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Title Spinners of Silk

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ETCHING OF A TORMENTED AGE
(PEN BOOKS)

CHINA BUT NOT CATHAY

THE DRAGON BEARDS VERSUS THE BLUE PRINTS
(Meditations on Post-War Culture)

A HARP WITH A THOUSAND STRINGS

The

SPINNERS OF SILK

by

Hsiao Ch'icn

London

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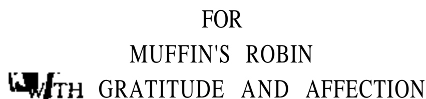
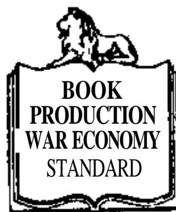


FOR
MUFFIN'S ROBIN
WITH GRATITUDE AND AFFECTION



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A Rainy Evening

THERE is something exciting about being caught in the rain. It is unpleasant to get wet, but life is a dramatic struggle, a race between two slender but determined legs and the threatening sky. The grey canopy above loses its temper and begins to frown ; abruptly the dark clouds mass together like the vessels of a mysterious flotilla. Layer upon layer the blackness piles up, as if it must topple over on to the earth. The desperate fellow on the road tears along like a bandit, and behind him, like drums in old-style battles, the thunder rumbles. As he runs, he looks back at the clouds which have shaped themselves into swords and palm-trees and unknown monsters baring their shining teeth. Suddenly icy raindrops fall on his head and neck and shoulders, and when he puts up his hand to feel them the water gathers on the back of his hand.

The muttering of the thunder changes to an uproar. Lightning flashes out like metal threads in a dark brocade. He feels nervy, exhausted. But automatically his weary legs carry him on, and the raindrops Batter on his bowed back ; now they are strung together like beads. He begins to worry about his clothes and his sodden legs. Through his dripping eyelashes he looks about : there may be a temple by the roadside, or a deserted inn. Whatever it is, he goes inside, forgetting all the etiquette he has been taught ; squeezing the water from his hair, he whispers to himself, " Gosh, how wet it is ! " Then perhaps he picks up a log, settles down by the doorway, folds his arms and begins to enjoy the beauty of the ram.

To be fair, rain has often been a blessing. How many poor scholars on their way to take part in the Imperial Examinations have been caught in the rain, sheltered in some deserted temple by the roadside, and encountered fairies ? Others have taken

refuge in the guest-chamber of some great household by a bamboo grove. Then the pearl-in-the-palm [1] of the household looked through the window of her boudoir and fell in love with the shabby scholar at first sight. In the rhododendron grove by moonlight they contrived to meet and pledged themselves to wed or die. The timid maiden thrust a jade ring into the scholar's hand and then they parted ; it was a ray of hope for the elegant but barren boudoir and an inspiration for the one who was on his path to fame. . . .

Once I was caught in the rain, but it happened long after the romantic age and therefore brought me no special luck. Also I was barely twelve years old and had a guiff of hair on my forehead. At that time I went to a day school a little way south of our village, where my task was to chant the Analects of Confucius at the top of my voice for eight hours a day. (Otherwise I was thoroughly spanked.) At about four o'clock each afternoon I bowed three times to the stone-rubbing of Confucius on the lime-washed wall and dashed out into the open.

The school was not very far from my home ; I had only to cross a dried swamp that bristled with feathery rccds. By the bank was our house, impressively guarded by five tall willows. But I liked to think of myself as a vagabond, and hated the idea of going straight home, where I should only exchange pedagogic for domestic discipline. I liked to wander about as long as I could, even though I thought a lot about my goldfish in its jar on the long table.

One day I went with an older boy to a river, some two or three miles away from our village, to catch crabs. But the crabs were much too clever for us, and before we had decided that crabs sleep by day and can only be caught at night with a lantern we had both had our feet in the river. As we sat on the bank like a pair of sillies, drying our shoes, patches of dark cloud gathered on the horizon. Unanimously the millet stalks

[1] Daughter,

rose and dipped in a fierce south-easterly wind ; in the distance the row of poplars guarding a walled graveyard rippled their silvery leaves. We began to be frightened by our wild surroundings and hurried towards home, trying to race the storm, while our soaked shoes squelched beneath us. Before we had reached Five-Hundred-Homestead, raindrops like lead'pellets attacked the millet, the corn, and our unprotected heads. Then we saw a mill-hut at the end of a beanfield, and made a dash for it.

A peasant with a pair of dull eyes set in a deeply wrinkled face was sitting there, puffing at a slender pipe about three feet long. He seemed very snug, contemplating the rain outside. On seeing us his wrinkles deepened a little and then he thrust his long pipe back into his mouth. The presence of two small human creatures made as little impression on him as the torrents of rain, and his brown eyes gazed blankly at the sky.

I was determined to catch his attention somehow, and so I said timidly, " Old Uncle, do you mind if we shelter here ? " At this he took his pipe out of his mouth again, rather unwillingly, it seemed, and nodded to us.

So we settled ourselves at the doorway of this hut that snq.e|ty of hay and cow-dung. The rain was falling more and more heavily, and the screen in front of us, macHTDy the water trickling from the straw eaves, was getting thicker and thicker. Through the downpour we watched the stalks of corn, beaten almost to the ground. It seemed to us that the whole world was drenched in vertical rivers of rain with watery flowers budding and blooming in their midst. My friend amused himself by rearranging his satchel, and I hugged my soaked shoes, wondering what sort orpunishment I should get that evening.

Suddenly we heard the heavy splashing of human feet in the inch-deep water, and the next moment we saw a hand, fragile and bony, gripping the corner of the hut. A young woman with her hair hanging in dishevelled strands, like hemp, was standing outside the hut, the water from the roof pouring on to her. I

was so excited and frightened that I dropped my shoes. A woman wandering in the rain ! I can still remember her bound feet which looked like two muddy shapeless bricks. The legs of her blue trousers were so wet that they looked purple, and her white " upper body " clung to her so closely that we could see the shivering flesh beneath. Above all this was a laughing insensible face, a face that showed no awareness of cold, or wet or shame. Even through the screen of rain, one could recognise the crazy glitter in her eyes.

Obviously she wanted to come into the hut. As she turned I could see from the muddy patches on her clothes how many times she must have fallen ; I moved aside quickly to make room. My mate and I were pleased to see a new-comer, but all at once the peasant got up, brandished his pipe at her and shouted, " Get away, you trollop ! Anywhere but here ! "

The woman went on laughing senselessly and came nearer to me. I put out my hand to her, as I might have done to one of my aunts.

" Stop ! " shouted the peasant. " She is a mad woman." And this time he laid his hot pipe on the back of her hand.

The woman stared at him and her mouth fell open. Then she backed slowly out of the hut, bowing her head under the curtain of rain. I looked angrily at the peasant. Then I tried pleading with him—" Let her in." But there was fear in his face, and his brown eyes staring after the poor woman were narrow and hard.

Still supporting herself with one hand against the wall, the woman showed her teeth at us maliciously, and then plunged away through the millet field ; as she passed me she gave a strange, unmeaning smile, a stupid smile. After a few moments she seemed to stumble into some bushes, and we saw her no more.

I very nearly began to cry. Why must she be driven out so cruelly ? Even my mate was muttering, and the peasant

saw that we had a grievance against him. First he knocked out his pipe against his sandal, and then began to mumble, " Good heavens ! A mad woman in this hut ! I've had enough trouble in my life already ! "

This made us curious, and we ventured to ask him who she was. He was evidently pleased that we had asked, for he began to fill his pipe again, rubbing the tobacco leaves gently between his palms as though to convince us that he was not as cruel as we thought. The slow movement of his fingers made us impatient, but you cannot hurry a peasant. At last the pipe was lit, and a long stream of white smoke came from his nostrils ; he felt relieved. Scratching the back of his ear, he began—

" A mad woman. A woman nobody wants any more. Do you understand ? "

"But why does she want to be mad ? "

" O stupid boy, who would *want* to be mad ? She had a great blow."

" A blow ? " I looked at my friend, and then remembered what had happened lately in Hwang Village. " Did she lose her pigs ? "

" No, but she lost her man. Her husband is the second son of the household of Tu. They were betrothed when they were both children, and married the year before last. Then the second Master went to some big school[1] in Peking, a grand new place with all the new ideas. The first thing he did when he came back was to get a (Jiyorce. What could she do to stop it ? He brought himself a new-fangled lady from the city ; what a clever witch ! Short hair and short skirts ! They drove the ' old-fashioned wife ' away. But where could she go ? Her parents had all gone to the yellow earth [2] and she had only a brother, as soft as a rotten peach. So she stayed on, as a kind of servant. And the ' new-fangled' was fussy about everything ; if she didn't complain with her tongue she punished

[1] University. [2] Died.

with her hand. Finally the poor creature went crazy. She sang all the time, ' Day and Night, I live in the shed V

We could hardly understand what he was saying, but in our small hearts we felt that it was not her fault that she should be mad. So we went on worrying him—" Why must you drive her out from here ? "

The peasant spat noisily at the incessant rain, as though cursing it. " You saw how I drove her out. If I ask you to give evidence, I hope you won't fail me. What could I do but drive her out ? It's only because some men are animals. . . . At night the mad woman was locked out, and slept under an elm tree in a field. In the darkness some rascal came across the easy game, and seduced her. . . . But what's the use of telling you kids such things ? You'd much better shut up about it ! "

But all this muddled talking had not answered our question. The rain was lessening, and my mate was urging me to go. But I was still puzzled. " But why must you drive her out as you did ? "

" Why, the magistrates here are looking all over the place for the man who did it. Once found out, he'll have the whole village against him. Could I keep her here ? You stupid milksops, would anyone believe she was here simply to shelter from the rain ? "

The storm was nearly over, and the eaves were dripping gently. The sky had turned a misty grey and the bent stalks of millet seemed to be panting ; the raindrops were still dripping off them. The story of the mad woman interested me extremely, but my mate insisted that we should go, lest he should be spanked more than he could bear. Also I began to think of my wet shoes.

" Go home, you lads. The day is shorter when it's cloudy. And remember, be good. When you grow up, don't you be tempted by the ' new-fangled V He knocked out his pipe again, then blew down it, making a queer whistling noise. Then

he straightened himself and heaved a deep sigh. " But I'm talking nonsense. Probably you will both choose women with feet as large as boats. Things are changing, to be sure, things are changing. ..."

When we left the hut the rain had stopped, but darkness was coming down. The road was so wet and muddy that we carried our shoes in our hands ; we walked silently, looking back from time to time.

Many weeks later I passed through that village again. As I loitered with pigs and chickens about my feet I heard a peal of laughter, so wild and piercing that even the fowls ran away. I moved towards the sound, but before I turned the corner I heard the same voice, now sobbing, now singing,

" In the eastern chamber sleeps the Master,
In the western chamber the ' new-fangled ' lady,
But the shed is the place for me. . . ."

1933-

The Spinners of Silk

THE moment Mei crossed the doorstep I took her by the shoulders and shouted the question I had been saving up for her : " Tell me how many lives there are in this room at this moment ? "

She had just come back from school, and she was so surprised that she could only stare at me with her bright eyes wide open, then peep timidly about like a mouse. As if suspecting that she was being teased, she murmured tentatively, " Can there be more than the two of us ? "

" Ten lives ! " I said proudly, and planted myself challengingly in front of her. Her head shook like a street-draper's rattle ; she could not believe it.

" All right, come with me, and Til prove it." I towed her by the hem of her skirt towards my bed. Mei looked as though she thought it might be her duty to scream. I drew the curtain of my bed, and showed her a square box lying on my checked blankets. Inside, against a green background, crawled a heap of greyish creatures, their antics as varied as the eight horses of Chao Tse-ang.[1] Silkworms ! Mei forgot the compromising place she was in and bent down. " One, two, three, four. . . ."

" Don't touch ! Eight of them ! Well, how many lives are there in this room at this moment ? "

" No wonder you have been thinking about me so little," she said, and made a face. That's how girls are, jealous. All the same, there was some truth in what she said. Heaven forbid that I should forget such a charming neighbour, but I had not been to her house at twelve and four as usual.

It had all happened that morning. It was raining hard, but all the same I felt I needed some flowers in myjpoky .bachelor's room. So I tramped down the hill, sheltered by a tiny girl's

[1] Famous painter of horses.

umbrella. As usual, I made for the far end of the Longevity Bridge to get my tulips, pushing my way through a mob of cooks and housewives, some barefooted, some in wooden slippers, each carrying a basket and studying the market stalls. When I got to the end of the bridge, the flower-seller smiled to see such a waterproof customer ; he took special care in choosing bunches for me, and the price was lower than usual. While he was tying up the bundle, I poked about among the green leaves at the other end of his bamboo yoke. At first I thought they were wild herbs, but when I asked him what they were he said, " Mulberry leaves, of course, sir," without telling me what was underneath. By chance I lifted one of the leaves, and underneath on a bamboo winnowing fan lay a heap of silkworms. So many queer little lives ! I was so excited that I nearly dropped my flowers. I had still eight coppers in my pocket, so I was allowed to choose eight " pieces " from amongst the hundreds of fat, flabby creatures. I had forgotten the rain altogether. I tucked the flowers under my arm, and hooked the umbrella on my wrist so that I could hold the precious silkworms in my cupped hands.

I marched triumphantly into my rooms. My landlady was washing cauliflowers, but I was too excited to think about the picture of milky-coloured vegetables and white hair. With each stair I climbed I felt more closely related to my eight strangers. Eight new friends, all at once, for a bachelor many thousand miles away from home !

Any other day, after unlocking the door of my room I should have trimmed the newly-bought flowers, washed my vases, and then, with a great many apologies, I would have disposed of the old flowers which had witnessed my youthful dreams for at least a day and a night. As I threw them out I would murmur, " Don't be upset. This time next year you'll come back to earth as a new flower." To-day, things were different. I gave the flowers and the vase to the servant, and

started to arrange accommodation for the silkworms. " Where am I to put them ? " I asked myself. I was like a thoughtless woman who had given birth to a child without providing a cradle. I searched through my drawers, and at last found a box which Mei had given me. Her father had brought it back from France, and the cover had an embroidered picture of long-skirted European women wandering under a weeping willow. It was meant for the letters Mei would write to me when I sailed back to the North. Perfect ! I could keep the most precious within the most valuable.

The next thing was the equipment. *I* cut off the stiff stalks and rotten fringes of some mulberry leaves, and trimmed them into shapes, stars, half moons, diamonds. When the little box had become a green bower, I dropped the eight babies carefully into it from a huge leaf. As soon as they were put down they rolled over on their new green cushion and wriggled themselves into curves, sniffing the fodder underneath their soft bellies. Some of them appeared curious about their new master ; lifting up their heads, they seemed to be wondering, " What is this place, and who are you ? "

When all the babies were settled, I moved the box from the table to my bed, forgetting all the compositions I had to correct. Their little world was a huge orchard of delicious fruit; they had only to open their mouths. Above them hung the immense milky folds of my mosquito net, beneath them was the unknown. The eight companions, naked and without shame, rubbed up against each other, some indifferent, some passionate. And I, Almighty God, watched them from above ; my lightning-like glance moved freely over this garden built with my own hands. I felt like a Creator, and they seemed pleased with my work.

All the same, I had to go back to my drudgery. Forty compositions had to be returned to my pupils at nine o'clock next morning. So I had to leave my world of romance for the desk where it seemed I must waste all my youth.

By the time I had marked the last composition it was dusk, and the lower part of my body was full of pins and needles. There seemed to be a sheet of frosted glass between me and the rest of the world. I limped to the window to stretch my legs. The sky was rosy, with patches of dark cloud. The River Min curved from the interior of Fukien like a spotted snake ; green islets girdled it, and a few sampans moved slowly beneath the greyish mist that hovered above the surface of the water. A steamer was making its last west-bound voyage for the day, drawing a long trail of white foam. Then my eyes fell on the apricot-coloured curtain at my neighbour's window, and I began to wonder if she had come home. Suddenly, even the last faint light vanished as my eyes were covered by a pair of soft hands that smelled of a familiar soap.

" You frightened me, Mei ! Let me go ! " Laughter, and then the light came back.

" Feeling romantic and forgetting those innocent creatures ! Shame on you," she said. Indeed, until she reminded me I had completely forgotten the silkworms. Those long white creatures, raising and lowering their heads like giraffes in a jungle ! Their pin-point eyes stared into mine, as though they were cursing their cruel master. Two or three of them were already starved and shrunken, hidden beneath the few remaining mulberry stalks. All the leaves were eaten, and while I was correcting the essays there had been a disastrous famine. I was overcome with shame and repentance. Dear children, you trusted your Almighty ; you left your fate in my hands. Did it never occur to you that I too had my limitations ? That I have other occupations, apart from cherishing you ? I could cut your food into the shape of the crescent moon, but once the market is closed, I can't give you any more. I depend on the flower-seller, as you depend on me.

I rushed downstairs to the kitchen and asked the cook if he had kept the leaves I threw away. The kind old man blamed

his own thoughtlessness and did his best to save what he could from the dustbin. After rinsing the leaves in water, I ran upstairs again to distribute the stuff to my children. It was barely a handful.

At the sight of food, even the thinnest managed to crawl towards the edge of the leaves. The stronger ones had already begun to tear off big mouthfuls, blocking the way for their weaker fellows with the lower halves of their long bodies. Mei was angry with their callousness and took them away from the leaves. But what god or goddess could ensure justice in that silkworm world ? As soon as she moved them away, the stronger silkworms pushed the weaker ones aside.

Next morning I went to them as soon as I had jumped out of bed. Two were already dead, just as I had feared, their crumpled bodies hidden under a dried leaf as though they were ashamed of their weakness. The other six were very feeble, and looked at me with their tiny blank eyes as though they were greeting me ironically, " Good morning, God."

I washed and dressed hurriedly, and rushed down the hill to buy them some food. I picked out the most tender leaves from the tips of the branches and spread them over the white bodies, already shrunken with the pangs of hunger.

Every day, while I stooped over my desk to prepare my lessons, the six brothers ate noisily in their green garden. In the intervals of teaching I acted as their scavenger. The fresh leaves had purified the creatures' bodies, which were now marked with transparent circles. Soon, they were altogether translucent, and a stretch of bluish sinew, like a layer of cloud, rippled on each back. I wondered whether that was what in a poet we should call inspiration.

When I paid my usual visit to the box one morning, a few days later, I found something new. One of them, now glassy coloured, had settled itself in a corner of the box. Without giving notice, it had begun to spin a filmy thread across the

corner, in the shape of a harp. Oh, dear minstrel, so languid, so fragile, and yet so industrious, your music a delicate thread !

Clever Mei said, " Remember, the box is mine ! " She was very excited and motherly, and agreed to play truant from school for the day ; we had to decide on the proper place for this memorial of a silkworm's life. We looked about, and then, all at once, Mei had a beautiful idea. " We have always dreamed of a portrait in silk from Hangchow," she said ; " why not let them weave over the photograph we took at the Hsi Chan Temple when mother wasn't looking ? "

So she climbed up on a chair and took the photograph from its frame, then put the industrious silkworm gently on the corner of the picture. In a " Leechee Grove," perhaps, we could call it. In Mei's hand was a book of Li Ching-chao's poems, in mine a bamboo flute. Branches of leechee fruits dropped above us, graceful as Mei, the restless deer.

Two days later all six lives came to maturity, nourished in their green paradise. All six settled on our photograph and began to realise their ambition. From that day mulberry leaves lost their interest for me, and I was promoted from scavenger to foreman, doing no work but watching others work. My only task was to snatch them off the photograph as soon as they raised their behinds, for one patch of liquid might make a permanent stain on the masterpiece. It seemed cruel to break the shining thread ; once it was pulled away from the silkworm's mouth the creature seemed at a loss, gaped, wondered, like a poet trying to recapture an image. At last the thread materialised from nowhere, and work went on again.

I noticed that the spinning silkworm was quite different from the feeding silkworm. Their lives could be divided into stages, like human lives. When they were very small they were timid and not at all aggressive, but as they grew older they realised that the only ethic that concerned them was the ethic of food—to snatch. Long bluish sinews moved across

their strong bodies, their heads hardened, and they were ready to resist anything standing in their way. They were competitive by nature, for even when there were plenty of mulberry leaves they shouldered others away. But now, in their old age, they were touchingly kind and gentle. Their bodies were as fluid as water, wrinkled all over. To them life was a wearying but inescapable undertaking.

Often Mei and I sat by the window, shoulder to shoulder, watching the silkworms at work. One would settle on the mole at the corner of my mouth, spinning industriously. Then it would link the thread to the mole on Mei's chin. We smiled at each other. " What an old man under-the-moon,"[1] I whispered. One silkworm liked to spin over Mei's eyes ; at first it pleased her, for she could pretend to be " a European woman in a glamorous veil." But after a while the little creature seemed likely to cover her eyes altogether. " Unkind," she said, and gently moved the spinner away.

Some of the silkworms seemed to spin wildly without bothering about direction or pattern. We called them " the Romanticists" and the ones which liked to spin methodically we called " the Classicists." We used the Romanticists to spin in the middle of the picture and the Classicists for the edge. In this way all my six children were disposed so that they could work to the greatest advantage. Who knows—perhaps they took Mei's eyes for willow-ponds, her lashes for a river-bank with reeds growing, her brows a bluish upland, her hair a black forest. The flower she wore would be the moon or an ancient well in that dark forest. My nose ? The Great Wall, perhaps. But in spite of all our guessing, the silkworms might well be spinning for spinning's sake.

There was no need for us to look at the calendar ; the thickness of their embroidery was sufficient measurement. In a few days' time the Kodak paper was entirely gilded, more

[1] Match-maker.

splendid than an Empress's garment. But the poor silkworms were worn out. They were shrunken (for they had no bone at all), and one could see that they were tired to death.

One evening Mei came to see me, carrying two sun-ripe oranges. The sunset hovered about her shoulders and her smile was like the twilight. Together we looked at the silkworms. The store of silk contained in their bodies was getting exhausted. They moved more slowly, they were spinning with hesitation. They were noticeably shrunken.

" You mean man ! " Mei said. " Why don't you let them have a rest ? Let them take some of their silk to the grave." There was something to be said for it, but on the other hand, I argued, would it be real kindness to let them die without finishing their life-work, with their potential resources unrealised ? It would be like burying alive a hero with his deeds undone, or an idealist with all his noble notions.

Then came the question of their final resting-place. As a child, I used to give the most elaborate funerals to the crickets I had reared. Each one was buried in a Danish matchbox, with a little grain, a few drops of water, and many tears. So the question of their coffin occurred to me first.

" Silly ! " Mei was shocked. " Don't you know that they turn into moths first ? Then they lay eggs. Life does not always end in a coffin," she said triumphantly.

So Mei darted off like a butterfly, and after a moment there was another pattering on the staircase and she was back again with a piece of cotton-wool. The old silkworms—I could hardly call them my children for in their own way they were older than I—were laid peacefully in their box on a bed of soft cotton-wool. They lay there as quietly as patients in the third-class ward of a hospital. Mei bent over them sentimentally and whispered, " Silkworms, dream your dreams. You have lived a fruitful life, embellishing our photograph. I am spreading fresh leaves over your bodies, to feed your souls, and may their

fragrance make up for the nightmare of famine. . . . We (she took my hand very solemnly), We will look after your children and your grandchildren, however many they are, and bury them all in the same grave."

But the feeble bodies of the silkworms were still, each curved in the shape of a scythe. Darkness came floating down from the peaks of Fukien, welling from the ripples of the River Min. We stood by the bedstead watching the end of six blameless lives.

1932

Under the Fence of Others[1]

WHAT difference did it make where they went? What did it matter whether they went to the home of his mother's mother or to the home of her sister? Now that Grandmamma was dead, it was quite proper that they should go to live with his maternal aunt. Hwanko bounced about and whistled and sang during the whole of the journey: his mother kept saying, "Things from now on are going to be different. Do be good for Mamma's sake," but Hwanko took no notice.

The village had known all about the quarrels between his father and mother. His father had been away for about six months, and it was natural enough that there should be a row when he came back. After each major quarrel, Hwanko usually enjoyed a trip with his mother. As a rule old Bald Wang, the village carrier, took them on the back of his mule to Grandmamma's house which was just over ten h[2] from the village. The old lady had a nice house. In the hall there was a little bronze Buddha in a wooden shrine, and beside it a "Ching" (a sonorous stone) which gave out a sombre twang if one snapped one's fingers in front of it. But that was forbidden. Last year, alas, the old lady had gone away to the Buddha for good, or she would certainly have welcomed them to-day, leaning on her walnut cane.

On the second day after his father's return from the "big place" there had been a quarrel. His father had said this and his mother had said that, and then all at once his father hurled a bowl of rice at her. It knocked against her arm which she had put up to protect her face. Then his father seized her hair in his hand like a bundle of hemp, and slapped her all over. She cried

[1] To live under another's roof.

[2] 3½ li equals a mile.

and wept; Hwanko, holding on to her skirts, cried too, stamping his feet, and outside in the sweet-potato fields the dogs heard the noise and set up a frightened barking. At last a farm hand from the village dragged his father away, and his mother fell across the edge of the brick bed, sobbing and cursing. In the evening his father came back. He had got someone in the village to write out a " form on a piece of red paper, and he forced Hwanko's mother to sign it. They went on quarrelling all through the night, and at daybreak Hwanko was dragged from his warm bed. A bundle of luggage and a wicker trunk were already in position on the back of Bald Wang's mule. As Hwanko was going out of the house with his mother, his father rushed out, His eyes glaring and a scythe in his hand, shouting, " You little fiend, choose between us ! " Hwanko trembled all over his body, and dashed headlong into his mother's arms. Immediately a rigid finger was pointed at them both. Get out, the two of you, as far as you can. . . ."

During the journey, old Bald Wang asked, " Third-sister-in-law, what happened to you two lately ? Didn't third brother get a nice job in town ? " The woman only swallowed her tears and said nothing. When they had left the village, Bald Wang halted the mule at the cross-roads and said, " Now that the old lady is no more, where shall we go ? " The woman answered curtly, yet reluctantly, " Take us to my sister's place at Pao-An."

When they had passed the millet field of the Chang Village, a ruined tower of the city came into view above the millet ears, and Hwanko was so excited that he began to jump about ofi the mule, which immediately pricked up its long ears. The woman held fast to her son, grumbling, " Oh, you stupid little pig ! "

As soon as their luggage was stored away in an alcove, Hwanko's mother began with many tears to tell her sister what had happened. The child heard his aunt saying, " It might be as well . . . but he can't just divorce you like this. . . ."

Just then Hwanko's cousin, the son of the house, came in. He was a fair-skinned, gentle, polite boy ; his hair, done in the " scholar's style," was a contrast to Hwanko's shaven dome, and he stood and sat and moved like a grown-up person. Hwanko's cars were tired with all the quarrels and cries and blows of the last few days. Soon after he had made the acquaintance of his bousm, Hwanko went up to the young master and whispered to him out of the corner of his mouth. While the two sisters were deep in talk, they slipped out.

The two boys did not get back until nearly dinner-time, when they showed four muddy hands to their anxious mothers. Hwanko was boasting how big the eels were in the city moat, and sneering at his cousin's cowardice. All the while his uncle stood there looking on as if he was thoroughly shocked. He was just going to spank his fair-skinned son when his wife nudged him then turned to the two children and sent them off to change their clothes.

It was getting late, and Hwanko's little stomach began to gurgle. He wished that he could lay hands on some corn in a steaming tray. But in this house all the cooking was done in the kitchen, and one could hear only the rattle of saucepans. The table was covered with a white cloth, and there was nothing on it except bowls, dishes, and chopsticks, all beautifully arranged. While the grown-ups were " ushering," each trying to persuade the other to take the top place,[1] Hwanko placed himself conveniently on a stool at the corner of the table. His mother promptly dragged him away, and he thought how she had changed.

Uncle had two wack lines across his upper lip, which confirmed the story Hwanko had heard about civil servants in big towns all wearing moustaches. Uncle seemed modest, thoughtful, and kind. He said repeatedly to Hwanko's Mamma, " It's

[1] In some parts of China the seat facing the door is the seat for the guest of honour, and diners show their modesty by persistently refusing that seat.

a great pleasure. We are such close relatives." With this kind, thoughtful man Mamma did not seem very much at home. But Hwanko could not bother about such subtleties. He grasped his red-lacquered chopsticks firmly and shovelled the food down, while his mother seemed to have stones and pebbles in her throat. Now and again Hwanko would stretch across, trying to help himself from a brightly-coloured dish far beyond his reach. After each of these struggles his uncle gave him such an enormous helping that his mother glared at him angrily.

In the evening, his aunt came over to their quarters with a long gown, in the style worn by townsfolk, for her sister. After she had gone, Hwanko's mother said to him earnestly, " Think of me, Hwanko ; don't go on disgracing me. . . ."

Lying on the wooden bedstead, Hwanko decided that his uncle's home was admirable in every way, much better than his grandmother's. From his snow-white pillow Hwanko could see beautiful china and glassware set out on the long table, and there was a life-like paper lotus in a vase. Suddenly he turned to his mother : " Mamma, what was the thing that ticked on the eight-fairy-table in the best room ? " The woman was angry with him for being so light-hearted at such a time, and gave him an angry push, saying, " Go to sleep, you heartless little devil."

After this unjust scolding Hwanko covered his head with the blankets. He thought his mother could not mind if he thought about all these wonderful things in the darkness, and he began to recall the day's excitements. There were three steps in front of his uncle's house; and instead of monotonous fields, stretching away for miles and miles, as they did at home, there were carriages and horses passing the gate. There were no rakes or scythes in this yard, but a big tank full of goldfish. And there were swallows' nests under the eaves ; the grown-up swallows chattered to their young. His boy cousin learned to sing the Boy Scouts' march at school, and his girl cousin wore leather shoes. . . .

At daybreak, the woman sat up on the edge of her bed. Hwanko was still dreaming of all the new things he had seen and she tucked in his blankets.

" Go on sleeping, my darling," the woman whispered, but Hwanko was already moving restlessly in his blankets, and in a moment he sat up.

" Tell me, Mamma, what are the dates like on the tree in the back-yard ? Are they oval or round ? "

" You mind your own business. You can't run wild here. This isn't *our* home. And listen to me ; you're not to go off with your cousin like you did yesterday."

" But we only went along the river bank. What's wrong about that ? You used to let me catch crabs in the pool."

" You're a hopeless creature," the woman said impatiently. " Don't you see that things aren't the same as usual ? We're in someone else's house. . . ."

Hwanko could,not understand it at all. Not as usual? Someone else's house ? In any case, if they had been at home, the cock would have crowed. Hwanko couldn't bear to stay in bed a moment longer. He wanted to see the goldfish.

" You lie down, you imp," his mother ordered.

" But why, Mother ? Haven't I usually gone off sweeping dung by now ? "

" Oh, you stupid ! " the woman screamed. " *Usually,* indeed ! Don't you realise you're in a town now ? You've just got to behave yourself."

Hwanko wanted to get up. The sheets were so clean and soft that they seemed to stifle him, and the rough skin at the nape of his neck was not used to that sort of pillow. He never stayed in bed for a minute, once he was awake. Why should he do so now ? Finally he was allowed to get up, after promising that he would not go out of doors. Having tied his shoe-strings, he got down on to the floor. Rubbing his eyes, he said, " Mamma, I want to piddle. ..." So his mother had to let

him go, and Hwanko rushed off immediately. He was over the doorstep before his mother had half-finished her instructions, and making straight for the goldfish tank.

Someone coughed gently from the direction of his uncle's bedroom. The bedroom was well guarded by a paper " Door God,"[1] and the glass was screened by painted material, which made Hwanko pity them for having to sleep in such a stuffy room. He spat gaily, cheered by the fresh morning air, and heard another cough. He took no notice, but undid his trousers, and aiming at a young camellia plant, began to make water. As he was looking up at the sky, judging the weather prospects for the day by the trailing morning clouds, a voice came from his uncle's room. . . .

" Who's there ? " Hwanko's mother heard it, dashed out of her room and pulled Hwanko inside, making him wet his trousers.

" You little good-for-nothing ! This isn't the middle of a field!"

Hwanko hung his head despairingly. It was such bad luck, first thing in the morning, too. His feeling of gloom lasted until he saw his pretty girl cousin at breakfast, with her plaits done up in coloured ribbon. Then he began to think how he could tease her. When his boy cousin had gone off to school, he asked his mother what job he could do, whether he should turn the hay or feed the fowls. He had to be reminded that he was in a town ; townspeople only sit and read books.

" The job for you is to sit still in this room, and that's the hardest work of all for you, you restless little monkey. . . ." In fact it was too hard. He was used to rambling all day among the millet stalks and in the melon-fields. Soon he slipped away.

The first thing he noticed was the long, shiny, red-ribboned

[1] In the interior of China some families still paste the pictures of Chi'n-Chiung and Ching Tei, two door gods, on their gates.

plait belonging to his girl cousin^, who was bending over a flowering bush. He found that she was collecting jasmine seeds blown down by the wind. Hwanko thought very little of these tiny seeds—he was used to broad beans, sesame, spinach, and egg-plant—but he wanted to be helpful. Soon she was very pleased with him, and began to call him " Brother Hwanko." But as soon as Hwanko got to know someone, he was tempted to tease them.

" Shall I pick just one or two flowers for my mother ? "

The little girl shook her head vigorously, and to tease her Hwanko plucked the flower at the very top of the bush. His cousin felt as though she had lost one of her own limbs, and cried out, pouting, and shaking back her shiny ribboned plait. " This is *our* home," she shouted.

It was a terrible thing for Hwanko's mother. She had no mind for such trivial quarrels, having too many troubles of her own. She patted the shoulder of her niece, and with her other hand gave her son a sharp blow. Hwanko's most effective " counter-attack " to pain was a loud tearless cry, a noise which he seemed to have learned from the donkeys in the village. J3e raised such a cry that his uncle at lunch advised his mother to be gentle with her boy.

After this Hwanko was altogether without companions, and he began to regret having teased his cousin, who was now shut away in her room, holding a little brush and practising calligraphy. Hwanko peeped at her through the shutter until he had cramp from standing on tiptoe, but she did not even turn her head.

There was a swarm of ants under the steps. Hwanko bent down and tried to bar their way by spitting ah[1] round them. It was very amusing to see the slender legs of the insects caught in his saliva, and the way they rolled over. He watched them, chuckling, and a pair of leather boots came towards him. He lifted his head, and saw above him the stern face of his uncle.

" Don't you think that's a dirty game ? "

" Why, that's not dirty," Hwanko said sturdily. His uncle had never been so firmly challenged ; his wife, his son, and his daughter had always agreed with him.

" Stand up when I talk to you," he ordered his rustic nephew. Hwanko straightened up half-heartedly. " Who made the mess by the goldfish tank this morning ? "

" A mess ? " Hwanko was quite at a loss. " I only piddled there ! "

The uncle did not enjoy Hwanko's mischievous grin. " There is a lavatory," he said firmly. " Don't do that again."

This time Hwanko was genuinely taken aback. He went off to his mother, scuffling his heels.

" I can't do anything with you," his mother said to him. "I dare not spank you in case your uncle gives me more good advice. What debt did I owe you in my last incarnation that you should disgrace me so in this one ? First your father, now you. . . . I wish I was dead. . . ."

His mother was in tears, and Hwanko shuffled his feet sadly. He had begun to feel lonely and out of his element. For the first two days it was exciting to be in the town after the country, but now he realised that the town was a restricting, dim, severe sort of place. He missed his yellow dog and the wide fields at home. He wondered how ripe the melons were, and who was beating the daje trees with a stick.

A branch of his uncle's date tree was just near their window laden with red, round fruit. The sight would have been too much for any country boy ; Hwanko put one foot over the doorstep, then, seeing his mother's sorrowful face, dragged it back again. He felt more strongly than ever that town was a dreary place, with no mooing of cows, no caterpillars to catch, and no orie to sing the Harvest Songs. All he could hear was the sound of human Voices chattering incessantly.

Presently there was a knock at the door. His boy cousin

was back from school. This delicate scholar was the only companion he had not quarrelled with, and he vowed to himself that there would be no more teasing.

" What shall we play at ? " He went up to the fair-skinned boy with an appealing look. The scholar had been shut up at school all day, and thought it would be a good idea to play something.

" Can you wind a windlass ? "

" I've never seen one."

" Can you catch grasshoppers ? "

" No. I hate running about."

Hwanko was disappointed. He asked his cousin if he could climb trees. When this suggestion too was turned down he said, " Well, it's very easy. I'll show you." They went out into the back-yard together, and before the scholar could hesitate any more Hwanko was beyond the fork of the date tree. He clung to the branches as cleverly as a monkey. " Coming!" he shouted, and with one little shake a rain of red dates pattered down.

" Please stop." The cousin was frightened. " Papa never lets us touch that tree. He hires men to do it, and the dates are sent away as presents to his colleagues."

" Don't be silly," said Hwanko, who was not really listening, though he knew that his cousin disapproved. He climbed up to a higher branch, and although his cousin kept saying, " Look out ! " he had soon shaken down most of the ripe fruit. The dates rained down like hail on the head and shoulders of the worried scholar below, until even he became excited and began to stuff the ripest ones into his pocket. But Hwanko had the best of it, eating the biggest dates straight from the tree.

" Does your father let you climb trees ? " the cousin called up to Hwanko, anxiously.

" My father hasn't been home for over six months," Hwanko said. " He has a big business in Peking. Peking is a very big place, and very rich, too. Peking has one thousand—no, ten

thousand carriages. And——" Hwanko stopped, remembering all his mother's warnings.

" You can't fool me," said the cousin, rather annoyed that Hwanko should run down the splendours of his home. " You haven't got a father any more,"

" Don't you dare say that ! "

" It's quite true. I heard my mother and father talking at night. …"

" What did they say ? " Hwanko had climbed down, and was stamping on the dates lying all around them.

" They said your father had kicked you both out for ever and ever."

"Blast you. . . ." Hwanko began to roll up his sleeves. . . . " You beastly swot, you."

" They said something else," went on Hwanko's cousin bravely. "They said your rascal of a father had got himself another woman in Peking."

" You shan't say that." Hwanko grabbed his friend by the collar and gave him a sharp slap on the cheek. The cousin set up a loud cry, and Hwanko, leaving behind his weeping cousin and all the dates he had meant to collect, marched out of the yard with contempt, nearly knocking into his aunt who had heard her son's weeping.

Hwanko's mother realised from the condition of her son's clothes that something serious had happened : she was very pale.

" What have you done now, my bitterest enemy ? "

Suddenly Hwanko began to sob. " Mamma, is it true that we haven't a father any more ? " His mother looked across the yard to the smoke rising from the kitchen chimney, her chin in her hand, and Hwanko went on asking : " Who is this woman, mother ? Is it the woman who stole our chicken ? Is she that fierce servant of Uncle Chang's ? "

That night Hwanko's aunt came to the bedroom, and stayed talking until past midnight. Hwanko was tired out, and slept

soundly, but once in a dream he seemed to hear his aunt's voice saying repeatedly, " Sister, it's all my fault. He's always had the say in our house. I never get my own way. ..."

When Hwanko awoke next morning he saw the same wicker trunk, already packed, standing near the door. His uncle came into the room with his most urbane smile, feeling his chin, and said in his mellow voice, " Must you both go ? But why so soon ? We are such close relatives. ..."

Hwanko looked curiously at his mother, but she only shook her head with a strained smile.

1934.

Scenes from the Yentang Mountain

THE undulating horizon was no longer before us. Instead, we could see the long range of mountains, with leaning peaks rising behind. We could see the high pass winding across the range, sometimes like a snake, sometimes in whorls like the shell of a snail. In the valley the criss-cross of a rice-field with a " mist-lake " floating gently above it calmed our terror as the bus lurched violently round the corners. The way to a famous mountain shouldn't be easy ; the piety of pilgrims needs stimulating.

Then at last we were in the arms of Yentang. Like the characters in the prologue of a play, the various cliffs and precipices came into view, all grim, all uncompromising. One was like a fist extended from the clouds, another was like an arm stretching upwards with honourable scars on its tawny skin. There was the Mountain of the Two Swordsmen crowned by two peaks like slender fingers, and there was the Tiger Cave, showing two wicked sunken eyes at the foot of a mountain like a crouching animal.

Just as I was wondering why some mountains look like huge mounds of earth, or perhaps a plump sow, while nature kneads others into fantastic shapes, I caught sight of a stream with water of the strangest colour. Above us was a greyish sky scattered with white clouds, and yet here in front of us was clear blue water. One could see the green weeds growing up between the pebbles in its bed. When I was a child, I often used to wonder whether clouds came from the chimneys of houses. Here, surrounded by these great mountains and far arway from household fires, I saw that smoke is only a matter of a few unimportant puffs, which might be smothered with a saucepan lid, while the clouds beget themselves, slow-moving,

intractable. As I watched the clouds spread they became greyer and greyer, making the whole scene look like a scroll painting that has been dipped in water. It seemed as though the clouds were playing a game with the mountains. First a peak would move further and further off, until it disappeared altogether, then after a long time the peak came back again, as if from nowhere.

We crossed the Plum-Rain Bridge and came to the famous waterfall. We picked our way through a bamboo grove, and suddenly we came upon a splendid purple rock. From its top hung a white mist, delicate, graceful, like the waist of a Tang beauty. We saw that we must no longer use "waterfall" as a synonym for "downpour"; the Big-Dragon Cascade was a real demonstration. It looked as though an unseen hand had changed the torrent into the finest silvery grains. The waterfall did not seem to fall; it was tossed by the gentle hand in shower after shower to break against the rocks and divide into smaller and smaller drops. The spray billowed and scattered on the air like the skirts of ballet dancers, then fell at last into the bluish pool at the foot of the cliff as though reluctantly, each shower followed by the next for ever and for ever. From miles away we had heard its thunder, and yet now we were conscious of ecstasy, not power. To sentimentalise was futile; there was not even time to record the history of each falling silvery shower. They were at once separate and fused, momentary and eternal. I could only feel the thrill of that sober madness, the deliberate grace of nature. As we were moving away, a strange bird darted from a fissure in the cliff above us. It was as small as a swallow, fluttered its wings like a bee, and yet we could hear it singing with a sound like the ring of metal. It was a part of the whole mystery.

Ling-Yen is not a great temple, but hidden as it is among the mountains it borrows magnificence from nature. Behind

its chanting-tower rose the Embroidery Screen Cliff, the rock all stained with rainbow colours. At the foot of the cliff was a sparse bamboo grove, and in front of the Great Gate of the Temple two great crags rose perpendicularly to a thousand feet. They are called the Lion and the Flag. These grea.t rocks cut off the temple from the rest of the world ; even the sun could seldom penetrate their shadow

While we were looking at the spring called " The Dragon Nose " a rope was being made fast at the top of the cliff. The monks of the temple had made " Cloud Mist Tea " for us, plates of melon seeds had been put ready on a table in the porch of the Great Gate. The mountaineers had promised to give us a treat, and as we were eating our melon seeds someone pointed to the top of the cliff. The rope had already been fixed at the top of the Flag, and now it was being pulled across to the Lion, some eighty yards away. A man, smaller than a bat at that distance, his limbs hardly visible, went swaying along, hand over hand, down from the Flag. It was the first time that I had compared the size of a human being with the great mountains and the blue sky. The man was apparently making for the Lion ; the rope was so slender that we could see it only by straining our eyes, and on it, his legs struggling wildly, the man was turning somersaults. At one moment he lay back as though he was going to bed, at another he waved his legs in the air. He did everything he could to make the rope shake and our hearts beat, and at the same time these tricks were bringing him nearer to the centre of the rope. Then he threw down some scraps of paper or leaves, to show us how high he was above us. They fluttered in the air ; goodness knows how long it was before they reached the ground. By then the little bat had reached the centre of the rope. Against the sky he was like a tiny mole on a pale face. Suddenly we heard a faint crackling noise which started the echoes in the valley. The bat had lighted

a string of fire-crackers. To torture our nerves still more he tied a string of crackers to the rope, and as the smoke puffed upwards we were afraid the rope would be burned in two. And then, not content with all these risks, he began to juggle with two white stone balls. As he threw them up into the air and caught them again he began to move towards the Lion. . . .

1937

Chestnuts

In 1936 North China was divided between the official appeasers and the intellectuals, the majority being students who were in favour of immediate resistance against the economic and political strangling of the Japanese Army as a convenient prelude to military invasion. Many demonstrations took place in Peking, one of China's university towns, but the most memorable one happened on the yth December 1936 ivhen students clashed with the armed police. As a result, many students were wounded by the Big Sword Corps of Governor Sung. I went round to visit the wounded the next day in various hospitals, and wrote this afterwards in white-hot exasperation as a tribute.

IN the overcast sky a wicked greyish-yellow circle hovered ; darkness and cold were joining hands across the winter evening. To-night, sneered the whirlwind, to-night coy girls in the boats play their lutes ; to-morrow the masts will be blown away. The wind seemed to be trying its strength, tearing at the trees, swooping round houses, howling, screaming, threatening. Sun Chia-chi sat all alone on a little mound in the College grounds under an umbrella-pine. The collar of his overcoat was well buttoned up and his hands were thrust into his pockets, playing with some chestnuts. The little nuts rolled this way and that between his fingers, always escaping him, as though they were playing a game. But Sun Chia-chi was in a bad temper. " Blow, you blasted wind. Blow 'me off this changeable earth, if you like," he said to the wind, and to the chestnuts, " How warm you were a moment ago, almost too warm. But where is your warmth now ? " He fairly bit his lip with annoyance and crushed one of the chestnuts between his thumb and second finger. The sudden crack stopped all the lively activity of the nuts, as though they realised that he was not playing a game after all. The sharp little noise pleased him and he nearly laughed aloud. " Crack, you dis-

obedient creatures, crack, all of you. You've made enough trouble ! " Soon the nuts which a few minutes ago had given him so much warmth and pleasure lay in his pocket, broken to pieces. No longer could they roll about playfully ; they were like dead soldiers on a battle-field. He felt a little pain in the soft pads of his fingers. Damn them, their shells were certainly hard.

All the same he felt relieved. He stood up, holding on to the trunk of the pine tree, for his head felt dizzy. The night seemed lit up with fire—no, it was a light shining out from one of the classroom windows. He felt as though he would ... he spat disgustedly into the darkness and muttered, " You're all dogs, dogs and bitches. You wait, you'll see—I'll crack the lot of you ! "

His eyes fell on the shining ice. Blown by the wind, the lamps were shaky and dim, but he could just see a few skaters trying out figures. Their long, faint shadows stretched across the rink, and the clear shrill noise of their skates seemed to cut his heart. As he turned, he saw the marble steps where he had sat with her last summer, where they used to sing so many " song-hits" learned from Columbia records. It was only this time last year that she was peeling chestnuts and feeding him with them. Fate was too fickle for him to bear ! How happy he had been ; the inside of the chestnuts was golden-yellow and glowing, just as his life had been then. Every day had beamed with light and colour. He was the third son of the Chief Constable of Peking ; he played the violin well; he could do beautiful outside edges on the skating rink. But now the chestnuts were all cold. There was hardly anyone on the skating rink, and the most abominable thing was the poster outside every dormitory : " Hedonism while the dwarfish Japs are nibbling at North China is TREACHERY."

He, Sun Chia-chi, was an individualist. If he liked to

play a Serenade by himself, he would play it. But someone had knocked heavily on his door. " Stop that cheap row," a voice shouted, and the " group-leader " burst in, followed by his own Ching. Sun Chia-chi turned to her longingly, waiting for her to protect him, to lean peacefully on his shoulder and listen to the music of his violin, as she used to. But now she was distant and wore heavy blue with a red armlet. What a terrible thing, politics, turning a sweet girl friend into a crocodile, almost overnight.

" Stop, Chia-chi ! The Japs have already crossed the Great Wall. Will you stop that noise ? " Such a tone, such a set face ! He thrust his instrument under his arm, walked up to her with pleading eyes, and took hold of her arm.

" Comrade Sun, she is one of our officers. She is here on duty. Please take your hands off her."

Comrade to these gangsters, indeed ? If the violin had not cost 300 dollars he would have hurled it at his " comrade's " black-bearded face. When did Ching become the group-leader's girl friend, he wondered ? For two months she had seemed worried and anxious, no longer his pretty squirrel. Each time they had met, instead of asking, " What's on at the Ping-an Cinema ? " she had asked, " Have you seen the news ? "

Now he realised all of a sudden the oddness of women. They could never lay hold of happiness, as men could. Their vagueness let happiness slip, every time it was near. Anyway, he had done all he could to make her happy. He had played the " Ave Maria" for her, with many variations, a dozen Serenades. ... He had taken her to the best restaurants in the city. And yet the ungrateful girl had joined his own father's enemies.

" Chia-chi," she had said, " if you're not coming, leave me alone. I have to do my duty as a citizen. It's not the time for that sort of tiling."

Stubborn girl. Silly girl. -What are your duties as a citizen ? To be a gangster's girl friend ? He seemed to see Ching at the lighted window, rubbing shoulders with all the most unpleasant radicals. ... He stamped his feet and walked slowly down the mound.

Two or three couples were still on the rink, their arms interlocked, darting and chattering like evening bats. The scene was disagreeable for Chia-chi ; it was looking at happiness over others' shoulders. Inwardly, to soothe himself, he commented on the dullness of the figures they were cutting. Last year at this time, Ching's swaying body had pressed lightly against his shoulder. She was wearing a purple skirt and a white silk scarf which fluttered as they skimmed forward together. He had hummed a waltz tune to keep them in time, and afterwards they drank hot cocoa in the canteen. Her pink cheeks had shone through the white steam. . . .

But what was the use of thinking about the past ? He crossed the bridge and made for the lighted window. As he drew near he clenched his fist, resolved to drag Ching away by force. He dimly remembered an American psychologists theory that women are born hero-worshippers. . . . Perhaps he should have shown her before how tough he could be. ...

Outside the dormitory there were coloured posters. " We start at 9.00 from the Front Gate, double file." " Maintain morale ! " "Be prepared for police interrerence ! " " Down with the Defeatists ! " and many others. Reading them made him angrier than ever. He knocked hard on the door, and it was opened, just wide enough for a suspicious eye to look out. Seeing the visitor was not a member of the Committee, the watchdog closed the door again.

Chia-chi stared at the unfriendly door. He had caught a glimpse of her, bending over a desk. He hammered on the door with both fists, and it was thrown open. He saw a number of faces under the electric light, faces angry, excited,

wary, determined, yet impersonal, not interested in him. Someone asked, " What do you want ? "

Chia-chi looked round the room. One boy was cutting paper, another was writing on a banner with a huge brush. By the window three girls were using a duplicator ; the smell of ink turned him sick—and there, holding the cylinder, was Ching.

" Come here," he shouted ; " come here, Ching."

Except for the little dimple in her cheek, her oval face was severe. Her hair was untidy, and she looked as though she had been getting far too little sleep. Worst of all, she looked shocked by his presence, guilty before her fellow-workers. She looked away from him and her eyes fell on a map hanging on the wall, marked with red in the* north-eastern corner, a map of Manchuria. She brushed the hair from her face and then said harshly, " This is our office. Get out,"

Chia-chi's eyes were round with fury ; the sight of the sign-writer somehow made him. angrier than anything else, for it was the bearded group-leader, wearing a grey uniform. Chia-chi walked over -and jogged the sign-writer's elbow, looking ready for a fight. The way he twisted his mouth might have been an imitation of Wallace Beery.

The boy writing the banner was so absorbed that he only glared at Chia-chi over his shoulder, muttering " I'm busy," then went on with his work. Chia-chi was disappointed, an'd drew nearer. By this time Ching was pale and trembling, realising that she was the cause of all the trouble. She handed the cylinder to another girl and whispered, " I'll be back in a minute." Then she moved towards the door and beckoned him after her. Chia-chi had not expected this, but he felt it might be better than a fight, so he looked round the room contemptuously and followed Ching into the corridor.

" How you've changed, Ching. Has some devil got into you, Ching ? "

The girl stood stiffly against the wall, with her arms behind her back. There was a fanatical look in her eyes ; she would not let him touch her.

" I haven't changed," she said quietly, almost impersonally. " I have no time to exchange stupidities with you, when millions of our people are being enslaved. You may have leisure, but I have too much to do. If it's not done now, we may never have the chance. The Japs may be in this city at any moment. To-morrow we are going to have the biggest demonstration Peking has ever seen. Go and tell your father. Tell him to trample us down. ..."

As she laid her hand on the door knob he tried to stop her, pleading with her, " Please, Ching, keep away from the demonstration. Father telephoned me twice this afternoon. He reminded me that batons and hoses and swords are blind . . . they've even got machine-guns ready." Without thinking he took out a handful of the chestnut-fragments. " You'd be broken to pieces, just like these. . . . Do listen to me, please . . . "

Surprisingly, his tearful voice seemed to make no impression on her. She was trembling, but she opened the door and said, " Your father can go to hell with his weapons. Go and polish his bayonet, you ..."

By the following dawn the whirlwind was a blur in the dark sky. Sharp gusts whistled through the streets with a cutting edge to them, as thougli they would carve branches from the barren trees, and whip the feeble arms off beggars. The roads were blocked by thousands of young people, defying a fiercer enemy than the Siberian gales. Those were muddled days ; even the boundary between life and death was indistinct. The wild wind drove the wild crowds up and down the streets of old Peking ; slogans were taken up by thousands of mouths, and the cold cunning snakes of the wind slipped into the open throats of all the shouting boys and girls, filling the empty

the tears streaming down his cheeks with the edge of his hat. He tried to touch her hand, but as though she knew what he was going to do she drew it back. In the midst of his pity and remorse, the boy managed to whisper, " Ching, Papa is here."

The figure in the bed lay quite still; the one eye visible looked at him for a second, and then shut again. Was it anger, or pain or exhaustion that made her eyebrows twitch ? Soon she turned to the wall.

The Chief Constable looked at his son. No one knew what to do.

" It is Chia-chi here, Chmg," he whispered gently. " Are you in pain ? Are you badly hurt ? "

There was no sound in the room, no stirring beneath the white cover. Then, suddenly, she turned to him, with a great effort; her voice was so faint and husky that it was hardly audible, but they could just hear her whisper, " Get out. You did this. I must rest. But soon. . . . Look out for yourselves, you traitors. . . ."

Written in honour of the heroes and heroines of gth December, 1936.

When your Eaves are Low

IN the street the apricot-junket seller was calling out in his husky voice. The hunchback's cracked note was like a cuckoo clock ; punctually, as he passed in the morning, the wintry sun threw a yellow beam across the window-sill. The sudden brightness used to awaken the woman, and while she was still on the borderland between dreams and reality her hand would reach out to fondle the little shaven head in the next bed. There was no stove in the room, and the child was almost buried in the blankets. " It's time . . . really, it's time . . ." the woman whispered, but her gentle touch was no more than an encouragement to sleep.

A living creature, asleep, has a misleading tranquillity. How docile the little creature looked, as long as he did not dream of the swordsman. Who could have guessed the amount of mischief hidden in the small gourd-shaped head, the tricks those restless hands could play ? The best moment for maternal discipline is when the mother dresses her child in the morning ; each button becomes a punctuation mark for her reminders : don't dawdle on the road, keep away from the street tigers,[1] above all, don't annoy your cousin. And all the time the small head would be contriving fresh mischief. She had begged Lotse so many times to leave his aunt's tabby cat alone, and yet he had tied a piece of rag to its tail so that the nervous creature ran round in circles until it was nearly demented. Then, although he had been warned so often, he had made 9, face at his cousin Lingko behind the backs of the grown-ups. Lingko was a spoilt child, always ready to burst into tears, and he ran *off* to his mother, sobbing loudly. That slim-waisted but narrow-minded woman thought her flesh had suffered serious harm, and complained sharply of the " wild rabbit " in the house.

[1] Motor-cars.

In the ears of Lotse's widowed mother such complaints were as sharp as thorns. She tried to make her son apologise to Lingko, but Lotse was stubborn, and in the end she had to spank him to appease her sister-in-law. But how soft her hands were ! Lotse stiffened. Hadn't he been taught to swallow his tears ? He folded his little arms, shut his eyes, and with each blow felt more of a hero. His mother wanted him to cry out, and the only effect was a set face and a rigid little body. At last, her hands smarting and her body trembling, it was she who burst into tears. Then a mysterious sadness came over Lotse, and his feeling of triumph faded. He leant against his mother's thin shoulder and counted the white hairs straggling across her brow. Warm tears streamed down his cheeks as he remembered the stories in " The Book of Filial Piety." In the midst of his tears the child had fallen asleep, and his mother, tired out by the weight of his body against her shoulder, carried him to the brick-bed. She took off his clothes and rolled him into bed. Some cigarette cards fell out of his pocket; one by one she picked them up. Then she tucked him in securely, and sat down to darn a pair of socks by the light of the oil lamp.

To a widow in her circumstances there was very little difference between dawn and dusk. When the day was over she could at least rest; yet, because of the child, she did not hate the dawn. The boy's eyelids began to flutter ; pouting his mouth, he made a little croaking noise, a reminder of his baby days. Quietly the woman got up. The room was like an ice-dungeon.[1] The fierce wind from the Gobi desert howled outside. There was ice in the wash-basin, ice in the water jar, ice on her eyelashes, even. All at once she called out, " Lotse, your precious fish-jar is frozen ! " Her words were more effective than a whip. The child sat up at once, his eyes strayed

[1] In Peking, ice-blocks are preserved in underground cellars for use in summer.

wildly about the room, and he kicked his legs under the blankets, making a great noise. " Oh, why do you freeze my fish ? " he cried.

" Be reasonable, Lotse," his mother said. " If I had the power to freeze your fish I wouldn't be here. It's because the room has no fire. . . ." She stopped herself hastily, in case her sister-in-law, who had a fire, should hear.

" We need a stove, Mother. I was awake all night," Lotse protested; but she knew that it was a lie, for she had piled everything on his bed : blankets, coats, trousers, even socks, and had watched him sleeping peacefully. It was she who had lain awake in the dark, wondering at her life.

The woman fondled the child's head, and the blue sinews moved on the back of her hand. " Child, wait until you're grown-up. Then you'll earn enough money to buy a huge cement stove.[1] It must have a wide, wide surround and there will be a great fat cat dozing on it, and Lianghsiang chestnuts to roast. That's what your daddy had. He had a big stove. He hated daylight. Poor fellow, he would sit up till three or four in the morning, staring at the flames. . . ."

Both mother and son -were steeped in the glories of the past. The child had often heard of the great days of the family, of the lanterns they used to hang up for the Lantern Festival at New Year, lanterns in the shape of goats, or bats, or pagodas, lanterns moulded of ice. At the bottom of his little heart, he always felt sorry that he had come into the world so late. He wondered why he could not have arrived just a few years earlier, before his father was squeezed out of the Civil Service at the dethronement of the baby Emperor. But it was no good day-dreaming. The woman held out a pile of garments to the child. " Now, my pet, you must get up." The child stood up on the bed, shivering, while his mother wrapped him in layer after layer of clothing. As she fastened the buttons she said, " Now you

* Often used in Pekingese houses. Thj^jrarjrveicy TOch^in $ize.

must remember to behave yourself. This is *their* home after all——"

" No, mamma," he interrupted, thoughtfully. " Isn't the clock in aunt's room part of your dowry—that and——? "

" Who taught you to be so mean ? " The woman gently pinched his behind, frowning. " Must your heart be as small as that of a mouse ? Haven't you read ' Proverbs Ancient and Modern ' ? " [1]

" Oh, yes ; I've read them. Listen. . . ." The child began to recite as though in the schoolroom, so fluently that it was clear that he did not understand the meaning. All the same, his mother was amused.

" Well, haven't you come across the proverb, ' Bend down your head when your eaves are low,' and didn't you understand what it meant ? " The child shook his head ; he knew enough about the world of mischief, nothing about the world itself. As the woman tied his belt, she applied the proverb to their own circumstances.

Just then they heard someone sawing wood in the yard. The dry logs fell heavily on to the frozen stone steps with a shrill metallic noise as the saw drove through them.

" Shu-chen, let me do that," the woman called in a strained voice, through the window. There was no reply, and the sawing went on spasmodically.

By this time the child had jumped down from his brick-bed. At eight years old, he was not very tall. His face was rather dark, even for a northern Chinese, a round face full of mischief, from the thick eyebrows downwards. The first thing he did was to rush to the frozen goldfish-jar. He nearly began to cry ; he wanted to stay at home to " do " the funeral.

" You lazy-bones ! Have you forgotten what I said just

[1] A book often used in old-fashioned schools. Some of them have been translated into English, by Professor Herbert Giles.

now ? Are books such enemies ? " his mother grumbled as she began to make his bed.

" But, mother, so long as I don't pay for tuition, that foul old man will always hit me. . . ."

At this the woman looked tenderly at her child. The teacher at that school had once been her husband's subordinate, and he had been treated well. But that was a long time ago. She knew the world, and could guess how her child was treated. She looked thoughtfully at a camphor chest which stood under the table. Once it had held all her valuables, but now it was nearly empty. She thrust in her hand ; there were her husband's manuscripts, already nibbled by mice. There was the pair of jade bracelets which her own sister had given her, and with them was another treasure, a jade seal with her husband's name in archaic style, engraved by one of the best seal-makers of the last century. She did not want to part with that. All the same——

" Tell your teacher he shall have his fee to-morrow, Lotse," she said resolutely.

As she closed down the chest, the dark blue curtain was drawn back and a plump, short woman of about thirty-five came in, carrying a basin of hot water for the child.

" Oh, you are a kind soul ! " The mother took the basin and put it in the stand. Then she pulled the child's ear, saying, " How can you think of neglecting your lessons ? Could you have a better girl cousin than Shu-chen, chopping logs, making a fire, heating this water just so that those two peep-holes of yours will recognise a few more characters. Come along, you imp, turn up your sleeves."

Shu-chen was a little deaf. She could not make out quite what was said, but stood there with her thick hands hanging, looking hopefully at the child. She was the spinster of the family, and had been a link and a comfort to three generations. She had been at the death-bed of the grandmother,

and then when Lotse's father, her uncle, died she pledged herself to do all she could to help in the child's upbringing. For eight years she had forestalled her aunt in washing the child's clothes, mending his shoes, and, when evening came, in sitting with him on the steps, telling folk-tales. But one day when she was bathing him Lotse had suddenly stuck his head out of the bath and said, " Shu-Chen, don't you feel shy, bathing a man like me ? " He said this just when she was soaping his back, and she had dropped the towel and run off to her room without even stopping to dry her hands. Lotse thought he had made a great success, and splashed in the bath until the room was half-flooded with water. When he saw her swollen eyes that evening he was sorry, but ever afterwards she would rush out of the room as soon as she had brought his hot water.

Having washed his face the child snatched a roast potato from the kitchen while his mother was packing his satchel. She tied it up with a butterfly bow. Then the child bowed twice, once to his mother and once to Shu-Chen, who stood for a long time at the gate, watching them down the street.

The streets were narrow in the Peking of sixteen years ago. When it was fine, they were as dusty as incense burners; when it rained, the mud was like porridge. Yet the old Peking had its charm. Perhaps the tall foreign buildings built since then have hidden the jade-blue sky of the North China plain, perhaps the motor-cars have made a difference. Anyway, there were endless things to be seen in those days, even on Lotse's short journey from home to school. To begin with, the shops still hung out symbols of their trade, a bundle of hemp for a draper, a coin for a money-changer, a plaster for a chemist. Lotse found them all exciting. He stared about him, wondering whether the bundle of hemp had anything to do with the silvery beard of the cashier behind the counter. Sometimes there were bridal processions, with all the spectacle of court lanterns, mandarin fans, the gold anvil and die broad axe following. Behind the

band came the sedan chair, carried on the broad shoulders of either eight or sixteen strong men. Lotse would follow it for a long way, hoping to get a glimpse of the bride inside. One day he saw a great event. Four or five mule carts went by in a procession, and in one of them sat eight horrid ruffians with their hands bound, singing, drunken, swearing. Someone explained that these were " convicts " going to have their heads cut off. Lotse wondered what " convicts " could be, and how they would look with their heads cut off; it weighed heavily on his little heart all day, and that night he screamed and cried out in his dreams. His mother had to " call back his soul " by knocking at the gate with a wooden spoon and calling out his name. After that, she took him to school herself. Knowing that he was a nervous child, she avoided the noisy parts of the city. They went through a Lama Temple, and often heard the sound of the trumpet mingled with the bleating of the Tartar flageolet, and the deep chanting from the Worship Hail. The child loved to see the tall yellow hats of the Lamas and the multi-coloured rosaries they twirled between their fingers. They only spoke Tibetan, but once or twice he met one who said, " Child, you are destined to be a living Buddha." So for years after, Lotse, when asked about his ambition in life, would say, " To be a living Buddha,"

After the Lama Temple, they came to Ta Lien Pit. A row of willows stood in front of a big homestead, their branches barren and black like dried bones. At last they came to the Nine Turn Lane, a street so narrow and winding that it seemed like a black ravine. Even the dogs curled themselves up and lay quietly in the angles of the walls, and Lotse held tightly to his mother's middle finger. Soon the vermilion wall came into view, and they could hear the sound of loud chanting. At this point they had to part.

The White Nunnery was a temple, built some time during the Ming Dynasty (A.D. 1368-1644), and not rebuilt since the

reign of Kaiighsi (1661-1723), when a rich convert painted the roof and restored the ruined parts. Time leaves nothing alone, and the weather is no respecter of sacred buildings ; except for the Ta Hsiung Hall, which was almost intact, the building was in a state of dilapidation. One corner of the Sultra Room was open to the skyTTnT window-ledges of the Abbots' Lodge were cracked and falling away. Few worshippers came, except a colony of faithful pigeons which circled about the stone unicorn at the angle of the roof. At the back of this sad temple there was a dim mouldering room, where an old scholar in tortoise-shell spectacles, who had retired from the Imperial Civil Service, ruled by virtue of his sharp pointer and his stern hand over some thirty pupils.

Timidly Lotse crossed the high doorstep of the Temple gate. As he passed the Worship Hall he heard the chanting again, crisp and undulating. By standing on tiptoe he could see through the crack in a window a group of nuns reciting their sultras. A little nun was kneeling in front of a hollow wooden fish,[1] and as he tried to attract her attention someone nudged him from behind. Lotse was startled, but it was only one of his schoolfellows playing truant for a moment.

The school-yard buzzed and hummed like a beehive, though there was no sunshine. Everyone in the school was shouting the " Analects " at the top of his voice ; perhaps it helped them to keep warm in the icy weather. Lotse went into the dark room, bowed to the stone-rubbing of Confucius and to the master, and went straight to his place. Having undone his satchel, he joined in the grand chorus.

All at once someone nearer to the schoolmaster's desk beckoned him. The old scholar had finished his pipeful of tobacco and was calling upon Lotse to recite his lessons. Lotse began to tremble ; he was sure to be beaten. Still, he handed

[1] A musical instrument which the Buddhists use to beat out the rhythm of a chant.

his book to the master, bowed, turned to the wall and began to reel off the lesson he had tried to learn the night before. Just as he came to the middle of the " Great Learning " a centipede crept out from a crevice in the wall. Lotse fixed his eyes upon it as he went on with his recitation. But soon, as the centipede crawled nearer, he became so fascinated by it that he lost his cue ; stammering followed hesitation, and the pointer came into play. Lotse cried out for mercy as the sharp rod travelled over his body, and the chorus died down for a moment while the master vented his fury. He went on beating Lotse for a long time, calling him a good-for-nothing, and then, finally, made him kneel up with his face to the wall. Just above his head Lotse could see a red-paper slip which bore the words, " To-morrow is the master's birthday. All students who have made him presents are invited to a bowl of noodles."

When Lotse got back from school that day, his mother's jade bracelets had already been pigeon-holed in a pawnshop by the Arch. It was the most unpleasant shop imaginable, not only because the counter was high and hard, like the counters of all such shops, but because the faces behind the counter had an air of being there to do people a service, and yet when it came to bargaining each fur coat was a " rag " and all jade " soapstone." It was only after much pleading that the woman left the shop with four ounces of silver in her hand.[1]

Putting aside the money for Lotse's tuition fee, she bought him a surprise with the rest.

" Guess what I've got for you, my love," she said, and held out a little parcel wrapped up in newspaper. He weighed it in his hand ; it was heavy, like stone, and yet it felt hollow inside.

Lotse's eyes rolled as he made wild guesses. " Is it a pair of skates ? "

[1] In pawnshops " tael " and " ounces" are still used, though the actual transactions are in national dollars.

" How could it be ? "

" Then ... is it a train ? "

" Absurd ! "

" k it an . . . an inkstand ? "

" You're getting warmer ! "

The child grew impatient. Usually they both enjoyed this kind of riddle, but to-day Lotse had less patience. He had his own worries. He pulled at the corner of the parcel.

" Ah, but that's not fair," protested the mother, but Lotse had found out what he wanted to know.

" A cricket jar ! A pair of them ! With longevity pattern ! Mother, where did you find them ? "

The woman was thoroughly pleased with his delight. It had not taken him long to recognise the present. One day as they were walking along the street he had seen them on a stall, and was so taken by them that he would not move on. The pedlar had tried to entice the young customer by boasting what an arena they would make for two " three inches."[1] The child wanted them badly, and the mother would have bought them, but she had no money. She had had to put him off by running the things down, but now she had made up for her prevarications.

As the child was fondling this new treasure, He whispered to his mother, " Do you think the teacher would take them ? " The woman was puzzled. What would the old scholar want with such a thing ? The child bent his head, and she saw a patch of reddened skin on his neck ; his eyes were tear-stained. Had he been beaten again ?

" Yes . . . and it'll happen again if I don't take him a present."

Why did the teacher want a present, just when she had the tuition fee ready ? " He has a birthday," the child said.

The woman was quite stunned by this fresh news. She wished that she had not bought the cricket jar, but that could

[1] Crickets.

not be helped. She foraged in the chest again, and went off with a little parcel. While the boy was occupied with his crickets, moving his favourites from their commonplace earthenware into the new stone jar, his father's jade seal was offered and refused, offered again and belittled, over the same high counter. His mother did not come back until it was dark ; the Siberian gale howled outside the house like wolves in the forest, and she was shivering with cold.

The next morning she left him once more at the gateway of the school. This time the boy rushed into the dim, mouldering schoolroom carrying a parcel wrapped in woven rushes ; in it were twenty fruit-cakes. Bowing to the stone-rubbing of Confucius and then to the master, the boy held out a little red envelope and the parcel. That day, he ate a bowl of noodles.

1936.

The Captive

ALTHOUGH Leelee is only thirteen she has already learned to pout. Whenever she sees a man who doesn't please her, she mimics her mother, saying, " Tiresome man." If the water-bearer treads on her pansies, she points her small finger crossly at his back, saying, " Tiresome old Liu." If her father sends her *off* to buy half a catty of rose wine when she is in the middle of feeding her white cat Mimi, she whispers into the cat's soft ear, " Father is very tiresome. He won't even leave us in peace at meal-times ! " When a bride-carriage passes along the street, neighbours like to tease young girls ; someone would be sure to fondle Leelee's plaits and say, " When will Leelee be betrothed ? " Then Leelee would pout her mouth into a small O, toss back her plaits and say decidedly, " I shall never marry a tiresome man and be beaten like my mother." If the neighbour asked her whether she mightn't be lonely, she would sniff contemptuously and say, " As long as I have Mimi I don't want even to *see* a man ! "

On an August evening the hearts of children are gay as fireflies. Young creatures flutter by as though on the wings of bats, singing with the crickets hidden in the grass. Cicadas, after a whole day's chirping, leave the sky to the bats which dive and skim through the creeping dusk. The glow-worms light up the ancient corners of Peking and make lanterns for the children sitting on the steps of their homes in the evening breeze. When they see the tiny sparkling lights the children begin to clap their hands and dance, surrounded by unknown insects, some hard-shelled, some soft like soya-bean curd, some red by day and blue by night, some smelling like water-melons. In the air, in the crevices of walls, beneath the bushes, the insects drone softly and spasmodically.

The whole grass square was filled with children. Some moved in a long line, their arms widespread, making cooing sounds and imitating a flock of pigeons. Some were playing " flowery palm," singing as they hit each other's hands. A few of the most energetic were playing cats and mice with one elusive " mouse " in the middle of the circle. Another group sat apart under a pine tree, as though engaged in most important business. The quieter ones were gathered together on a low mound, guessing riddles. Once a riddle had been asked, all the heads turned towards the dark sky. As a shooting star fell, drawing a line like a schoolboy's scratching on a slate, the children drew in their breath with excitement, and forgot their riddle.

Leelee never took part in games with those " tiresome big beetles." She liked to gather together a few congenial girls and, carrying her Mimi in her arms, lead them to some remote corner, where they would sing " Little Cabbage " in soft voices, or tell stories, each beginning " Once upon a time," They wanted no noise, no rowdiness. One or two fireflies darting past and a few crickets chirruping in the distance were enough excitement for them.

* As Leelee was telling a story she had read, she heard a great clamour as a torch headed in their direction. It came nearer and nearer, until a boy planted himself in front of the four of them.

" Listen, you poor creatures ! I am the great heavenly king Li,[1] come here to summon you all for consultation on important business. If you dare to disobey, my heart is kind but my sword is blind ! " All this the boy-leader recited in a stagey voice which he must have learned from some old opera. In the light of the torch they could see that he had blackened his eyebrows and put on a false beard which reached down to his knees. With him were five or six " men-at-arms."

[1]A legendary hero in a mythological novel: Feng Shen Pang.

The Great Heavenly King had a wooden sword thrust through his belt, and carried a number of broken bricks for missiles.

" You tiresome men," said Leelee. " We don't want anything to do with bandits." She got up, primly dusting her trousers, and ordered her companions to follow her.

" You can't move an inch," proclaimed the boy with the long beard, but his voice already sounded less pompous, as though he had been a little disconcerted by her sharpness. " Let's decide what lanterns we should have in the street this year for the Yu Lan Festival,"[1]

" I'm quite clever enough to manage my own affairs," said Leelee. " You needn't worry about *my* lantern . . ." and she began to walk off. The boy stood in her way. " Oh, no," he said, folding his arms on his chest like a real hero, " we've got to talk it over this year. Last year someone had a turtle [2] lantern, and someone else a manure barrel. This year they've all got to be nice."

" You tiresome man, I shall carry whatever lantern I like."

" But I am the head man," cried the boy with the beard, looking round at his following. " These are all my men."

" Go away, head man ! " Leelee spat with scorn. " You're only a turnip head. We girls don't obey any head."

" Hark ! " The Great King went back to his stage voice. " This mountain was cleft by me, this tree was planted by me. If you wish to pass . . ." Briskly he drew his silver-colpured wooden sword, and looked meaningly at his " men."

" Pay your fare in full ! " [3] the followers cried, altogether.

By this time the girls were thoroughly cross, and Leelee began to fight her way out by bumping against the boys, while the other girls held on to her sleeves. The " head man " held

[1] **Lantern Festival.**

[2] Children display their originality by making lanterns in all kinds of shapes.

[3] Phrase used by Chinese "Robin Hoods " in " All Men are Brothers,"

his sword across his chest and cried out, " Brothers, carry out your orders ! " The rough boys took hold of the girls' delicate arms, but at their cries for help a fat, middle-aged man came on the scene.

" What are you up to this time, Iron Pillar ?[1] You're dressed up like a perfect rascal. Go home at once." And the father of the Great King pulled off the false beard and spanked his son's behind twice, saying, " You born bandit, why must you always make yourself a nuisance ? "

Iron Pillar might be a great hero, but he was afraid of his father. No hero in " The Seven Swordsmen and the Five Sworn Brothers" [2] ever dared to challenge a father. But he did not want to obey, and as he moved off he turned back to call out,

" You cheap Leelee, you stinking Leelee, I'll get my own back on you. ..." Before he could finish the fearsome sword had become the instrument of his own pain. Biting his lip in the dark, for his torch had burnt out, he disappeared into the autumn night.

No great hero would have borne such an insult. Iron Pillar was known up and down the street as a hero ; everyone remembered how he had pulled down a hornet's nest as big as a fist from the fork of the elm. For two months afterwards revengeful hornets had buzzed about the tree looking for the culprit, and no wise woman would buy soya milk from the stall beneath the tree. He was a cruel boy. After half a day spent with a stick in the city moat, he would bring back a sackful of " field-chickens " [8] and invite all his men to a feast of frogs' legs. Seeing the spasms of the mutilated frogs left in the dustbins, the neighbours would wonder what Iron Pillar would be in his next incarnation, for Buddha would be sure to

[1] Children in Peking are called by " milk-names " until they go to school.

[2] A popular novel.

[3] A kind of frog.

punish him for such a trick. But now the hero was disgraced in front of a little girl. He could not forget it, and all day long and half the night he plotted revenge. Although in the evening he would take out his cricket-jars as usual, and would even help the others to paste incense sticks on a pine branch,[1] he did these things half-heartedly.

" She goes to buy wine for her father every day," one of his followers suggested. " If one of us hid behind the God of Earth Temple we could jump out at her, and she would spill her wine." The others thought this would let her off too lightly ; one of them thought the best thing would be a good thrashing, but this they turned down as not sufficiently amusing.

As they were in conference, lying on the grass, a white shadow sneaked past them along the wall. One said it was a hedgehog, another pointed out that hedgehogs never move so fast. Then they thought it must be a white fox come to attend the Yu Lan Festival, and forgetting all about their discussion they dashed after it. Iron Pillar gave each of them a special post, and soon a cordon was formed round the animal. When they were all in position the " headman " advanced slowly on tiptoe, using his special technique for catching crickets in grave-yards. When he was quite near, the creature gave a loud " Miou " and tried to get away.

" It's a cat. Catch it, Hwan-tse," Iron Pillar called to the boy at the corner. Hearing the hissing and shouting all round her, the cat ran desperately, but she was soon cornered, and with another " Miou," she was firmly imprisoned in Iron Pillar's arms.

" Did she bite ? " Iron Pillar smiled grandly as he sucked his bleeding finger.

" A pure white cat ! Let's blindfold her," said one boy, but another jeered at him, " What's the use of blindfolding her ? She lives in this street. It's Leelee's cat, Mimi ! "

[1] One way of making a lantern.

" Leelee's cat ? Then we'll keep her as our captive until Leelee comes for her." So the front of Iron Pillar's coat became a prison, and the pretty captive purred devoutly all the way home.

The next day when Leelee went to buy wine, the apprentice asked her if she wanted to buy dried fish, as usual. Only pride prevented Leelee from bursting into tears, and she walked out with her head bent.

The night before, Mimi had not come back. Leelee had only realised it at midnight, when the watchman passed, beating his gong, and Mimi should have wormed her slender body through the hole made specially for her and come into the room, her green eyes shining like little lamps. In the autumn moonlight, with the light dew on her fur, she would have walked delicately across the roof, then made her way to Leelee's pillow. She would sniff at Leelee's face or lick her finger-tips, as though to say, " I am tired of climbing the date tree and I have fought enough with the other cats on the roof. To-night there is quite a good moon, but the grass is all wet. So here I am, if you don't mind." And having said so much in her own way, Mimi would jump down with a soft little thud and creep into the little straw hutch waiting for her. But last night there was no Mimi. Leelee made all sorts of allowances for her cat. It was already the seventh month, when cats should bow to the moon ; for if a cat could bow to the moon ninety-nine times, she would become a fairy. Leelee had always hated the idea of Mimi's becoming a fairy, and had told her so more than once. Another thing : there must be a lot of hobgoblins and spooks, hiding in the bushes, waiting to take advantage of the Ferry of Mercy[1] at the Yu Lan Festival to cross to the other side. Would one of them haunt Mimi and change her somehow ? Before Leelee was properly awake she asked her mother, " Is Mimi back yet ? " and her mother said Mimi had probably

[1] Paper boat burnt during the Festival for the Dead.

come in long ago. But when Leelee put her hand into Mimi's nest, the straw was cold and dry.

" Take off that long face," her drunken father complained. All day long Lcelee's eyes strayed to the top of one particular tree, to one particular corner of the wall. Thoughtless neighbours kept telling her how many pet thieves there were about ; Uncle Chang, smoking his two-foot pipe, sighed, " It's a pity about Mimi's white coat. Think, it's quite big enough to make two pairs of gloves ! " At that Leelee burst into tears again, and her mother had to make up all sorts of tales to comfort her. She said that when she was a girl a cat was lost for a hundred days, and then one day came back, prettier and sweeter than ever. " And cleverer, too," she added. Then she suggested that Leelee should go out in the street that evening and call aloud for her pet.[1]

Evening came. The fireflies lit their lamps among the dark leaves, and the bats seemed to fly low deliberately, until the children opened their arms to catch them and they went skimming up again, almost perpendicularly. The children sang all sorts of nursery rhymes to the bats : " Bat, bat, lizard under the eaves, wear your flowery shoes. I'll be Papa and you be Mamma." When the night had set the scene, blotting out the nooks and corners and making the grass square a stage for children, then they began to appear. Already hundreds of incense sticks were hanging from the pine in the middle of the square, and Iron Pillar was busy giving directions, while the other children worked cheerfully round him. Presently they all heard a soft, tremulous voice—" Mimi, Mimi, come back to your mistress. ..." The voice sounded so miserable that several children began to giggle nervously, and one gave everything away by asking impatiently, " Hi, Iron Pillar, where did you put her ? "

[1] When pets arc lost the owners generally " cry " them themselves.

" She's in our yard. I've tried to feed her, but gosh, how she bites, and she won't eat anything. Father doesn't know yet, but when he does. ..." Iron Pillar seemed to feel a tingling in a tender part.

The evening breeze carried another sobbing appeal—" Who has imprisoned my Mimi ? If he has a heart, let her go. . . ."

Iron Pillar saw in his mind a miserable girl leaning against a tree, crying. He began to reason with himself. His father would never let him keep a stolen cat. His father would thrash him like anything when once he found out. Besides, that cat wouldn't even eat. His hand patted his behind nervously as the thought of his father came into his mind. Just then the voice came again, fainter but even more moving. " Think of your next incarnation, you cat thief. Be merciful, and let her go."

The steel heart of Iron Pillar began to feel extremely uncomfortable. He whispered something in the ear of another boy and then dashed off home. The languishing Leelee stood in the darkness, sobbing. Iron Pillar was soon back, and stood behind a willow with the equally languishing Mimi in his arms. She had eaten hardly anything, and was almost past struggling. Then Iron Pillar's messenger approached Leelee. " Leelee, what'll you give me if I find your Mimi ? "

" Anything," she answered from the darkness, and walked up to him.

" Well, what about coming to help us stick incense sticks on the pine ?" At once Leelee understood. " You, you gangsters, you stole my cat. Give her to me ! " Iron Pillar drew near. Mimi gave a loud " Miou," and Iron Pillar handed over the captive, receiving a parting scratch. Leelee was nearly crying for joy to have her warm, fluffy pet back- again. She leaned her cheek against Mimi's soft head.

The next day Iron Pillar gave orders that all his men should " respect" Leelee, " protect" her and her pet. Leelee was

quicker than anyone in putting slips of paper on incense sticks and fastening the sticks to the pine-twigs.

The Festival was a great event. The Cypress Grove Temple had made a paper dragon boat seventeen feet long. The " yakchas "[1] standing at the stern with one foot in the air was even fiercer than ever. All the windows were made of imported cellophane, but the pancake for the ghosts on board had already been snatched and eaten by some naughty child. The priest was thoroughly annoyed.

Before dusk the full moon had risen above the trees. Innumerable lotus lanterns were already alight, their pale candles competing with the stars. Iron Pillar had given orders that none of *their* lanterns should come out until the real darkness fell. With the darkness the number of lotus lanterns increased. Even a baby was holding a goat lantern which it could wave from its mother's arms. Everyone was singing " Lotus, lotus lantern, to-night we light you, to-morrow we burn you."

Then Iron Pillar decided that it was dark enough. He made them march out in single file, each one carrying a lantern. In front went a couple with two lion lanterns, and at the end came the pine-bush on which they had been working for so long. The hundreds of incense sticks along its branches were all lighted, and it looked more majestic and splendid than a peacock. The other lanterns marched between, each trying to get the most attention, goat lanterns, fish-jar lanterns, caper lanterns. The most distinguished of all was in the shape of a " Sailing in the air boat"[2] which someone had copied out of a foreign magazine. One or two boys without lanterns carried lotus leaves on their heads with a candle stuck in the middle.

Iron Pillar had tied a ta-lian[8] round the waist of his yellow uniform. The scabbard of his sword was fastened with red and green silk stolen from his mother. His lantern was in the

[1] A devil guardsman. [2] Aeroplane.
[3] A wide belt with pockets in it.

shape of an anvil, and he walked beside Leelee whose flower-basket lantern had three tiers. The deafening sound of the drums was accompanied by the rustling of footsteps and voices calling, " Your candle is on one side "—" Look, a petal of your lotus is falling." Tlie whole procession swung round like a fire-dragon, heading for the main road.

Iron Pillar shifted his lantern to the other hand and looked to see whether the double candle in Leelec's flower basket was burning the blossoms. He asked with concern, " Leelee, aren't you getting tired of holding it in one hand ? " Leelee smiled dreamily, and the pink paper flowers in her basket threw a rosy glow on her face. How could she be tired ? She leaned towards Iron Pillar's ear and whispered, " This is fun ! "

Written in order to tease a feminist friend'.

1932

The Ramshackle Car

HAVE you ever owned a worn-out watch or a gramophone with its inside hanging out, a thing that was the joy and pride of your father or your grandfather ? Most aged treasures have a story behind them ; they are like old drabs, with baggy skin round their dull eyes, boasting of a glorious past.

It was with mixed feelings of pity and admiration that we climbed into that wretched car. It is not to be vindictive that I use die word " wretched "—no other is appropriate. It is true that once upon a time the car might have been doted upon by its owner, oiled by a chauffeur several times a day, parked royally in front of the Fortune Theatre waiting for celebrities in mandarin robes to sink into its seats. But alas, even a car finds old age inescapable. It had been sold and re-sold until at last it had come into the hands of this taxi-driver deep in the interior of China. No polish is wasted on it now, and no one looks after it except the driver, who starts up the engine each day, long before the sun comes over the horizon. Huge wooden crates are piled on it until it creaks and groans with the weight ; the remaining space is filled up with parcels of vegetables and some odd human freight, and the car starts off on a long bumpy journey. When the car is thirsty the driver fills a petrol tin with rusty-coloured water from the ditch and pours it straight down the car's throat. With this treatment the car has become tougher and tougher, but more and more disreputable. The roof has gradually turned into a kind of sieve that shows patches of sky, now grey, now blue, and when the road is dusty, white clouds come billowing up through the floor. But there is one thing about being driven in such a car : no scenery glimpsed through the window can distract you ; the springs

projecting through the torn cushions remind you constantly of your means of transport.

In the remoter parts of the North China plain, a car even of this kind is an attraction. As soon as we stopped a large crowd collected round us. It was the middle of winter, and the weather was cruelly cold. The villagers thrust their hands up the sleeves of their cotton-padded gowns and craned their necks, examining this foreign curiosity from end to end. Life on a six hundred mile stretch of unrelieved flatness is lonely and dreary. The mules are dumb, the cattle low only once in a while, the fields are barren and grey. Life goes smoothly enough, but without excitement. Even the engine turning over makes a pleasant disturbance.

The faces of the villagers looking after us grew smaller and smaller as the car drove on, and soon we were in the midst of the grey, tawny fields. The bare earth looked callous and indifferent : once nature sheds her green cloak,- everything seems harsh and sinister. The black branches of nondescript trees were outlined starkly against the sky, and the Siberian gale howled in the distance, disturbing a flock of rooks which flapped their dark wings and settled in another part of the field. The cold air blew in through the front of the car, and we tucked the sheepskin round our thighs.

The driver was a fine chap. With both hands clutching the wheel, he kept his eyes glued to the track. He had to avoid great lumps of frozen mud or ruts made by some heavily-laden mule cart. The windscreen was cracked, and frozen tears hung on his eyelids, but he drove steadily on. Occasionally the car protested at being driven so hard without a rest, and stopped altogether. Then the driver would push or pull every knob or handle he could find. All of a sudden, the heart of the veteran would begin to beat, but before we had gone fifty yards it would stop again.

" Damned box of tricks," cursed the driver. This time

he got out. He opened up the bonnet, and, seeing nothing in particular wrong, gave the car* a furious kick, which shook us far more than the car. The wind attacked us from all directions with flying grains of sand which bounced visibly *off* the body. Did we hear the moaning of ghosts in the distance ? Behind the grey clouds there was a yellowish round shape, so blurred that it looked like an eye swollen with crying, but still recognisable as the sun. The driver got out his tool-box, convinced at last that he would 'have to do something to his wretched car.

Looking round at the grey sky, the enormous, barren North China plain and the car, my companion muttered grimly :

" The nation is just like this wretched car, its past was glorious. . . ." [1]

I stared at him, disagreeing whole-heartedly.

" Oh, no. That's the most shameless pessimism. After all, a car has only one life to live, but a people can start on a new track altogether. . . ." But there was no other car for us at that moment, and only that rugged track to travel on. We had to push forward.

By noon we had reached a village. As it was New Year's Day red lanterns hung from the flagpoles and on the willow branches, like blossoms on the cotton trees of the south. Again a curious crowd gathered as our car entered the village, and we were told that we still had twelve miles to go, twelve miles more difficult than the track we had already covered. We also heard that we had already crossed the border of another county.

As soon as the car had been satisfied with a few jugfuls of water and the driver fed with half a catty of pancakes, we started off again. This time a man in a black uniform rushed

[1] This was written at the beginning of 1937 when China was inert under the stranglehold of the Japanese. People in North China were filled with anger, disgust, and gloom.

up, shouting, " The Sergeant wants to make an inspection." It was maddening. We complained, but the policeman who had brought the order had nothing to say. My companion said that we would save ourselves trouble in future by hiring a mule cart.

As we were grumbling at the policeman another official came out. He had stars on his shoulder badge. In one hand he held the end of a rope ; the other end was tied to the arm of a man with an ashy-pale face, a prisoner, evidently. The prisoner carried a parcel under his arm, and as he was led towards the car he kept trying to button his coat with his free hand.

" You miserable turtle-born," the officer jeered at the prisoner as they came towards us. " There are plenty of cigarettes ; why on earth did you take to smoking that stuff? And then when you'd once been cured, how could you go back to it ? " Then the policeman took hold of the rope so that his superior could speak to us. There was to be no " inspection." All they wanted was a lift in our car. We said we had no objection provided that the prisoner sat in front. My companion was already thoroughly scared by the bloodless face and the two rows of blackened teeth which the prisoner exposed as he grinned at the driver.

Sitting next to this living ghost made the driver more savage than ever. The prisoner was a smallish thin man, about thirty, perhaps, wearing a blue padded gown with several patches. His eyes were deeply sunken in his face, and he looked like only the skeleton of a human being. He was shivering, and the cold made him draw in his breath with a hissing sound, otherwise we might have taken him for a corpse with its eyes open. The most frightening thing was the chattering noise his teeth made all the time.

The yellowish disc behind the clouds was sinking westward. The wind screamed as we drove out of the village, and the car jolted even more than before as we entered a field which in

the summer was a stretch of marshland. Ah[1] at once a gale began to blow, the sky turned a greyish-yellow and seemed to hang just above our heads, as low as a ceiling. The ghostly sun disappeared altogether, and the whole landscape was overcast with a greenish light, heavy and sinister like the atmosphere of a medieval nightmare. One felt hemmed in by an inimical force, not animal, like wolf or tiger, but revengeful Nature.

Presently the car tilted over into a ditch and stuck there on its side. No engine alone would pull that out. Even worse, not more than 100 yards in front of us lay a frozen river. This time we had to get out and help.

" But where are we ..." puzzled the driver. It seemed that even the policeman had lost his way. Holding tightly to the white rope, he looked about him in astonishment.

" We're near Tung Chia Chuang," whispered the ghostlike prisoner, peering at the policeman.

" How far are we from Wu Pai Hu, then ? " asked the driver, beginning to take an interest in this living map of a prisoner.

" You'll have to go by the wooden bridge further up die river, about seven and a half li," the ghost answered promptly, but with the same apathy. " There is a new Temple of Earth built there. You'll see its flagpole and parasols in a minute."

We were all grateful to that talking compass. We found the wooden bridge, and soon we could see from the river bank a stretch of red wall screened by a grove of pines. A solitary piece of vermilion cloth fluttered from the top of a slender pole. The new temple looked altogether out of keeping with its surroundings.

" Could we go into the village too ? " the prisoner asked the policeman as they were getting out.

" What for ? " the policeman asked.

"I ... I've got a widowed sister living there. I'd like just to . . ." The prisoner looked at us, and then at the driver, as if trying to remind us that we owed him something. The

reflection from the drab ,earth gave his face a greyish tinge ; he was begging for pity.

" Widowed sister ! " the policeman retorted gruffly, as though warning us against being taken in. " If you'd thought of her sooner you wouldn't have touched that drug."

The driver was ordered to stop, and they got out at a fork in the road. The policeman thanked us, still clutching the rope, then dragged off the unwilling prisoner towards the east. The driver spat after them.

" Damn them, we'll be lucky if we get back by midnight," he said/ When we asked what drug it was that the prisoner had taken he turned round and said very seriously, " Something even worse than opium. The Japs are clever with such stuff. You only have to have one puff of it in your cigarette ! It's called heroin. Pretty enough name ! "

As our wretched car entered the village a woman was chasing a little pig which had escaped from its sty. Screaming wildly the little creature ran backwards and forwards across the road. . Some children in red-checked gowns were playing round a conimill. A crowd of villagers quickly gathered round us as our wretched car hissed and throbbed. It was an excitement, a change from their rural monotony. The grey dusk crept slowly over the plain of North China.

1936.

Galloping Legs

ALL die people who know Bald Liu say he's all right, except that he's bull-necked.[1] As a man, his heart is in the right place. When he gambles and loses he unfastens the heavy belt with the stitched butterfly pattern that he wears round his waist and counts out, coin by coin, the money he has earned with his " galloping legs," then hands it over to the winner. He never curses and swears as grumpy gamblers do. Whenever a customer needs a rickshaw to take home sacks of flour the owner of the " flour shop " points out Bald Liu among the crowd of rickshaws.[2] " This one I *can* guarantee," he says. " You needn't even write down his licence number." This is all because Bald Liu used to return a snufF bottle which the owner of the flour shop often used to leave in his carriage.

Yet, sad to say, this pride of his is almost as bad as an incurable disease ; he wanders about the world like a lonely ghost. People who know him well often say that he deserves a better job than rickshaw pulling. But he quarrelled with his father over some small matter and there and then, early in the morning and without any breakfast, he left the house and joined the army. His mother only heard the story afterwards, and then she cried and cried as if she had been to his funeral : in fact the old couple hardly spoke to each other after that. In the meantime Bald Liu gallivanted with the army, Hankow on Monday, Tehchow on Friday. He never wrote a word home. One day in barracks when he was polishing his bayonet he had a row with another soldier : the man knew nothing about Bald Liu's peppery temper and challenged him. Before Bald

[1] Stubborn.

[2] In Peking crowds of rickshaws can be found in the shopping quarters.

Liu knew what he was doing his bayonet was through the other man's thigh. He knew it was serious this time, so he deserted and made his way in disguise back to Peking. He found his father had been dead for nearly eight months, and his timid and fearful younger brother had been married off to a capable woman. He could not stay at home, however much his mother begged him. So he set about taking a rickshaw on hire-purchase and so joining the " Rubber Tyre Corps." [1]

The first thing was to get someone to back him. Hardly anyone was willing to risk it, but after a great deal of wangling the proprietor of a " dried fruit shop " agreed to put his seal on the contract, and then Bald Liu became the owner of a yellow-lacquered chromium-plated rickshaw. How he polished it ! Even sucking his mother's milk as a baby he couldn't have used more energy. He crawled uuderneath, opening his mouth like a great cave and dimming the plated foot-lamps with his warm human breath, then polishing them with a rag. As he did this he would tilt his bald head this way and that to see the effect. People passing would often call out over their shoulders, " Ease off a bit, Bald Liu. You're only a wet-nurse to that baby." When he heard things like this Bald Liu would shake the dust out of his rag and call back, " Eight dollars a month. I've already paid my fifth instalment. Why ! In thirteen months it will be mine. You just wait and see ! " And the officious person would mutter to himself as he went on, " Five months ! I've known people who've paid eleven months, and even then if you miss a month the rickshaw goes back to its real owner. Either you buy a rickshaw for cash or you don't buy one at all. You can't fool *me."*

Bald Liu could see nothing tricky about it. He raised his huge fists and hammered on his naked hairy chest. Muscles like steel balls came up on his arms. " Here are my tools and weapons, all of flesh," he would say. (He meant his arms and

[1] Peking nickname for rickshawmen.

legs.) " And here is my rickshaw. I shall get acres and acres of land with them. Let the shop take as much profit as they like. I can make up for their meanness with my * galloping legs'."

Bald Liu's younger brother, Liu the Second, was a gentle, steady fellow. He had been married for two years, and he and his wife still behaved with the proper filial respect towards his mother. He worked as a clerk in the Salt Duty office. Every month he handed his entire salary to his mother, and he had no complaints at all about liis life, except that he did not enjoy being addressed as " Sir " while his blood brother worked like a beast of burden. Sometimes as he sat at his desk this painful thought would make his brush waver. He was anxious to persuade his brother to try some other kind of work, but except when Bald Liu brought money to his mother at the end of the month the elder brother was seldom seen at home. Once or twice when he went to the " garage "[1] the keeper told him that Bald Liu hardly slept there two nights in a month. Liu the Second thought it natural that his brother should " run wild " occasionally, since he, two years younger, was already married, but he could not help thinking that something " permanent " should be arranged.

One day he found Bald Liu by the roadside, his legs bare, sprawling under a willow-tree and tucking into a water-melon. Liu the Second whispered " Brother ! " But the brother was having a very good time with his water-melon, and it was only after the clerk had called him several times that Bald Liu lifted his head, with his mouth outlined with melon seeds in the shape of a butterfly. " What do you want, old Second ? " asked Bald Liu. The younger brother knew that one could hardly talk of serious matters in the street, so he asked his brother if he would eat some ice-cream with him. Bald Liu rolled up his eyes and said he had never heard of this damned ice-cream ; he only

[1] A kind of hostel for rickshaw pullers. The rickshaws are parked in the yard at night and the men sleep in a dormitory.

knew " snow-flower fall." [1] The docile young brother said immediately, " Yes, let's go and have some snow-flower fall," So they walked into a tea shop.

" Brother, yoa said you didn't like the indoor job I found for you before," the younger brother began, " so I have found you something else. What about being a janitor in a school ? Although the pay is only twelve dollars a month, it would be better than pulling . . ."

Before Liu the Second could finish, Bald Liu banged his cup down on the table and said, " Nonsense. I told you I didn't want to be pitied. I feel grander than an emperor these days. Besides, do you think I'd give up this rickshaw just when it will soon be mine ? What's wrong with pulling a fellow-being about the streets ? No one *is* a beast unless he feels one. You bookworms always talk such nonsense. Who dares to call me a beast, when I earn my living by my sweat ? Tell mother not to worry. I eat three catties of flour a day, smoke a packet of Chickens,[2] and sleep wherever I like. ..."

This immediately reminded the younger brother of another question. Of course he could not find the courage to recommend a wife for Bald Liu-, but he managed to ask, " Where do you sleep, brother, since you so seldom sleep in the ' garage ' ? " It was a very delicate subject, and as Liu the Second was speaking he was afraid his elder brother might kick the table over. But Bald Liu only laughed aloud.

" Old Second, you'll never guess. In the army, I used to sleep out of doors, and now I can't sleep at all unless I see the stars above my head. When I pulled my rickshaw on the road from the city to the Western Hills, I used to sleep on the stones by the pool, near the old Summer Palace. A breezier place you couldn't find. Lately I've been working in the city, so I spend my nights in the elm grove on the Chang-an road, near

[1] A native delicacy similar to ice-cream.
[2] A brand of cheap cigarettes popular in North China.

the palace. Customers sometimes come out at two or three in the morning from the dance at the Grand."

" But what would you do if it rained ? " said Liu the Second. He was thoroughly shocked at the wild life his brother seemed to be leading.

" Oh, there's plenty of shelter about. Plenty of ruined temples, verandahs of rich houses, or shrines. . . ."

Liu the Second was horrified. He had been afraid of ghosts as a child.

" Be damned to your ghosts." Bald Liu took off his flowery jacket. " Ghosts only go for you bookworms. There are no ghosts in my mind, so they don't bother me. The only ghost I mind is hunger. When my stomach is round and full I can look the God of Death in the face." All this time Liu the Second had been kept away from the question of a " permanent home " for his wild brother. He could only allude to it indirectly by talking about the doings of neighbours.

" Well, anyway, I shan't take on any such burden," Bald Liu commented. " Women are worse than ghosts. They make one weak. I shouldn't be able to pull my rickshaw as fast if I slept with one of those every night."

It seemed quite futile to try to persuade Bald Liu to drop the handle of his rickshaw. It was like persuading a champion runner to give up a race. The glory of it ! At the tram terminus there would never be less than twenty rickshaws. A man would get off the tram, and all the rickshawmen would crowd round him, one asking fifty coppers, another only forty-five. Bald Liu would stand there by his shining rickshaw, showing off his tall body and his sturdy limbs, with iron muscles flexed in his folded arms. The traveller would brush aside all the offers, walk over to Bald Liu and say, " How much ? " Bald Liu would answer rather curtly, " Sixty coppers." Then the passenger would walk up to Liu's rickshaw and settle himself on the seat under the envious stare of a score of eyes. Bald Liu

would blow into his hands, take up the handle of his rickshaw, and in no time the rickshaw would have disappeared proudly into the distance.

From the first day he took out his rickshaw Bald Liu could never be content to lag behind any of his colleagues. He simply caught them up and passed them one by one. Children in the street would get so excited watching the race that they would shout, " Look, here come the * galloping legs,' " and Bald Liu would trot still faster when he heard his nickname. But those " galloping legs " were a curse to him in his profession ; at the back of their minds the rickshawmen hated the " galloping legs " more than they hated the burning sun in the summer or the Siberian gale in winter.

One day Bald Liu found a hole burnt by a cigarette end on the white cushion of his rickshaw. A few days later he went into a tobacconist's to get a light, and while he was inside some-one punctured his tyre. The fellow in the noodle shop gave him good advice, saying, " Bald Liu, don't try to be so much better than the others. Remember you probably have another thirty or forty years to use your legs. Spare them a bit." But Bald Liu banged the bottom of his bowl on the table. " They only know my legs," he said. " No one has tried my fists yet. Let the one who punctured my tyre come out, and I'll show him. . . ."

Well, a fine opportunity came along for the galloping legs. Someone specially asked for Bald Liu to pull him to a village about thirty li[1] from the East Gate. Thirty li was nothing to Bald Liu, so he asked for a dollar and a half. Strangely enough, this time there was no competition from his colleagues, and they all stood back. The customer even said that if Liu ran faster than ever he would be rewarded with a fat tip. So Bald Liu took a bite at a meat-roll, took up the handles of his rickshaw and dashed away.

The next day someone came to Liu the Second with a message,

[1] About 10 miles.

Bald Liu had pulled his rickshaw nearly as far as Yen-chiao village when some toughs came out of the millet field. They beat him up badly and he had been found by a farmer limping along. As soon as Liu the Second heard the dreadful news he rushed out of the town without saying anything to his mother. He found his obstinate brother in die village inn, lying stretched out on an earthen bed with his mouth open. There was a small lamp on the table beside him, with a bowl of cold porridge and a bunch of plasters. Flies with blue-black wings droned about his face, danced on his eyebrows, settled on his lips, shared the little food he had. The sick man was asleep ; he seemed as rigid as a dead animal. The younger brother sat beside him patiently and fanned away the flies, until the braying of a donkey in the yard awakened Bald Liu.

" Brother ..." Liu the Second bent over and touched the burning hands.

" What . . . what have you come here for ? " Bald Liu did not seem at all pleased with his visitor.

" You must have been wretched here. Tell me at once what I can do for you."

" Do ? There's nothing to do until my legs are cured." His legs were red and swollen ; it was impossible to tell whether the bones were broken.

" Brother, come home with me. My wife will look after you. You can't stay rotting in this place."

" No." Bald Liu shook his head. " Until my legs are healed no one can persuade me to enter the city gates again. I couldn't have believed there were such blackguards. I'll show them ! You go back Tell mother that I have gone on a long journey, pulling a client to Jehol. I may be away ten days, maybe twenty. Pawn all my warm clothes and get me some dog-skin plasters. That'll do the trick."

" But . . ." Liu the Second tried to persuade him, but Bald Liu hitched himself into a sitting position and waved his brother awav.

The younger brother had not expected his visit to be so short and so unwelcome. He looked at the trickle of dust from the ceiling which was making a little heap on the earthen floor, he looked at the sandals lying under the bed. Surreptitiously he put two packets of coppers on the table. He wanted to say something else, but Bald Liu's proud, hostile look prevented him. Very unwillingly he pushed open the door, and as he was going out Bald Liu said, " Remember, don't tell the ' garage ' people about my troubles. If they come to you for news, tell them I've gone on a long journey, do you hear ? "

How stupid he was, Bald Liu. He thought no one knew what had happened to him, when his owrt brother had been the very last to hear the news. Everybody in the " garage " knew that the " galloping legs " were beaten ; some said they would take two months to cure, some said six. When the proprietor of the noodle shop heard about it he sighed. " A fine lad, a fine lad. Only he's too bull-necked ! "

As soon as the manager of the " garage " was told the news he rushed off to the proprietor of the " dried fruit shop," the Shantungese who had guaranteed Bald Liu's hire-purchase rickshaw. The Shantungese said quietly, " Take away his rickshaw if he doesn't pay his eight dollars this month," and from that moment the " garage " man counted the days.

Liu the Second knew nothing about all these business complications. Having seen the brand-new rickshaw standing in the yard of the inn he thought everything was all right. But on the 3Oth of the month, in the afternoon, the " garage " man came to him, asking for the monthly payment. Liu the Second was taken unawares. He had just paid in his share for a birthday present to a superior in his office, and there simply wasn't eight dollars in the house. As he was trying to scrape up something, an idea came to him. He had always hated his brother's job as a beast of burden, and now he could see a way out. So he offered to go off to the village with the " garage " man.

In the meantime, Bald Liu had been entirely at the mercy of a country quack whose only idea of a cure was to smother the legs in a coloured lotion. The wounds were festering and full of yellow pus. The room smelled foul, and tough Bald Liu lay moaning day and night on the earthen bed.

" Look here, * galloping legs/ " said the garage man, " I've come to take back your rickshaw. Here's your contract." He dropped the folded paper on Liu's blanket.

Bald Liu picked it up with a trembling hand. The former hero's chin was covered in thick stubble, and his face was greenish coloured. He looked pleadingly at the garage man, although he knew that he was ftot likely to be shown any mercy. Then he turned to his younger brother and said :—

" Old Second, you've always wanted to help me. This time I'll let you."

" Brother," the young man mumbled guiltily, ashamed at finding himself on the side of the " garage " man, even if it was for his own good reasons, " Brother, there are other jobs. . . . Couldn't you——? "

Bald Liu saw at once what had happened. Even his own younger brother was against him. He tore the contract across and cried out in his feeble, angry voice, " Get out, both of you. Get out, you traitor ! "

Bald Liu pulled himself up on his pillow. He heard the wheels of his rickshaw in the yard outside ; the familiar sound of the lovely rickshaw that had been his pride. It seemed to him that the wheel was crossing the doorstep and running over his body. He heard the jangling of its bell, and saw its lamps like the eyes of a tiger shining directly in his face. His eyeballs were bursting, and he fell back on his pillow. In his dream, he went galloping along the Chang-an road, he and the rickshaw with him. Very gently, Liu the Second drove away a large persistent green fly that perched itself on the tip of Bald Liu's nose.

1933.

Shanghai

YES, now I am to be a citizen of this metropolis, this Paris of the East, this meeting place of celebrities. Many famous campaigns have started here ; thousands of books have had " Foochow Road, Shanghai,"[1] printed on their backs. It is the breeding-ground of redshirts and bluejackets ; it is the headquarters of Far Eastern magnates. As the train brought me southwards from a provincial town I asked myself, " Do people in Shanghai drive about all day in stream-lined cars on shiny modern roads ? Or do they call strikes, or break them, in the yards or factories ? " My guardian's last words as I left him had been, " Don't worry about going to the sea.[2] If it is a sea, then let yourself float." And so, like any ordinary visitor, I got out at the North Station and plunged into this bee-hive of a city with a heart full of borrowed courage.

It was only a short distance from the station to my lodgings, but even in those few moments several cars went rushing by me. To a countryman with the white dust still on his shoulders it was all very exciting. Someone seemed to have set the sky alight. It was not red, like a rosy twilight, but there was a kind of fluid beam shining out from glass tubes. And in the midst of the glow one could see fearful looking black clouds drifting. Cars swept to and fro like shuttles, white cars for mending broken arms, red cars for putting out fires, black cars to carry away disturbers of the peace. At each cross-roads red and green eyes blinked out, and trolley buses howled shrilly, like ghosts. If I had not been in the middle of a busy street I should have been frightened to death.

Being a good host, my friend insisted on taking me out that

[1] Street of publishers.
[2] " hai " means " sea " in Chinese.

evening. We went for a donkey ride. There are many things in this world which are obviously symbolic. When I talk about a donkey ride you think of the hill-sides of Peking, of gathering red maple leaves, and drinking from mountain springs. Nothing of the sort. This donkey ride was in a " Fun Palace," a place where for a few pennies you can see yourself idiotically distorted into all kinds of shapes and phantoms, a place where you can gamble wildly by pulling a spring and watching a blind ball bounce out of one hole into another. Right in the centre of the building there was a circle of gravel, about fifty feet across, set out with under-sized pagodas and pavilions—apparently the city's idea of a " wilderness." You pay twenty cents, and for a quarter of an hour you sit on the back of a miserable donkey, holding the rein while the little beast of burden trots apathetically round the circle. The bright light throws your gallant shadow on to a cheering crowd, stuffed with greasy food and surfeited with coarse pleasure. You just let the donkey carry you round and round and round, and over the way the people sit drinking iced coffee in a hall full of artificial palm-leaves. After about twenty rounds the keeper takes the rein and off you get. The poor donkey is running with sweat and droops his ears in protest. Donkeys' eyes are stupid and blank enough, and yet that small stuffy world seems more stupid still.

And the next morning I joined the interminable round. There I was in the busy city, panting, hating it, tired before I started. But the circle was so small, and there were so many people waiting to get on the back of the donkey. What could I do but hurry and hurry in the endless circle past the artificial pavilions and pagodas ?

1936.

The Philatelist

THE huge machine of life has a myriad of wheels ; to be caught up with one of them is to have found a centre for one's hopes and desires.

I am ashamed to say that my life has been caught up in a wheel like a merry-go-round. I am interested in anything gay. I play most games well. The year before last, for example, when a game called kao-fu[1] ball was introduced from abroad, and at once became fashionable, half my day-dreams were about the flight of that little rubber ball. I held an imaginary club and aimed at an invisible hole in the far distance. As my enthusiasm for one thing dwindles, there are always friends to initiate me in something new. How proud I am to be congratulated as a perfect specimen of the happy human being.

This spring, I added a new hobby to my pastimes : I began to collect old stamps. To start with, someone gave me, quite casually, some spare stamps he had. Some had tropical plants printed on them, some an American Goddess of Liberty. I thought they were amusing, and stuck them in some exercise-books I was using at the time. But soon, owing to my friend's generosity, I had more than an eight-inch envelope would hold, and whenever I had nothing to do I would empty them out on to the table. I would look at the faces of great national heroes of all races and all centuries; some with beards, some bald ; I looked at famous cathedrals and at waterfalls. Finally I bought an album, and asked my teacher of calligraphy to inscribe on the front " Stamps from Ten Thousand Nations."

At first the album was only supposed to keep my stamps from getting lost. But soon, like the man who buys a cottage

[1] Golf.

for his week-ends only, I found my sense of possessiveness growing. I wanted more and more, for every collector aims at completeness. The pleasure of owning a specimen of every single stamp that had ever been issued seemed to me as great as being installed on a gilded throne.

Having cultivated my enthusiasm, my friend who was responsible for my entry into the stamp-collecting world no longer showered his treasures upon me. By that time I had begun to taste the pleasures of hunting for myself. Henceforth all my acquaintances, even the most casual ones, were pestered by my request, " Have you got any stamps ? " I was so persistent in my quest that sometimes, even before I had opened my mouth, a triend would forestall me by holding out his empty hands and saying, " I haven't got *any* for you."

During our botany class one day, when the master was drawing the pistil of a " pyrus spectabilis " on the blackboard, I turned over the pages of my exercise book and out fell a stamp of the " Imperial Manchu Empire."[1] While I was admiring the form of the winding dragon in brown, a classmate thrust his head over my desk. His hair was dishevelled and his face sullen and pale. I was afraid that the master might turn and find me out, so I closed the book quickly. The pale boy realised how rash he had been, and nodded his apologies.

I knew the boy. His name was Chao something. No one in the class spoke to him, but he didn't seem to mind. I used to sit beside him in the geometry class too, but in prep, he generally sat three rows in front of me, No. 75 or 76, I think it was. We had never talked to each other, and I saw no reason for breaking the ice. He frowned all day long as though he were burdened with a lawsuit, and I hated to see long faces. I never could see why people shouldn't be cheerful. I'm happy, and so are my friends; we play tennis in summer and skate in winter. But this

[1] Manchukuo, the puppet government installed by Japan in Manchuria.

boy did none of these things. All he did was to pace up and down the playground, with both hands tucked in his sleeves. Sometimes in class he would seem to be concentrating, yet when the master asked him a question he would be taken quite unawares. He liked to draw on the margins of his books, but unlike the rest of us he never drew pictures of the masters or of class-mates. He liked to write. He would lightly trace a few characters with his pencil, and then he would make them all solid by darkening shadows along each stroke. Finally he would obliterate all the characters by making them into big black circles. But once in the geometry class I peeped over his shoulder and saw four huge characters, " Return My River and Mountain." *

At the next botany class we both happened to arrive early. He asked me rather crossly, " What do you collect that stuff for ?" His accent was noticeably Manchurian. " To play with, of course," I told him. I saw no particular significance in the question. Yet the boy gave a contemptuous snort and said, " To play with ? Don't you know how much of that territory is gone ? " I couldn't understand what he said, and just then the bell rang and in came the master.

The same afternoon I met him again on the staircase that led to the third dormitory. His hair was as dishevelled as ever, and he wore an old black suit and a pair of worn-out slippers. He was reading a Tientsin paper as we went upstairs ; the way he spread the paper and walked without looking where he was going made me think of a lost ship sailing a wild sea. He looked at me over the top of his paper with a bitter little smile, and went on up the stairs. I caught him up and asked him what he had meant in the classroom. First of all he scrutinised my innocent face, then folded over the paper and showed me a column at the edge. It was not a sensational sports item, not

[1]" Hwan Wo Ho Shan," a well-known quotation from the twelfth century patriot, Yueh-fei, meaning " Recover our lost territory."

an announcement of a new film, but a news item about someone being enthroned.[1] I was enthralled. Wouldn't that mean a new addition to the stamp collection, if only people would have die sense to commemorate the enthronement by a new issue.

So I asked him if he had any stamps to spare. I seemed to annoy him very much, but he said in a very ironical tone that he expected there would be plenty of new stamps to come.

That was quite good enough for me, but the strange boy sailed scornfully away with his paper. I was too excited to notice his manner at the time ; I was busy thinking about the new stamp. I followed him silently, and only when he was fumbling for his key did he realise that an unwelcome guest was just behind him.

" Do come in for a moment," he said, out of politeness. I was quite surprised to find that he could be polite ; I bounced in, full of hope. There were no photographs of film stars on his walls, which were criss-crossed by slogans written with different coloured pencils. In the middle there was a map with one corner coloured red. His bed was unmade, and there was a pile of books under his pillow. The top one was called, " A History of Japanese Imperialism." I couldn't understand it: I had been bored enough by all the textbooks our dreary history master made us read. I was only after stamps.

" Stamps of the new Empire ? " he said. " Don't you realise that before long you, too, may be a slave of a North China Empire ? " I wondered why he needed to be so gruff.

While he was feeling the belly of his white teapot, meaning to pour me out some tea, I caught sight of an envelope sticking out of his drawer. I pulled it out at once, and heavens, what did I find but a brand-new stamp ! At first I thought it was

[1] Manchukuo, the puppet government, was established on 9th March 1932, when Henry Pu-yi, the ex-Emperor of Imperial China, was kidnapped by Japanese secret police and proclaimed their figurehead in the invaded country.

Japanese, as it was thin and delicate like a faded water-colour. But when I studied it I found on it three characters, " Man-Chu-Kuo." The very thing I had been hoping for, the stamp of a new country ! I thought it must be a rarity, and I forgot all his insults and begged him to let me tear it off.

" What do you want the bloody thing for—the curse often thousand generations ? " I could not make out whether he was jeering at me or at the stamp, but he looked furious.

" Oh, I want it badly for my collection," I said, still naively enthusiastic. Then I changed my tactics. " If you haven't any use for it, there's all the more reason for giving it to me."

" Oh ! There arc too many people like you inside the Great Wall ! "[1] This time I was quite sure that he was jeering at me. He began to tear off the stamp, but I stopped him.

" Please let me do it." Very gently I detached it myself, making sure that in his anger he did not damage the treasure.

Holding the stamp carefully, I thanked him and made off. I could guess well enough his sentiments towards me as he heard my footsteps going down the stairs. Several of my fellow-collectors gathered round me with envy ; one boy offered me his giant " Paris Exhibition " for it, but I walked off with a mocking laugh.

After this I did my best to befriend my benefactor. I tried to pass him sweets in class, but he always refused my gift politely, yet scornfully. I think he did not want to lose altogether this one contact of his. I was not at all pleased by his queer manners, but after that day 1 regarded him as a very useful source of supply. He had given me three more Manchukuo stamps, which I exchanged with White Lohan for seven Spanish and Portuguese, and got two French Air-mails and three Italian ones as well. The second bargain, with Mcng, was a good one, for I got as well a memorial stamp of the National Athletic Meeting, which I had been coveting for a long time.

[1] Then not yet invaded by the Japanese,

One evening I went up to see Chao. After knocking hard on his door, I went in. It was barely seven o'clock, and he was already in bed. I longed to tickle his feet, but remembering what a stern mentor he was I didn't. Instead, I called his name at the mouth of his sleeping-bag. There was no reply ; he had only huddled deeper into the blankets. I thrust my hand into the bag. It was very warm inside, and his head felt like a furze bush. I could trace the frown on his forehead, and just below it I could feel something wet. How absurd, a big boy like that crying !

" Wake up," I said. His hand inside the blankets clutched my arm, and then suddenly his head came out, with two swollen, glaring eyes. I was frightened, and gave him my handkerchief, which he pushed away. He got up, with his feet bare.

" My friend, we are going to part," he said suddenly. I put my hand into his sweaty palm ; his other hand was running through his dishevelled hair. Then he walked over to his desk, pulled open his top drawer and handed me an envelope with the postmark " Kirin."[1] " Tear off the stamp," he said. " It's the last you'll get from me."

But I found I was hardly interested in the stamp this time ; I wanted to know why he had to leave. His eyes were blank and frightening. He only muttered something about " going to be a slave." Finally he begged me to leave him alone just then, and meet him later, after evening prep.

I left No. 34 with a heavy heart. White Lohan followed me about, asking how many new stamps I had got and what they were. I stared at him scornfully. How shamefully heartless he seemed! I showed him my empty hands and said not a word. He made a face at me, calling me " a narrow-minded devil, an impatient goat," thinking I was disappointed because Chao hadn't given me any stamps. As I watched him go off, playing his mouth-organ, I felt positively indignant.

I could not concentrate on my books that evening, however

[1] One of the four North-Eastern Provinces forming Manchuria.

much I tried. His inkpot was still at place No. 72, but he wasn't there. I felt a blank in my mind. I scribbled endless phrases in my geometry book, especially " Return My River and Mountain," All the same, for the benefit of the master I had to pretend to work. At last I could contain myself no longer : I feigned a bilious attack and was allowed to go.

The Third Dormitory was silent and dark. As soon as I went I could hear the noise of trunks being moved about on the floor above, all coming from the direction of No. 34. Chao was in his room, with his head shaved like a monk. Blue veins stood out in his forehead. All the slogans had been pulled off the wall, and nothing was left in his bookcase except some worn-out shoes and a wash-basin. He was fastening up his luggage.

" Are you going already ? " I was surprised.

" My train leaves to-morrow morning at eight." He counted on his fingers : " Tientsin at eleven, Pcitaiho at five, and by six o'clock, beyond Shanhaikwan. . . ." [1]

" But why must you shave your head like that ? "

" I want to look like an ordinary peasant." He fastened the last bundle and stood up. His eyes looked at the darkness outside. " I've always been a peasant. All students in Manchuria are dangerous to *them.* I don't want them to kill me before I see my mother."

" If it is as dangerous as all that, why must you go ? "

" Little brother." It was the first time he had called me that, and I saw pity in his eyes—" Here are two books for you to keep, the rest I've given to the library." He handed them to me—one was " The North-Eastern Question," the other " Youth and Manchuria," both with inscriptions in his bold hand—then he sighed and said, " Do you realise that from now on I shan't even see a newspaper with a breath of Chinese about it ? "

[1] The main entrance of the Great Wall into Manchuria.

When his luggage was ready we went out together into the playground. It was very dark, with a few pale stars lighting heavy banks of cloud.

" It would be much better if there was a moon," I said. It was probably the most sensible thing I had ever said to him.

" A moon ? What's the use of a moon, when we are surrounded by darkness ? "

We walked towards the swing at the eastern side of the grounds, his hand on my shoulder. Once or twice I made an effort to break the silence, but I was defeated by his slow footsteps and the heavy darkness. We heard a bell pealing out, and a crowd of students came rushing out of the lecture-hall. It was too dark to see his face, but I sensed somehow that he was looking towards the north-east. I heard him sniff, and then he said, " I may not see you any more, little brother. I know I am putting my life in *their* hands. My first brother was killed by *their* bayonets ... he didn't feel the pain for long, but my mother did. . . . The people I hate most are the people like you, people who live in a Hollywood sort of world and think of nothing and know of nothing beyond their next meal. Sooner, or later . . ." Then a new idea seemed to come into his head-" Of course you ought to enjoy life, to play and sing . . . unfortunately, you were born a Chinese. ... If you are not yet in torture, it is only because your turn has not yet come. . . ."

He talked about death in the most matter-of-fact way, but I was frightened to think that he too might be dead soon. Already he seemed like a ghost to me. All I could do was to beg him to stay, if he really knew that his return meant death.

" My father was arrested by the Japanese in Kirin. My elder brother has already been killed, because he was a good schoolmaster ; to the Japs all schoolmasters are rebels. Now my mother is alone, and she is ill. . . . Oh, I wish I was with her already. ... I'd bite the first Jap who laid hands on her. . . ." This idea seemed to give him a lot of pleasure, and he patted me

on the back, saying, " If none of us die now, our posterity will be no better than pigs. . . . You are still little. . . ."

I lifted my head, trying to see his face in the darkness. A voice inside me seemed to say, " I am *not* little any more. Look, I have wept. ..."

We talked until after " Lights Out," and then found our way back to the dormitory, stumbling in the darkness. At the door he whispered to me, " I'm leaving at daybreak to-morrow. Let's shake hands now. During the last six months you're the only friend I've made, and you don't understand what this is all about . . . but remember me, and show some guts. . . ." Then he wrung my hand as hard as he could and rushed off to his room.

I stood there stiff and numb. It was no use following him, but I felt I had not seen enough of him. There was a cold wind, and I huddled inside my collar and decided to get up very early so that I could see him again.

But when I woke up the sun was already high. The wash-room was festooned with basins. Before I had finished yawning I remembered that I had failed in an important undertaking. I jumped out of my bed, and there on the corner of my table I saw an envelope with a note scribbled on it in pencil, " I envy the way you sleep ! I hope I shall do the same one day ! Good-bye ! Here's another stamp for you."

Holding the envelope, I cursed my futility. The stamp didn't interest me at all. ...

1934.

Ep i demic

ONE day father said to Old Hwang, the servant, " The harvest this year has not been good. There may be kidnappers in the streets. From to-day onwards you are not to look after the gate any more.[1] You must only run errands and take the Seventh Master to school and back."

When I heard about this I felt thoroughly sore. It meant that I would never be able to run away from school, for although Old Hwang was supposed to be my protector he would really be my gaoler. I wanted to know what my going to school had to do with him. I didn't want a companion ; I had the best possible companion, my dog " Hwatse."

What a nice dog he was, this Hwatse with the marking of a plum-deer ! As soon as he heard my whistle, no matter how far off he had wandered or how handsome a bitch he was following, he lifted his head, pricked his ears, wagged his smart little tail once or twice and came bouncing back to me. Panting, his red tongue lolling, he would sniff at the ends of my trousers and the backs of my heels, showing me all his endearing ways. He followed me like a shadow, lifting a leg all along the road. If any of my schoolmates teased me he bared his teeth at the offender and showed off by fierce barking. But to be followed by dreary Old Hwang ! I hated the idea, and yet I couldn't defy my father, who really is the master of the house.

" Seventh Master, do walk a bit faster," Old Hwang pleaded. So I began to scuffle the earth with the heels of my shoes until even Hwatse began to wonder what I was doing, and rolled in the dust to keep himself occupied. " Seventh Master, please don't buy that lollipop." So I bought the dirtiest ones I could

[1] In rich houses in Peking there is always a gate-keeper, whose job is to receive visitors, receive tradesmen, and keep the front of the house tidy.

see, carried them home and told mother it was Old Hwang's idea. Old Hwang got into serious trouble, but he could never justify himself.

The next thing was that father said I was getting too big to sleep in mother's room any more, and so I was moved into the Western Chamber, which was made into my room.

Old Hwang still lived in the porter's lodge. Usually he got up before daybreak to sweep the big yard, clearing away the snow in winter and the leaves in autumn, stopping occasionally to give a middle-aged cough. When he had nearly finished sweeping he would lean on my window-sill and whisper, " Seventh Master, it's time to get up ! " When I heard him, even if I was already awake, I would screw up my eyes, trying to go on dozing in my warm bed, although I could hear his uncertain steps as he moved about the yard. Later, when we were walking to school, he would say, " Seventh Master, do try to get up a bit earlier, If you're late, I shall have to take the blame." All he got from me was a malicious grin, or perhaps I would ask him what business it was of his, anyway.

After the last class the entrance to the school was always crowded with servants come to meet their charges. Old Hwang usually managed to stand in the front row, searching among the human torrent which came rushing from the classrooms. When he saw me he would shout out in his hoarse voice, " Seventh Master ! " so that everyone in the school got to know that I was seventh in the family, and it became a favourite joke. If it happened that I was punished by being sent out of class, I would try to dodge Old Hwang and slip off to the playing field. When he found me he would do up my buttons like a mother, dust my shoulders, and see if anyone had chalked a " turtle " on my back. Then he would sling my satchel over his shoulder like a sack of rice, take my hand, and say, " So long," knowingly, as we passed the school porter. At this point Hwatse would

[1] To call someone a turtle is a common insult in China.

manage to disentangle himself from the crowd of my schoolmates and come bouncing to my feet.

On the way home I liked to have something to kick along ; anything would do. If I saw a cabbage head I would try to kick it all the way home. " Seventh Master, you are spoiling your shoes," Old Hwang would say, and, of course, I would change my cabbage head for a stone. If my stone went under a cart, I would try to hook it out with my toe, and if it rolled in the wrong direction at a street corner I would run back for it. But if it hit the foot of a passer-by the angry man would stare at us, and then Old Hwang had to walk up to the stranger and confess that he, " an old fool," was at fault, and beg for pardon. The man would stare at Old Hwang, spit, and walk on contemptuously.

One day Old Hwang asked me about the shiny coloured papers I carried in my satchel. I told him that we used them in the handicraft class, to fold into horses, pavilions, pagodas and so on. Old Hwang snorted and said, " Do you have to spend good money on a foreign-style school to learn things like that ? " Then he asked me if I could fold the paper into a bat, and when I said I couldn't he promised to show me how when we got home. That evening Old Hwang became forty years younger (he was really about fifty-five). He fished out a bit of paper, originally used for wrapping tea. We bent our heads together under the oil lamp. He folded the piece of paper this way and that, holding his head first on one side and then on the other to help his memory. Finally, a miraculous bat with two sharp-tipped wings appeared, and when he threw it up in the air it circled round twice before fluttering gently to the floor. This surprised me a great deal. I had never expected this cleverness from such a clumsy old fellow. I asked him the next morning what games his children played at home. He looked at me questioningly under his worn felt hat and said, " Seventh Master, I am a bachelor, yes, a bachelor." Then he explained

to me that he meant he had no wife, which surprised me very much, as judging by his hairy chin he was certainly entitled to one. I insisted on knowing why he did not possess one, but he only smiled to cover up his secrets and said, " Let's wait until the Seventh Master marries a beautiful, beautiful maiden. Then Til come to you as butler if you don't think I'm too old."

" But what about you ? " I persisted. It is no good trying to dodge a child's questions.

" I ? " I'd never seen a man of his age blushing as,red as a cherry. He bent his head and laughed ; "there was a shiny scar on the top of his head. He fingered a button on his coat and kicked once or twice at the stone step. Then he murmured, " How am I to feed her, Seventh Master ? "

We both sprawled on the steps. He took off his felt hat and steam rose from his head. He told me vaguely about his past, how he had followed my father all through his campaign in Urga (Outer Mongolia), how they had fought the Tartars in the endless desert, how he was wounded by a Mongolian sword in protecting my father, and so on and so on. In the end I was so convinced that Old Hwang deserved a nice wife that I ran upstairs and begged mother to give him one.

" What's the use of my trying to give him a wife ? " said my mother. " Your father used to suggest our maid to him. We pestered him until he got annoyed and left us without notice. He was away for a whole year."

" But why wouldn't he have a wife ? " I asked.

" Ah, that's something you've got to learn," my mother teased me. " It's because he has a mother at home, poor old woman. When he was a little boy he had his palm read by some stupid creature, who told him, ' Broad beans in big handfuls ; once he marries a wife he no longer wants a mother.'[1] As he is a good son, he has never dared to marry."

From then on I ceased to worry this stubborn filial son. I

[1] A Peking nursery rhyme.

often slipped a sweet or two into his pocket, but after a day or two I found they were still there, sticky from the warmth of his body. He told me he was keeping them for his mother when he went home on leave.

Spring is the season for kites. As soon as school was over I would take Old Hwang and lively Hwatse to open ground, carrying my seven-foot wild duck.[1] I held on to the bamboo stays at the back of the kite, while Old Hwang carried the winder. When he had arranged the string he would tell me to run off with the kite, choosing a place that was clear of trees. Hwatse would run after me, chasing the string or biting at my heels. When Old Hwang called out " Enough," I had to stop and let go ; in a moment the kite, which had been held so firmly in my hand, was floating up into the porcelain blue sky over Peking. We waited until it was well " settled " and adjusted to the wind, clear of trees and other kites, and then Old Hwang would hand the string to me. What fun to see the jade-like sky all criss-crossed with silvery lines, and at the end of each line a paper-planet, a goldfish with winking eyes, a centipede with its hundred legs all moving ! Some had harps tied to them, making music in the air.[2] But my wild duck always flew the highest, smiling down at the earth in tranquillity and content.

In the meantime Old Hwang was not idle. All the while his eyes were fixed on the kite, and his mouth was wide open. Now he would instruct me to let it go a bit by releasing my second finger which acted as a brake on the winder ; the string would run out into space, rhythmically, like a waterfall, and the wild duck would recede. Then he would say sharply, " Enough," and the kite, after some adjustment to its new position, would slowly rise up still higher. From time to time Old Hwang would kick the ground and say, " Seventh Master,

[1] A common shape of kite.
[2] Kite fliers often tie harps to their kites.

the wind is turning to the south-west," which would mean that I had to change my own position.

For the evenings, Old Hwang had a wonderful idea. He would throw the reel over the wall of the house, then light a red lantern and tie it to the string. Slowly and steadily the red lantern would rise along the string to the sky, the most joyful sight I have ever seen. We would let the kite wander in the darkening sky until my mother had finished her evening prayer before the Buddha, then, no matter how high or how far the kite had flown, we could bring it back by winding in the string. After its exciting adventures in mid-air my wild duck would be just the same, except that it felt a little cold, and I would slip into bed and dream of having wings myself.

One spring, my father had to go south on Government business. He told me to stay at home, not even to fly my kite outside, for he had heard that there were mad dogs about in the city. By his orders my kite was locked up in the store-room and I had to play with my shuttle-cock in the yard.

" Look, Seventh Master ! " With his right foot Old Hwang kicked the shuttle-cock high above the eaves of our house ; another kick, and the feathered thing settled on his head, right on top of his scar. But while I was absorbed in my shuttle-cock, Hwatse got ill. Often he lagged behind instead of keeping at my heels. He seemed to~Eavie"something on his mind ; I used to hear him growling to himself. I asked Old Hwang what was the matter. He was watering the geraniums in the yard, and he turned round and looked at Hwatse, then said, " Seventh Master, spring is the *time*—for dogs and cats—leave him alone and he'll be all right." I thought it was a very mysterious remark.

But my mother had quite a different idea. She wondered whether Hwatse had caught the infection. Old Hwang said, " No, Madam. I know a mad dog when I see one." All the same, on our way back from school Old Hwang assured me that

he had made enquiries about a place where they cure " dog-madness." The Bureau of Public Health had set up a special clinic in the Agriculture Building. At lunch-time, when my mother asked him about Hwatse, he said he thought he had better take Hwatse to this place to be looked at. My mother took no notice, and Old Hwang did not like to press her because it meant asking for money. He told me afterwards that he had some money left out of last month's wages, and that he was going to take Hwatse to the clinic. I contributed the money I had, with some more that I got out of my mother on some excuse or other.

That afternoon I had to carry my own satchel. I parted from Old Hwang under the East Arch, and watched him go off south-ward with Hwatse on a lead. During Physical Exercise I told a classmate that Hwatse had seemed rather " funny " that morning. A pock-marked boy leaned over and said with a horrified look, " You'll have to kill your dog at once. Our neighbours have just killed theirs."

" You shut up ! " I was very annoyed at this cruel idea. " How do you know Hwatse has caught the infection ? "

" All right, all right," the pock-marked boy said sulkily ; " but you'll see that whoever he bites will go mad at once. Don't you take my good heart for a wolf's lung." Saying this, he went off as though he was afraid of being bitten himself. I didn't bother about it any more. Kill my Hwatse, indeed ! What harm had he done to anyone, the sweet creature !

At four o'clock Old Hwang was outside the school entrance as usual. But he looked quite different, and he was without Hwatse. He told me sadly that the hospital people were quite heartless. " As soon as they saw Hwatse, they refused to let him go again. They said they must keep him there."

" So what did you do ? " I asked impatiently.

" Why, of course, I wouldn't let them, Seventh Master," he said with his usual steadiness, though he was obviously

very pale and exhausted. " I wouldn't let them. I took Hwatse away."

" Did you manage to get him home ? " I asked.

" Yes, but they said the police would be coming to the house."

When we got home Hwatse had disappeared, just as I had been afraid. What was more, my mother caught hold of me as soon as I went into the house. She wouldn't let me go out at all. With her rosary in one hand she held on to my arm, saying " Hwatse has gone mad, completely mad. You shall never have a dog again. It's too frightening. You'll go to school in a rickshaw from now on. . . ."

The next morning I was awakened by Sister Hu, the maid. She told me that mother would get leave for me to study at home all day. Any other 'day it wouldn't have been a bad idea, but to be at home without Hwatse or Old Hwang (for the maid told me then that Old Hwang was not in the house) would be too miserable. My mother actually expected me to sit in my room and practise calligraphy while Sister Hu sat by me sewing.

" Where is Old Hwang ? Tell me where Old Hwang is ! " I pestered Sister Hu. She wouldn't answer, although I could see from the sad look in her eyes that something dreadful had happened. She said that my mother had told her not to talk to me about Old Hwang or about the dog. To pay her out I ran out of the study. I chased the pregnant cat; I caught the butterflies in the pots of geraniums. I did everything that was forbidden. Finally, I threatened to climb the grape-pergola, and Sister Hu couldn't bear it any longer.

" Oh, Seventh Master," she burst out, " haven't you any heart ? Your dog is dead and Old Hwang is now in an Isolation Hospital."

My restless limbs were paralysed then. Everything went black in front of me, as though I had been hit by a thunderbolt. Could it be true ? She swore it was. " Poor Old Hwang. It

was just a little bite on his wrist. It hardly bled, but there it is. They say it's the infection. Poor Old Hwang."

It was a long time before I began to cry, but when I did it gave Sister Hu away.

And since then, I've never had a dog, nor, for that matter, a better friend than poor Old Hwang.

1934-

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