunao Tokunaga in China

Early this year, China received an honoured guest in the person of Sunao Tokunaga, the Japanese proletarian novelist. Although this was his first visit to China, Sunao Tokunaga, now in his fifties, is by no means unfamiliar to the Chinese people. His name became known to them as far back as 1930, when his famous novel, *Sunless Street*, was translated into Chinese and had a wide circulation. That was on the eve of the Japanese invasion of Northeast China in 1931. It was during the time when revolutionary thought in the fields of art and literature was undergoing intensive development in China. So the introduction of his work to China, representing as it did the best of progressive Japanese literature, helped the Chinese reader to recognize the darkness of Japanese imperialist rule in Japan itself, and made them aware of the growing strength of the Japanese working class in the midst of the struggle against oppression.

Sunao Tokunaga was born in 1899. He came of a poor-peasant family of Kumamoto. Forced by poverty to leave school at an early age, he worked as an apprentice in a printing house, as an employee in the Tobacco Monopoly Bureau and in a retail store. In 1926, Tokunaga took part in the great strike at the Kyodo Printing Company in Tokyo. It was finally broken by the employers, and more than 1,700 workers, Tokunaga among them, were thrown out of work. It was this experience that prompted him to write *Sunless Street* three years later. It was from his own life, his personal knowledge, that Tokunaga portrayed the anti-capitalist struggle of the printers. And although, in fact, it is the story of a strike that failed, nevertheless it gives the reader a fresh stimulus.

After the Second World War, Tokunaga became one of the leaders of the Literary Association of New Japan. Later, he joined the staff of the magazine *People's Literature* (now known as *Friend of Literature*). He wrote extensively on problems of literary theory, and taught at a literary college, helping to bring on a younger generation in Japanese literature. Among Tokunaga's postwar works is *Quiet Hills*, the first volume of which came out in instalments in *Akahata*, the Japanese Communist Party organ, from October 1, 1949 to April 30, 1950. The progressive Japanese critic, Kimifusa Abe, in his review of it, said, "This novel fills a gap on the road of the development of Japan's modern literature." *Quiet Hills* is the first work that truthfully, and with artistry, reflects postwar Japan from a working-class standpoint.

Set in a munitions plant in the Nagano Prefecture, *Quiet Hills* reflects the great changes that took place in the ten months following the Japanese surrender, and tells how the munitions workers gradually organized themselves, amid a welter of turmoil, to fight for their own interests. With consummate skill, the author interweaves into this industrial struggle the conditions in the countryside, the relationship between workers and peasants, and the progressive awakening of the intellectuals. The novel also brings out a factual picture of how the Japanese Communist Party led the struggle.

One of the principal characters in *Quiet Hills* is Furukawa, a lathe operator. Drafted into the army while still very young, Furukawa was forced to take part in the Japanese militarists' aggressive war. He suffered all its horrors, and was lucky to escape with his life. And then, when he returned home, he learned that his mother—the only person he had in the world—had been killed in an American air-raid; the plant he had worked in, which he knew inside out, had been smashed to smithereens; and his old mates were unemployed, living from hand to mouth. Furukawa couldn't understand all this; he got the answer only when he began to get in contact with progressive ideas, talked them over, and drew strength from his friends, who shared the same ideas. Most important, with the help of the Communist Party, Furukawa began to see where he should be aiming, and what road to take. Finally he became a Communist.

Quiet Hills was translated into Chinese in 1953, and has been widely read in China. Its readers have been helped to realize that there is a glaring distinction between the broad masses of the Japanese people and the handful of Japanese fascists; they can also see that the ruthless war, which brought endless misery to the Chinese people, also brought misery to the Japanese people. The old peasant, Tosaku Yamanaka, lost both his sons in the war, and on top of that was driven off his wretched patch of land, on which he eked out a miserable living, by the landlord. Chiyo Endo, whose husband had been taken from her and killed by the same hateful war, three years before its close, could only weep impotently when they took her field, with the crops standing in it, from her.... And then the contrast, of the fat fascist officials, in leisurely enjoyment of American cigarettes, fancying themselves at Western dances. They oppressed their own people, the workers and peasants, as much as they did before.

Sunao Tokunaga speaking

After attending the Second All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in December 1954 as an observer, Sunao Tokunaga came to China with the Japanese literary critic, Junichi Iwakami, at the invitation of the Chinese People's Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and the Union of Chinese Writers. They were warmly received in China's literary and art circles. During their one-month stay, the guests met well-known Chinese writers such as Ting Ling, Emi Siao, Lao Sheh, Liu Pai-yu and Yang So, and a number of Chinese readers of their works, which enabled them to gain some knowledge of literary life in China at present. Sunao Tokunaga also gave a much appreciated lecture on modern Japanese progressive literature.

Of course, New China's literature is not new to Sunao Tokunaga: he knows many of our modern Chinese novels in translation. And on his visit to China,

he found that, besides his own *Quiet Hills,* quite a number of other popular Japanese books are available in Chinese, such as Takiji Kobayashi's *Cannery Boat* and *An Underground Communist,* Teru Takakura's *The Hakone Canal,* and Tetsuo Harukawa's *Japanese Workers.*

It is worth mentioning that cultural interchange between China and Japan goes back over a thousand years. Its impact is readily to be seen in the present-day written and spoken languages of both countries, as well as in their literature and art. In the past, reaction erected many barriers, but this failed to prevent the advance of mutual understanding. The Chinese people warmly welcome Sunao Tokunaga's visit to China, and hope that more and more Japanese writers will be coming here.

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