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THREE SEASONS

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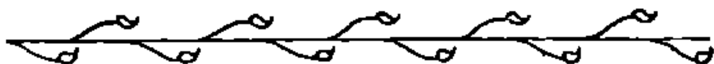

Three Seasons

AND OTHER STORIES

TRANSLATED FROM THE CHINESE

by CHUN-CHAN YEH

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THREE SEASONS

SPRING SILKWORMS

OLD TUNGPAO sat on a stone by the river bank, his back against the sun and his long bamboo pipe by his side. The sunshine was quite powerful in spite of the fact that Spring Festival was only just over. He felt his back warm as though he were sitting against a brazier of fire. In front of him a long line of Shaoshing trackers, bent double, were pulling hard at heavily loaded junks, their jackets open, and sweat drops, as large as soya beans, falling from their brows.

Staring at these labouring fellows, old Tungpao did not only feel his old back hotter, but also burningly itching. He had his long winter gown on, his light garment being still kept in the pawnshop. He had not foreseen the sudden warm spell.

"The weather nowadays has become as tricky as human beings!" he muttered to himself, spitting into the river.

The stream before him looked luxuriously green, but the boats, which came and went, ruffled its mirror-like surface now and then. And the clear shadows of the mulberry trees would shake up into patches of grey as the boat passed, and then, as the eddies and whirls subsided, sway this way and that like drunkards, and finally become clear and distinct and motionless again. The fist-like buds had already given out green leave, tender and delicate. But the field was still cracked and dry. The long lines of the reviving trees stretched over to the horizon. It seemed to old Tungpao that the young leaves were not only smiling in the sun, but also visibly growing every second.

Not far from where old Tungpao sat there was a block of grey houses. This was where the merchants from town came to buy cocoons from the villagers in the old days. But now it was quiet and deserted, the doors shut. Many rumours had been circulated in the villages that the silk factories in town had been standing idle because of Japanese invasion and that there would be no cocoon market even though the season came. Old Tungpao, however, did not believe in these tales. He bad

lived sixty years and never once had he seen such beautiful fat mulberry leaves lie waste. Unless, of course, the eggs did not hatch. But that was beyond the control of human beings.

"The warmth! Fine!" Old Tungpao said to himself cheerfully. It was exactly the same kind of spring about two score of years ago that gave an exceptionally rich cocoon harvest. It was that year he got married. His family fortune was then in the upward swing. His father worked hard, almost like an old ploughing cow; his grandfather, too, was very vigorous and healthy, although he had suffered much hardship when a captive in the hands of the "long hairs."* He could still remember vividly that the Chen family had not been as bad as it was now, for though the old squire had died, the son had not taken to opium yet. Somehow Old Tungpao could not help feeling that the fortunes of the Chens and those of his own family were linked together, no matter how poor a peasant he himself was.

This common tie had its origin with the "long hairs." Both the old squire and his grandfather had been captured by the rebels and later on both managed to escape safely. According to the local legends the old squire had made off with a huge amount of gold, with which he could have gone into silk business and become rich. Owing to the fact that cocoon harvests during that time were very good every year old Tungpao also became prosperous. So during a short period of ten years old Tungpao had acquired twenty acres of rice field and more than ten acres of mulberry trees. His certainly was the most well-to-do family in the village, just as the Chens were the richest in town.

Both families, however, had declined, and in a sad way, too. Old Tungpao had no longer any rice field. All he had now was a debt of three hundred dollars. The Chens were "finished." The rapid fall gave rise to a lot of speculations. It was said that the ghosts of the "long hairs," with whose gold the old Chen had grown rich, had sued the family through the King of the Underground World and had been warranted by the supreme judge to collect the debt. Old Tungpao was inclined

*Popular name for the peasant rebels of 1850's, who wore their hair long.

to believe this explanation. Otherwise, why should the young squire pick up the habit of opium smoking, by which he squandered all the fortunes? It must be some evil spirit that induced him to do so.

The decline of his own family, however, had remained a mystery. Old Tungpao could in no way account for it. He was quite sure that his grandfather had no share of the stolen gold. Although that old man had to kill a sentinel in order to escape, yet this should not constitute the cause of the downfall of his family fortunes. For matters like this were "predestined" and entirely beyond the control of mortals. Besides, his family had held services for the dead rebel many a time as long as he could remember. The soul of the poor wretch ought to have been elevated and reincarnated into a human being by now. So far as the members of his family were concerned, none had been so wicked as to invoke the punishment from God. His father had been a hard working man. He himself had never done anything wrong. His son Ah Four and his daughter-in-law Maid Four were all very industrious and honest. It was true that his younger son Toto was flighty at times. But who was not while young? He would be all right as soon as he learned enough about life and rights and wrongs.

Old Tungpao lifted his brown, wrinkled face and surveyed the scene before him. The river, the boats and the mulberry trees on both sides of the river were very much the same as twenty years ago, but the world had changed. He no longer had the luxury of eating white rice. Pumpkins had become the staple food of the family.

U-oo-oo! Several blasts from a steam whistle suddenly sounded from around a bend in the river. Immediately a tug, driven by synthetic oil engines, appeared, with three boats in tow. The small native crafts scurried out of the way of the puffing monster, and the boatmen, in order to steady them, desperately held tufts of grass on the bank. The little vessels began to sway, throwing their masters up and down in the air, until at last the grass came away from the earth, and the boats got helplessly engulfed in the wide wake of the tug.

Old Tungpao watched the scene with bitterness and enmity against such foreign devilry as steam boats and the like. This bitterness grew into a hatred of foreigners. He, however, had never seen a man from any other country. But the old squire Chen had told a lot of tales about them. They were said to have red hair and blue eyes and walk with stiff knees. They were as devilish as the steam tug. It was they who swindled away all the money from China and made the villagers poor. Old Tungpao entirely agreed with this statement. For was it not that he had become poorer and poorer since foreign yarn, cloth and kerosene appeared in town and the damned tug in the river? Ever since then he had got less and less for the things he produced with his labour and had to pay more and more for the things he wanted to buy. His anti-foreign sentiments were not without reason! And for these he made himself popular among the villagers.

Five years ago some one told him that the "dynasty" had again changed and that the new government was trying to free the people from foreign exploitation. But Old Tungpao would not believe it, because those youngsters who shouted "Down with foreign imperialism" wore foreign clothes themselves. How could they justify that? They must be carrying on underhand dealings with foreign devils while shouting the slogan, which served no purpose but to fool the villagers. Indeed, ever since the new government had come into power, things became dearer and dearer and taxes heavier and heavier. Surely the foreigners must have a hand in these things.

What angered Old Tungpao most was that cocoons hatched from foreign eggs should sell for ten dollars more a picul. He had always been on good terms with his daughter-in-law, but not on this score. Maid Four had, since last year, insisted on using foreign eggs. Toto supported her idea. His older son Ah Four was also a traitor in this respect, although he did not talk much about it. Pressed thus from three sides, he had at last to compromise by allowing them to use one sheet of foreign eggs out of the three that they decided to hatch this year.

"What a world 1" he muttered to himself. "Perhaps after

a few years even the mulberry trees will have to be foreign! I'm sick of it all!"

Old Tungpao took up his long bamboo pipe and went home with dragging steps. On the way the warm sun and the prosperous mulberry trees with their greenish tender leaves smiled at him. In spite of his ill humour, a new hope sprang up in his old heart, many a time disappointed with failure and poverty.

The weather continued warm. The finger-like leaves were now the size of small hands. The mulberry trees around the village looked especially fine, green as willows; thick and smooth and soft as carpet. Hope expanded in the hearts of the peasants just as the leaves on the trees. Everybody was smiling and every family busy. Old utensils used for rearing were sorted out from store rooms for repair and washing. As the men and women and children gathered about the brook that ran by the village to do the washing, they sang songs, made jokes and now and then burst into fits of laughter.

None of these folk, however, looked healthy. Some appeared terribly pale, and most of them were anaemic. Starvation was visible not only on their faces, but also in their movement. Since last winter they had had to cut down their rations, as their food reserve had even then been near exhaustion. Nor did they look decent in their garments, which were nothing but tatters. Yet their hearts were high. The beautiful sun and the rich mulberry trees created for them rosy pictures. They seemed to visualise how in a month's time the glossy green leaves would turn into snow white cocoons and how the cocoons would turn into jangling silver dollars. These illusions alone made them forgetful of hunger.

Among the women were Old Tungpao's daughter-in-law Maid Four and twelve-year-old boy Siaopao. They had finished washing the feeding trays and the hatching baskets and were wiping their brows with the edge of their coats.

"Maid Four, are you also going to use foreign eggs this year?" asked a girl from the crowd on the other side of the brook.

It was Lupao, Lu Fuchin's younger sister. Maid Four's

brows lifted up as though she was ready to pick an opponent for a row.

"Don't ask me! It's Grandpa who makes the decision. We are going to hatch only one sheet of foreign eggs. The doddering old fool hates everything that bears the word 'foreign' except, of course, silver dollars."*

The gibe provoked another wave of laughter.

Just then a man came across the threshing floor on the other side of the brook, to the bridge made of four logs. Maid Four immediately dropped the subject and shouted at the top of her voice:

"Brother Toto, come and help me take these things home, These trays are as heavy as dead dogs when they are wet."

Toto lifted the pile of trays without a word and carried them on his head. As he was walking off he swung both his hands like oars. He was a jolly fellow, good-natured and always ready to lend a helping hand to anyone who needed it. The pile of feeding trays balanced on his head like a huge straw hat. There was another fit of laughter when he wriggled his waist in the fashion of city women.

"Hello, Toto! Come back and carry some for me!" shouted Lotus, Li Kenson's wife and Old Tungpao's immediate neighbour, laughing with the rest.

" Call me by an affectionate term if you want my service," replied Toto without stopping.

"Then let me call you 'my dear godson'!" said Lotus with a loud laugh.

Unlike other women in the village she had made herself outstanding with her exceptionally white complexion, unusually flat face, small eyes, and above all, a bridgeless broad nose. Before she married Li Kenson, an ever-silent, downcast, mentally aged fellow, half a year ago, she had been a slave girl. Then she had already earned the notorious reputation of being "sociable" with menfolk.

"The shameless thing!" somebody muttered on the other side of the brook.

* Silver dollars were first introduced in China from Mexico. So in Chinese they are called "foreign coins."

Lotus's pig-like eyes immediately grew large and wild. She shouted ,"Whom do you mean? Come out and say it in the open if you dare!"

"It's none of your business! She who is without shame should know whom I mean, for 'Even the man who lies dead knows who's kicked his coffin with the toes.' Why should you bother?"

It was Lupao who made the reply. Simultaneously with the duet which followed, they splashed water at each other. Some of the women joined their self-chosen allies in the scolding match, while the children laughed and hooted. Maid Four, not wishing to get involved, picked up the remaining baskets and went home with Siaopao. Toto had laid down the trays in the porch and was watching the fight.

Old Tungpao staggered out with the tray stands on his shoulders—several of their legs had been bored through by white ants and were urgently in need of repair. Seeing that Toto was standing idle, Old Tungpao could not help pulling a long face. He hated to see his younger son distract himself with women, particularly Lotus. "That bitch is the reincarnation of the White Tigress Star,"* he used to warn Toto. "She is an evil spirit that brings bad luck to anyone who has anything to do with her." Now the bantering scene in front of him sickened him to death.

"Toto!" he shouted, "Ah Four is making cocoon trees in the backyard; go and help him."

He did not take his disapproving eyes off his son until he disappeared into the house. Then he started examining the tray stands and tried to put the damaged parts right. Although he had a smattering of carpentry, yet his hands were so stiff with age that he could not go on smoothly with the job. He had to straighten himself up now and then in order to breathe. Each time he paused his gaze invariably fell on the three sheets of eggs hanging from a bamboo pole in the room.

Maid Four was sitting under the eaves, pasting paper over

*Nickname contemptuously given to a woman whose private parts grow no hair. It is said to be inauspicious for a man to marry such a female-Translator.

the hatching baskets. This paper was specially bought for the purpose with the money they had saved by forgoing a meal. In the past they had generally used newspaper. This year, however, Old Tungpao was absolutely against its use, because newspaper was printed with characters which it would be sacrilegious to defile as with them the sages in the past had written down the most sacred sayings. This contempt, Old Tungpao argued, accounted partly for the decline of silkworm industry in the past.

"Maid Four, the twenty loads of leaves we ordered have used up all the thirty dollars borrowed through your father. What shall we do, now that our rice is nearly finished? The leaves won't last more than two days." Old Tungpao raised his head and stopped working as he spoke to his daughter-in-law.

The loan was secured at 2J per cent, interest. And it was considered a favourable rate, which only Maid Four's father could have secured as he was the creditor's old tenant.

Maid Four put the pasted baskets in the sun to dry, and said angrily, "all spent on leaves! It is just like last year: more leaves than could be consumed!"

"What words! You dare to forecast our luck like that! Can every year be like Mast year?[1] We can only gather about ten loads of leaves from our own trees. How can that be enough for three sheets of eggs?"

"All right, all right. All I know is that you can only cook a meal with rice and that without rice you have to go hungry!"

Maid Four made the answer with particular discontent, because she could still not forget the argument over the relative merits of native and foreign eggs. Old Tungpao was silenced with the sad thought of no meal, and dared not say any more.

As the hatching days drew near, the entire village of thirty families became tense with hope and anxiety. People seemed even to have forgotten the gnawing hunger. They fed on whatever they could get, generally pumpkins and potatoes. True, the crop last year was not too bad, but they could hardly save any rice for the spring. Such things as land tax, land rent interest, rates, assessments and what not, had exhausted

long ago their last grain. Their only hope now lay in the silkworms. All their loans had been secured by the promise that they would be paid soon after the "harvest" of cocoons.

It was now mid-spring. The hue of the "cloth" in every family began to turn from dark to green; and this transformation of colours became the only topic of conversation in the village.

"Lotus says they will be warming the cloth tomorrow. I don't see how it can be done so soon."

"Taoist Huang has performed a service, during which the character he drew indicated that the price for leaves would reach four dollars per ten loads this year!"

Maid Four became worried as she found her three sheets of eggs still dark when she examined them in the light.

"Press them against you own breast," Ah Four suggested. "They may need more warmth."

Maid Four did not say a word. Old Tungpao, whose face now appeared downcast and tearful, too, did not utter a sound.

The eggs were placed well on her chest. She slept with them at night, daring not to move nor stir even though the sheets made her itch. After a few days she began to feel something crawling against her skin. The movement made her ticklish, but it was a fearful sensation, as fearful as before the birth of her first child.

The "nursery" for the silkworms had been prepared a few days before. On the second day of "warming" Old Tungpao carefully smeared a garlic with mud, and nervously laid it down in a corner of the room. It was believed that if the garlic sent out many sprouts on the day the silkworms were hatched, the harvest would be good.

Every family in the village was doing the same thing. A state of emergency was virtually imposed on everybody. The village was empty. Not a sound could be heard in the open. People avoided one another. When they did meet by chance they only exchanged their greetings with the lowest voice possible, for fear that the bashful and sensitive goddess, who protected the silkworms, might be disturbed. It was a holy season.

The atmosphere grew more and more tense as the "black ladies" began to emerge from the eggs—a dangerous occasion, when it was most inauspicious to gather the silkworms. Fortunately Old Tungpao's first grubs appeared just a day before, and therefore he was able to avoid the disaster by transferring the cloths from Maid Four's warm breast to the "nursery." But when he stole a glance at the garlic his heart almost stopped beating, for only two cloves had sprouted. He did not dare to take another look. All he could do was to pray for the best.

The day for harvesting the "black ladies" finally came. Old Tungpao piously burned several red candles and set them before the kitchen god, who was also the household god. Ah Four and Toto went to the field to gather wild flowers, while Siaopao cut up lampwick grass into fine shreds for making the mixture to be used in gathering the newly hatched worms. When the sun reached zenith, Maid Four rushed to the "nursery" with a pair of goose feathers and paper flowers on her hair, ornaments which were dedicated to the silkworms. Old Tungpao followed her in with a steelyard beam and Ah Four with the prepared mixture of wild flowers and lampwick grass. Maid Four separated the two layers of cloth and spread on them the prepared mixture. Then she laid the cloths across the beam, held carefully by Old Tungpao between both hands, and, with the goose feathers, brushed off the "black ladies" down on to the papered baskets. The last cloth contained foreign eggs. So the foreign "black ladies" were brushed off to a separate basket. When all was done, Maid Four stuck the paper flower and feathers on the edge of one of the baskets.

The ceremony was holy, and as old as China. Beginning from this day a battle against bad weather and bad luck started. And this battle had to be continued for a whole month.

The silkworms, crawling about in the baskets, looked exceptionally healthy. Their colour was promising as it should be. Both Maid Four and Old Tungpao heaved sighs of relief. But whenever the latter stole a glance at the head of the garlic in the corner he turned pale. There were only two sprouts visible. Could it be that it was going to be like last year again?

But the forecast of the garlic proved unreliable this year. In spite of the cold spell that came untimely round Spring Festival, Old Tungpao's silkworms kept fine and looked very prosperous. A tension, a kind of cheerful tension, reigned over the whole village. One could often hear peals of laughter. Even the murmuring brook seemed to be laughing now. But Lotus was an exception. She looked sullen. And one evening while other people were feeding their "precious things" with fresh leaves, the ever-silent Kenson quietly emptied three basketfuls of dead silkworms into the stream.

This incident put all the villagers on the alert against Lotus. They avoided her and her husband. It seemed that a word with her would catch her family's misfortune for the speaker. Old Tungpao grew so nervous that he even threatened his son Toto with such words: "If you talk with that woman again, I'll accuse you at the court of being unfilial." Even Siaopao received the warning that he should not cross Lotus's threshold, nor look at her.

Old Tungpao's silkworms grew up steadily—and fattened as they grew up. After the "great sleep" they weighed nearly a hundred pounds. For two days and two nights the whole family, including Siaopao, did not sleep a wink. These "precious things" were indeed in rare condition. In Old Tungpao's memory such things has happened twice in his life—the first time when he was married and the second time when Ah Four was born. The worms consumed seven loads of leaves a day. As things stood, no one could forecast how much more they would eat before they started weaving cocoons on the mountain.

"It seems impossible to borrow money from Chen, the young squire," Old Tungpao said to Ah Four. "Perhaps we have to ask your father-in-law to try his landlord again."

"We can still gather about ten loads from our trees, which would be enough for another day," muttered Ah Four, hardly able to open his eyes, the lids being as heavy as lead.

Old Tungpao became impatient and said angrily, "What rubbish! Not counting tomorrow, there are still three more days to feed them. Thirty more loads of leaves, I mean."

The price of leaves had gone up to four dollars a load as predicted by the fortune teller, and as the worms were waiting for their food, there was no choice for Old Tungpao but to mortgage the last piece of mulberry land to a money lender for the required sum of one hundred and twenty dollars. However, the old man took comfort in the thought that he would harvest at least five hundred pounds of cocoons and that at fifty dollars a hundred pound, he would get more than enough to clear up the debts.

When the first consignment arrived, the "precious things" had already been without food for half an hour. It was really heart-breaking to see them raise their heads and feel this way and that for leaves. As soon as the food was spread over the baskets there immediately arose a crunching sound, which hypnotised the whole family into a kind of ecstatic stupor. The sound, besides, stilled all other noises in the room. But soon a general silence prevailed, and all the baskets were empty again. This woke the family up. They covered the beds again with fresh leaves, and then remained standing, watching attentively the worms eat. This was really the crisis in the struggle. In two days' time the "precious things" would be ready to "climb up the mountain" and perform their appointed task.

One night Toto was on duty to keep the first watch in the silkworm room so that Ah Four and others could have a rest before they came on duty for the next half of the night. It was a moonlit night, rather chilly. A fire had been made in the room to keep the worms warm. After a fresh layer of leaves had been spread in the beds it was near midnight. Toto felt quite tired and drowsy. In a minute he dozed off. But immediately a squeaking sound came to disturb him. He opened his eyes unwillingly, but nothing appeared. His drooping eyelids closed up again. Before he could fall asleep, however, another rustle amidst the crunching of leaves woke him up. He started with fright and was just in time to catch the sight of a human figure escaping through the door, which had been pushed ajar. He jumped out like a madman, thinking that the intruder must be a thief. The moonlight was clear enough to

show a shadow fleeing in the direction of the brook. Toto sped after it and in a moment had flung it on the ground.

"Toto! I will bear you no grudge even though you beat me to death, only if you don't tell anybody."

It was Lotus's voice. A cold spell ran down Toto's spine and goose flesh covered his body. His eyes met Lotus's which appeared now even smaller than pig's on her unusually flat face.

"What have you stolen?" Toto asked.

"Some of your precious things."

"Where have you left them?"

"I've thrown them into the brook."

Toto's face suddenly grew harsh. He realised that she came in order to influence his silkworms with her bad luck.

"How wicked you are! What have we done to you?"

"What have you done? A Lot! It is not your business whether our silkworms keep well or not. Why should you people keep away from me all the time as though I were no human being?"

And she struggled to stand up. Her face looked ghastly with hatred. Toto stared at her stupidly for a moment and then said, "I am not going to beat you. Get away!"

Toto went back to the room, no longer in the mood to sleep. The silkworms were devouring the leaves as though possessed. Except for the cheerful crunching sound nothing more happened. Towards dawn Old Tungpao and Maid Four came to relieve Toto. The old man examined the "precious things" with a fatherly smile. They were strong and voracious. Then he picked up one and held it by the light. It had already turned from white to pink, although not quite translucent yet. His old heart overflowed with happiness and Maid Four nearly shouted out for joy.

Next morning, however, when Maid Four went to the brook to draw water, some unpleasant news was whispered to her ear by Lupao. The girl said:

"Last night, shortly after midnight I saw that woman come out of your house, followed by Toto. They stood close together for a good while and murmured a lot of things. Maid Four, how can you let such things happen in your house?"

Maid Four turned pale for a moment. Then she rushed home and told Old Tungpao the story. The old man stamped on the ground angrily and summoned Toto for interrogation. The young man denied the story furiously and argued and Lupao might simply be dreaming. Then Old Tungpao went to Lungpao for confirmation. The girl insisted that she had had no dream last night. However, one thing was sure, Old Tungpao thought to himself, the silkworms looked very well. But no! another thought came to his mind, the garlic had not sent forth so far any more sprouts. Unconsciously he clasped his hands and prayed that the witch did not come into the room but simply flirted with Toto under the eaves.

The obsession of bad luck gradually took root in his old heart. Everything might go properly with the silkworms all the way as it should be. But who could tell, he reasoned further, that at the last minute the worms would not suddenly turn stiff? The more he thought the more he became afraid, afraid that the thoughts might come true.

At last the "precious things" mounted the trees to perform their long awaited task. But Old Tungpao's family was exhausted of the last grain of rice and the last penny. Yet no one was tired. The old man and his daughter-in-law, bowing low, wound their way to and fro among the trees, now stopping here, now listening there if there was any rustling sound, which was the prelude to spinning. Sometimes they crouched below a tree and stared upwards. Occasionally a drop or two of water would fall on them, and their faces immediately lit up. For it was commonly believed in Old Tungpao's district that before a silkworm was going to build up a chamber of silk it would pass a few drops of water, and that water would look yellowish.

On the third day the fire in the room was withdrawn. Maid Four could no longer endure the suspense. Eagerly she lifted the reed screen that had shaded the bashful silkworms on the "mountain" from view. What a surprise to her! She had never seen such a crop in her life. The whole "mountain" was covered with a mass of snow white cocoons. The last worry was now gone. Smiles radiated on the faces of the

whole family. The sleepless nights were not spent in vain, and the leaves at four dollars per ten loads had produced results. The silkworms were fair and Heaven had an eye on the honest growers.

The same joy rose everywhere in the village. The Goddess of Silkworms had really been kind to them. Every family on the average gathered at least seventy or eighty per cent. crop. As for Old Tungpao's family, they expected a hundred and twenty or even a hundred and thirty per cent. crop.

Women and children appeared noisily on the village square again. They talked with impressive gestures and facial expressions, of their struggle sin the past month, of their fears and their happiness. But their voices were hoarse, their eyes sunken and their faces pale. Still, their spirits were high. They dreamed of the piles of silver dollars which the cocoons would fetch them. They thought of redeeming their winter and summer garments from the pawnshop. They even watered at the mouth in anticipation of a delicious feast at the Dragon Boat Festival.

The harvesting of cocoons followed the next day in Old Tungpao's family. Many friends and relatives came to greet the occasion with presents and good wishes. Chang Tsai-fa, Maid Four's father, made himself an especially welcome visitor by bringing with him cakes, fruits, and salt fish. In face of these rare presents Siaopao became as cheerful as a pup frolicking in the first snow.

"Tungpao, are you going to sell your cocoons or reel them yourself?" asked Chang, as the two sat under a willow tree along the brook.

"Naturally I'll sell them," Old Tungpao replied, paying little attention to the question.

"But who is going to buy?" Chang said, standing up and pointing in the direction of the buildings used by the buyers. "The factories are not going to work because of the impending war with the Japanese."

Old Tungpao nearly burst forth laughing. How could the factories, as numerous as the open latrines in the fields, remain idle? Besides, it had been rumoured that the Government was

trying to seek peace with the Japanese by diplomatic means in order to suppress the communists. Chang, however, was not in the mood to argue, but only reminded Old Tungpao of the loans, which he had secured for him, and which were about due. This reminder made Old Tungpao realistic. In order to make sure he sneaked to the buyers' buildings on the other side of the river in the afternoon. True, they were closed. Dejectedly he went back home. The piles of snowwhite cocoons were smiling at him. Couldn't they find a market—he asked himself.

The atmosphere in the village, however, gradually changed from one of joy and laughter to one of despair. News began to come through that none of the factories would open for the season. Instead of the scouts of cocoon buyers who in other years used to bustle up and down the village at this time of the year, creditors and tax collectors crowded in the square, shouting at Tungpao and others and threatening them with imprisonment. And yet none of them would accept cocoons in payment.

Curses and sighs of despair overflowed the whole village. None had ever dreamed that such a good crop of cocoons should increase their difficulties. However, it was no use to complain that the world had changed from bad to worse. The cocoons would not keep. If they could not sell them to factories it was necessary to reel them at home. Already some of the families had got out their long neglected spinning wheels.

"Let's reel the silk ourselves," Old Tungpao said to his daughter-in-law Maid Four, "as our fathers did and their fathers before them. Selling cocoons to factories is a trap set by the foreign devils."

"We have over five hundred pounds of cocoons," Maid Four retorted. "How many spinning wheels do you plan to use?"

Maid Four was right. To spin the silk at home required more helping hands, to hire which would mean additional loans. Ah Four agreed with his wife. Toto was critical, saying;—

"Had you listened to me when I told you not to hatch more

than one sheet of eggs, we would have had enough leaves from our own land."

Old Tungpao could not refute this statement.

At last a ray of hope came to them. Taoist Huang brought news from somewhere that the factories at Wusi were still buying cocoons as usual. The place was about a hundred miles away. To go on foot would take them about three days. But there seemed to be no choice. The cocoons had to be sold in order to meet the demands of the creditors. After a family conference it was decided to borrow a boat for the journey.

Five days later they returned with one basket of cocoons still unsold. Taking advantage of the general depression in the trade, the buyers were particularly severe in their selection, and paid thirty dollars for a hundred pounds of cocoons from foreign eggs and only twelve dollars for the native variety. They rejected a hundred pounds of Old Tungpao's ware, although the whole lot was of finest quality. He got altogether one hundred and eleven dollars. With the travelling expenses deducted, only one hundred dollars were left, a sum which could not even pay the debts they had contracted in order to buy leaves. Old Tungpao was so distressed that he fell seriously ill on the way and had to be carried home.

Maid Four borrowed a spinning wheel from Lupao 's family and set herself to work on the rejected cocoons. The job took her six full days. On the sixth day the rice in the jar came to an end. So Ah Four had to hurry to the town with the silk. But there was no market for it; even the pawnshop would not accept. Threatened by the possibility of starvation, Ah Four went to the pawnbroker to whom he had pawned a picul of rice before the Spring Festival. After a great deal of begging and flattering he finally succeeded in redeeming it with the silk.

And so it was that because of the general prosperity of the spring silkworms, Old Tungpao and his fellow villagers got deeper into debt. And because he had hatched three sheets of eggs and reaped an exceptionally good harvest, he lost all his mulberry land, and got a debt of thirty dollars, to say nothing of a whole month of short rations and loss of sleep!

AUTUMN HARVEST

OLD Tungpao gradually recovered towards the end of the fifth month of the old lunar year, having taken no medicine except the cure—all which his daughter-in-law, Maid Four, procured at the temple of the Earth God. Relying only on his old bones and nerves, which, as he said "grew tougher and stronger with age," he slowly conquered his sickness.

But even on the day he left his bed, he felt something was wrong. His legs were as unsteady as if he was trying to walk on a heap of cotton, and worse still, he could not straighten his back. "A few days in bed have rusted my bones," he thought incredulously.

When he went in to wash, he had to sigh again. Were these mirrored features in the water his? Rocky cheeks, staring eyes, tousled hair, stringy neck—he looked half a ghost. He peered and peered into the basin, and in the end could not help dropping a few tears.

They were the first the stubborn old fellow had shed in decades. He who had made a fortune, through half a century of hard work, cared for only two things, God and good health. He had been used to saying that no matter how capable and canny a man was, he could never get a fortune without the blessing of God; and without good health he could not make a living, even though doubly blessed. Incidentally, Old Tungpao worshipped the God of Fortune. On every first and fifteenth day of the month he would knock several resounding kotows at the Hall of Fortune, a shabby old brick building by the bridge outside the village. In this way the years had once passed as evenly as single days. But now, with his body half a ghost's and his household bankrupt by their failure with last spring's silkworms, he was seized with hopeless melancholy.

"God of Mercy!" he croaked faintly. "How is it that I am completely changed after a month in bed?"

He stared in bewilderment at Maid Four who was squatting before the stove blowing the fire.

Maid Four did not answer. With her hair falling over her face, she blew into the stove so fiercely that it seemed she was going to plunge her head in. White smoke filled the room and began slipping out through the holes in walls, but still the green straw did not burst into flame.

In rushed Siaopao, now aged twelve. He choked in the smoke, but through his coughing began to howl that he was hungry. Old Tungpao coughed even more painfully. He swung his rickety legs towards the stove to help his daughter-in-law, when suddenly the fire flamed up. The straw crackled in the blaze. Maid Four thrust in some dry mulberry roots and stood up, her face covered with tears. Whether they were due to the smoke or had some other cause, the usually stolid, hard-working woman was weeping like her father-in-law.

The two stared at each other in silence, the fire crackling gloriously between them. In the ruddy light Maid Four's face looked flushed, but the glow could not hide her thinness as it did her pallor. Leaning against his mother's legs, Siaopao, too, looked bony as a monkey. When Old Tungpao was lying in his dark room he had sometimes run his old fingers over the child and he knew that he was little more than skin and bones. But now his eyes told him so much more that he almost wept again.

"Ayah, Siaopao, Little Treasure—what ails you? Seems you've caught tuberculosis." Old Tungpao's gaze fixed on Maid Four. The woman silently pulled the sleeve of her ragged coat to her eyes.

Then the wooden lid of the rice pot clattered as steam lifted it and billowed out into the room. Siaopao edged over to the stove and sniffed the hot vapour.

"Why do you always cook pumpkins instead of rice? I like rice—white rice—I want some!"

Maid Four pulled a mulberry branch out of the firewood and raised it over the child. Then she struck the ground instead, broke the stick and pushed it into the stove. She turned her face away.

"Don't cry, Siaopao!" Old Tungpao babbled, his fingers trembled on the child's head. I'll give you rice to eat as soon as your father comes back. He's gone to your mother's father for loan. We'll buy rice with the money and cook some for you."

This was the truth. The absence of Siaopao 's father was for the single purpose of borrowing money at no matter what rate of interest. Old Tungpao had resolved to ask his son's father-in-law Chang Tsai-fa to act as middleman in procuring a loan of fifty dollars from "Lord" Wu, the professional money-lender of the district.

But Siaopao regarded his grandfather's words as lies. It was already half a month since the old one began talking of borrowing to buy rice, and every day they still ate pumpkins and yams. True, Siaopao liked yams, yams with salt, but as his stomach quacked and his eyes filled with tears, he thought his grandfather and father and mother were hard-hearted creatures; he preferred his uncle Toto, who sometimes brought him sweet bread that filled the stomach and even made his little mouth taste good and smell sweet. But, as Siaopao knew very well, Toto had not been home now for three days.

The pumpkins in the pot hissed and steamed. Lifting the lid, Old Tungpao found the water had boiled away and the food was scorched into dry flakes on the sides of the pot. Without thinking, he began to rail at his daughter-in-law for her lack of thrift. In the spring, when the whole family had been busy with the silkworms, they lived on nothing but pumpkins; mixed with plenty of water, two pumpkins had then fed the whole family of five mouths for a day. He tottered to the water jar and scooped up a ladleful, but before he could add it to the stew, Maid Four rushed to the stove, shovelled the dry layers of pumpkin into bowls, crying harshly:

"Don't put water in, please! Only three of us are eating today. Let's finish it off. Siaopao's father will surely bring rice to-night." Then her voice changed entirely: "Siaopao, do eat your pumpkin this time. It's good. Eat a little ..."

Tso-tsa-tsa. Maid Four finished emptying the food from the pot with the cooking shovel. Old Tungpao was so angry

that he could not speak. He staggered away with a bowl in his hand and took a rest on the wooden sill under the eaves. Swallowing the scorched slice he felt himself as wrongly used as the pumpkin.

The brilliant sunlight on the threshing floor dazzled his weak eyes, but in the distance he could see the small river flowing white as milk in the reflected glare. The whole sun-baked countryside was silent; not a human shadow moved, nor that of a dog, nor a child. In the past, the women folk used to wash clothes or cooking utensils in the river at noon, while the men would idle and smoke their pipes among the trees, digesting their mid-day meal. Old people like Tungpao would sit on their door-steps, eating or chatting. But now, with the sun shining warmly and the river flowing placidly as usual, the village was emptier than a barren hillside. Old Tungpao had not been absent from his threshold long, yet the place was utterly changed. He could as little recognise it as he could recognise Siaopao, the skeleton.

As he stared at the sunny river and the desolate houses scattered beside it, his jaws munched mechanically on, even after the pumpkin was finished. He did not try to guess why the villagers had disappeared. He had only one thought; the world had overturned during his brief illness. He had first discovered the change in himself, then in Maid Four and Siaopao, lastly in his village. He laid down his bowl and plunged his confused head into his hands.

He recalled the tales told by his father and grandfather who had been in the camp of the "long-haired" rebels and then escaped. They said that a village visited by the outlaws became a heap of ruins where no man could live and no dogs barked. For a while this last spring, when the Japanese invaded Shanghai, the villagers had said that the "long-hairs" would come again ; but soon it was rumoured that a peace had been reached between the government and the foreign "long-hairs." Old Tungpao had not heard anything of the arrival of outlaws while he was in bed, but the village certainly looked as if the "long-hairs" had been there. His grandfather said they did not massacre the villagers but convened them, so the

villages were left completely empty. He remembered hearing that "long-hairs" were at war somewhere in the country, but all the people here were "good citizens."

Then Old Tungpao heard footsteps scurrying past. Raising his head, he saw a pair of staring eyes, round as a pig's, set in a large flat face. They belonged to his neighbour Li Kenson's wife, the exotic Lotus. She too, had been reduced to skin and bones, but looked rather charming in her thinness. Her round eyes, full of sympathy and surprise, were quite agreeable. But immediately Tungpao recalled his old hatred for her, born during the silkworm season, and thinking it bad luck to meet such a "Tigress Star" on his first venture outside, he looked down again and spat vindictively on the ground.

When at last he raised his head Lotus had gone and the sunlight was already creeping up his toes. He reflected that by now the daily junk should have started home from town and his son Ah Four, having secured the loan or even the rice, might be on board. Slowly his jaws munched as if he were eating. Really, he hated pumpkin paste too. Just the thought of steamed rice made his mouth water.

"Siaopao, Siaopao! Come here! Let your grandfather have a look at you."

Thinking of food, he automatically remembered his hungry grandchild, and his cry was the first healthy-sounding noise he had made since his illness. He stared at the sky for a moment, then called again. Unexpectedly Siaopao appeared from Lotus's house, with a round object clutched in his hand. The monkey-child leapt at Tungpao, crying " Grandpa, look, a baked cake!" And he hastily stuffed it into his mouth.

Smiling painfully, Old Tungpao involuntarily swallowed a mouthful of saliva.

"Who gave you that—that cake?" he asked in a small voice.

"Lo-lo!"

His little mouth stuffed, Siaopao could hardly speak, but already Old Tungpao understood enough. His mind was whirling. What shame that Siaopao should take food from a family enemy! And where was Divine Justice that Lotus

should have baked cake while honest folk must live on pumkins? Gulping the cake, Little Treasure cried happily:—

"Grandpa, Lotus gave it to me! She's good. She's a cake!"

"Get off!"

Old Tungpao's pale face reddened dangerously. He lifted his hand to strike, but the child rattled on:—

"She has more, plenty of them! She got them from town. And she's going back to get rice, white rice!"

Old Tungpao rose suddenly, trembling. He had not tasted rice for more than a fortnight and he hated all who had any, particularly Lotus whom he had despised long before. Now his face turned grey and he shouted hoarsely:

"It must be robbery! I'd like to see such people beheaded in public!"

Even as he swore, his heart hurried at the thought that Lotus might hear and attack him in her turn. It was no joke to call her a thief. But luckily Lotus did not appear and Siaopao answered:

"That's not fair, Grandpa! Lotus is good. She gave me a baked cake to eat!"

Old Tungpao reached for a stick that was lying near, and Siaopao ran back into Lotus's house. Old Tungpao rose to chase him but before he was properly on his feet he felt faint in his head and weak in his legs and fell on the ground, his stick bouncing away. Just then a man came out on the threshing floor and began to amble over the log bridge, calling:

"Good luck! Good luck! At last you're out, Old Tungpao!"

Though Old Tungpao had black patches before his eyes, he recognised the voice as Taoist Huang's. Instantly his spirits lifted. They were good friends; the Taoist was the one who had most frequently come to see him while he was in bed. The villagers called them a pair of "eccentric monsters": Old Tungpao because he was such a stubborn old fellow, considering everything "foreign" an affront to his ancestors for seven generations back; Taoist Huang because he had an elegant and obstruse way of speaking, like chanting of Taoist

priests which he had picked up from old calendars and pawn-shop tickets. For instance, he called coins "Brother Square-Hole," addressed another's wife as "Your Precious Lady" and his men friends as "Your High Throne" and so on. The villagers had given him an adequate name: "Beggar Priest," but Old Tungpao enjoyed his elegant language and frequently told his son, Ah Four, that it was a pity such a learned man should have to be a farmer.

Now he poured his bosomful of complaints on his friend.

"Taoist! Has the world turned upside down? The village looks as if it has been raided by 'Long-hairs' and to my surprise Lotus, the Tigress Star, has baked cakes. My ravenous Siaopao has just accepted one from her!"[f]

Old Tungpao picked up the stick and beat the ground revengefully. His listener gradually assumed a pose and expression imitating the fortune-teller in town who styled himself "the real third generation heir of a divine astrologer." Shrugging elaborately, he answered:

"There will soon be a change in the world, Brother Tungpao. Don't you know why the villagers have disappeared? . . . My fathers! They've gone to rob rich men's barns! The villagers in Chi Chia Pang started this kind of riot and some rascals in our village are copying them. I regret to say that your younger son Toto is with them . . . but, brother Tungpao, take care. Don't fail! . . . Do you pretend you didn't know about Toto's business? . . . Ah, I talk too much!"

With an idiotic look of alarm, Old Tungpao had leaped up, then he fell back heavily like a paralytic. Confiscating rich men's rice! His heart raced in a confusion of joy and shock. Joy because his guess about Lotus's cakes was right, and shock because of the news about Toto. Now it was quite possible that part of God's punishment would fall on himself.

"My loose tongue upsets you: may it be damned. And really I hear it will not matter much this time as the authorities will not take the affair seriously. Of course you had better warn your valuable younger son when he returns."

"Yes, to tell the truth, I used to wonder if the little beast weren't the reincarnation of a 'long-hair.' His way of life

has been quite abnormal. I knew he might ruin my whole household, and now perhaps he has—unless he never comes back! But if he does come back, I'll bury him alive! Thank you, Taoist, thanks for telling me. I 've been kept in the dark."

Old Tungpao maundered on. Closing his eyes, he seemed to see the unredeemed ghost of a "long-hair."

"I'm not worth your thanks, not worth it." Taoist Huang was really upset at the effect of this news. "Now I have some little things to attend to in my poor house, so goodbye, goodbye. Care for your precious body!"

The Taoist took to his heels, like a fugitive, leaving Old Tungpao musing idiotically. The sun blazed on his grey head but he did not feel the heat; he thought of the stories about "long-hairs" told by his father and grandfather. He recalled the great peasant rebellion in the time of the Emperor Kwang Hsi, which he had seen himself; instantly images of bloody heads with severed necks floated through his mind.

At length his old logic reached a conclusion for him: "If rebellion were proper, the 'long-hairs' would have succeeded." But still haunted by his imaginings and deeply shaken as he was by his recent fall from the position of self-sufficient and independent peasant, he thought with growing fear and distress of the changes that had taken place during his illness.

Towards sunset, Old Tungpao's eldest son, Ah Four, returned. He had failed to secure a loan but he did bring thirty pounds of rice.

"Lord Wu said he had no money," he told his father. As he went on with his story his voice and expression became more and more gloomy. "His face was terrible when I asked for some. He said that he could only lend us this thirty pounds of rice as a personal favour. But now that we've borrowed it, we must return him fifty pounds after the autumn harvest. A personal favour! No wonder the rich get richer; he is hoarding thousands of pounds of rice in his shop. No wonder we country people have nothing to cook."

Setting the rice in a wooden tub, Ah Four slipped out to the back yard where his wife was splitting firewood by the pigsty and they began whispering rapidly. Old Tungpao glared at

the secretive couple, then at the rice tub. He saw that Ah Four was uneasy and he began to have doubt about the origin of the rice, but he dared not question. He had just finished a bitter quarrel with Maid Four about his younger son, Toto. In the end his daughter-in-law had called him an old goose and cried scornfully:

41 Well, say Toto is 'unfilial' and bury him alive; the Lords in town will reward you with a golden egg."

Vainly he had tried to improve the view-point of the suffering and even starving woman with a quotation from the sages: "A man must maintain correct principles, to no matter what poverty he is reduced." This was an ancient maxim, but as Maid Four promptly pointed out, it could not fill stomachs as well as pumpkin, let alone rice.

After the quarrel, Old Tungpao was most depressed, for he knew that no matter how "correct and obedient" his eldest son was, he had a "soft ear" and could not withstand the persuasions of such a wife. And now there they were by the pigsty, whispering like conspirators! Old Tungpao's gums itched with helpless rage. Then as he glared at the pair, his thoughts suddenly shifted to the shed they stood by. He had built it with his own hands six years before; the wood then cost more than ten dollars. But it had stood empty last year, and it was not likely they would have money to buy hogs this year either. Before he built it, Old Tungpao had asked the advice of a very well-regarded geomancer, and he was still surprised that the shed had turned out such an inauspicious venture.

After a few mumbled complaints about bad luck, the old man staggered towards the sty, croaking:

"Ah Four! I've been told that Lord Chen needs some logs. Let's pull down this unlucky sty tomorrow. What's the use of a sty when we have no money for hogs?"

The couple turned at his approach. In the dim light Maid Four's face looked excited, her cheeks were glowing. But at his suggestion she pursed her mouth.

"How much could we get for the logs? This dirty wood—Lord Chen might not accept it,"

1' He will take it for the sake of my old face. We have been

on good terms with the Chen family for three generations. "Lord" Chen will accept our wood."

Old Tungpao shouted as if he expected contradiction. All the glorious past was blooming again before his eyes. That his grandfather had shared suffering and danger with "Lord" Chen's grandfather among the "long-hairs" did give weight to his word among the Chens; he had always been given special treatment by the family. Sometimes, for instance, the elder Chen addressed him as "brother Tungpao." These great occasions always engendered a new supply of "correct and obedient" thoughts in the old man.

Maid Four walked away, her lips bunched sceptically.

"Ah Four, tell me what Toto has really done," the old man asked. "You didn't think I have heard about it?"

A dingy crow settled on the roof above and croaked hoarsely. Ah Four carefully selected a stone, threw it at the bird, spat on the ground, and shook his head. What could he say? His father spoke in one way, his wife in another, and his younger brother in a third. To him all three opinions seemed right. He could not decide which to share. He remained silent.

"Such business means beheading," Old Tungpao shouted, "The beheading of whole families! I've seen many such cases."

"How many people?" Ah Four began. Then seeing the veins in his father's forehead swelling with anger, he went on quickly: "Never mind that. Toto only joined them for fun, and to-day they didn't go to town anyway."

"Nonsense!" Old Tungpao stormed. "Taoist Huang told me the whole story." The old man had already decided that his eldest son and his daughter-in-law were in the plot too.

"Taoist Huang has confessed things," Ah Four protested "To-day they only went to the town of Yang Chia Chao for fun, the women disguised as market-goers, the men as boatmen. Toto was helping row one of the boats. That's the entire truth."

But there were two important things Ah Four did not say, namely that Toto was the leader of the crowd in the village,

and that Ah Four and his wife had agreed to join them to "row a boat" tomorrow if Ah Four failed to secure a loan to-day.

Old Tungpao peered doubtfully at his son, and in silence the two stayed on by the pigsty as the evening closed in, cool and blue. Smoke blew from the chimney of the thatched house before them. On the threshold Siaopao was playing and humming a song. Then Maid Four's voice called from inside: "Siaopao's Papa! Siaopao's Papa!" Ah Four hurried away from his father with relief, turning at the door to call back with an effort at cheerfulness:

"Anyway we have thirty pounds of rice, enough for a week. When Toto comes back tonight, we can tell him not to help those fellows row the boat."

"This pigsty has to be pulled down," replied the obstinate old man. "It's a waste to let the wood spoil, out in the weather."

What he wanted to say was that as long as there was anything left to resort to, it was foolish to go against the law. He stayed alone in the darkening yard, tapping the logs of the sty like a master-carpenter. Only after the night had completely arrived did he totter into the house.

Now many voices and steps were heard on the threshing floor. Siaopao slipped away like a mouse to find his uncle Toto. Ah Four followed his son. Maid Four hastily threw a bunch of mulberry twigs into the stove and also rushed out for news. In the kitchen a thin wisp of steam slipped over the lid of the cooking pot. Now it really smelt of rice. Sniffing, Old Tungpao had to swallow the moisture which welled up in his mouth. His stomach too, rumbled with hunger, but his head was busy with other matters. He was scheming how to give a lesson to his son Toto, and so he was planning how to manage the work to come in the fields. At this time in this village Old Tungpao was certainly the only one who was thinking of the field-work to be undertaken in the following month.

But Toto was not among those who returned. Lu Fuchin from the village beyond the river did not come back either. It

was said on the threshing-floor that they were staying with the peasants at Yang Chia Chao, to persuade the people of that village to go into town also. This news was circulated all over the village, where it caused great excitement, but it was carefully kept from Old Tungpao, as everyone knew the old man's temper.

Over the evening meal he seemed to guess what was up from his older son's face. "It's good he hasn't come back," he cursed. '*I won't have such a son!"

Eyes downcast, Ah Four did not venture a reply. Maid Four glanced sideways at the old man and snorted.

Old Tungpao could not sleep all that night. The moment he closed his eyes, annoying or terrifying pictures reeled through his mind; he lunged about in bed as if he were being beaten. Yet he was desperately tired, his eye-lids seemed to weigh thousands of pounds. Several times as he was dozing off he thought he heard Ah Four whisper to Maid Four. Then, long after midnight, he leaped up like an epileptic when for certain, he heard his son cry out:

"Toto, Toto! Papa says he will bury you alive . . . and Toto! Don't think this is your only danger. The others will throw all the blame on their leader. They'll simply fade away."

Ah Four was calling in a nightmare, but Old Tungpao heard his words distinctly and goose-flesh covered his whole body. He sat up in the darkness and whispered in a frightened voice:

"Ah Four!"

No answer. Siaopao laughed in the middle of some pleasant dream. Maid Four stirred and sleepily cursed the child. Then the squeak of bed boards, snores, and silence.

Sleep was impossible for Old Tungpao. He stared wide-eyed into the darkness, his mind in a confusion just as black. He thought of the "golden age" thirty years before, when his household had been prosperous. But nothing was left of that now, except a pile of old accounts. He thought of his family tradition of "correctness and obedience," so much praised by the elder" Lord" Chen. Even since his youth he had tried to be

"gentlemanly" in manners and appearance, like the town gentry; he had had "ambition" and "Principle." Providence was blind! He could not understand why it should have given him so criminal a son as Toto. Could it really be that the wandering souls of "long-hairs," dead these sixty years, were reincarnating in the youngest generation? He trembled and cold sweat sprang out on his wrinkled skin. Toto's ways were exactly like those of the " long-hairs "! He remembered the movement to do away with the landlords and country squires which spread through the countryside five years ago. At that time Toto used to strut all over the village with their "long-hair's" sword, a family heirloom smuggled out of the "long-hair's" headquarters by Tungpao's grandfather. The grandfather killed a sentry with the weapon in the course of his escape. Toto seemed to know and like the sword from his earliest childhood. Old Tungpao thought of all the stories he knew about the sword, and the more he thought the more frightened he became.

One thing Old Tungpao did not consider that night in his wildest fancies was that thirty families of peasants from Yang Chia Chao, following Toto and Lu Fuchin, were already marching through the dark morning fog in the direction of this village. His neighbours who had talked and dreamed of violent events all night were awake and alert, awaiting the arrival of their friends with the greatest expectations.

Gradually the pale morning light grew stronger over the village, filtering into the houses through the holes in their dilapidated walls. Sparrows fought on the threshing-floor, searching for old grains of rice. Beyond the river the only cock in the village, the property of Taoist Huang, saluted the coming of the day. Doodle-doo. Doodle-doo. Muffled by distance, its crowing sounded almost like the crying of a child.

Exhausted by his fears, Old Tungpao fell asleep and soon he seemed to see the gleaming"long-hair's" sword brandished before him. Then he saw a hand on the hilt, behind the hand a muscular arm, above the arm a round solid face with pitch-black eyebrows. It was Toto.

"Aya!" He gave a strangled shout and woke himself.

Angry and frightened, he got out of bed and saw that it was broad daylight. Maid Four was already cooking gruel on the clay cook-stove from which red flames shot into the chilly room. As Old Tungpao painfully dragged himself towards the warmth, he noticed a confused murmur of voices from the threshing floor outside. Suddenly the giant clanging of a gong sounded.

"Whose house has caught fire?" he cried as he stumbled towards the door.

But once outside, he immediately understood what was happening. The scene on the threshing-floor was exactly like one of the demonstrations he had seen during the hunger rebellions at the end of the Manchu Dynasty. A long line of villagers from Yang Chia Chao, men, women, and children of all ages were marching up. "Come on, neighbours, we march together!" they called to the people who were standing among the houses.

Then Old Tungpao reeled. Toto was marching at the head of the outlaws. It was he who beat the gong! Now he stepped away from the crowd and came towards his father. The old man trembled in every limb. He screamed into the face of his younger son:

[1]'Animal! I hope you hang!"

"Hanging is one kind of death and starvation is another," replied Toto good-humouredly. " Let's go, Ah Four. Where's Maid Four? We'll all go together."

Deaf with fury, Old Tungpao clenched his fist and hit at Toto's face. But Ah Four leapt from behind and held his father off.

"Listen, Toto, don't go with them. Yesterday I borrowed thirty pounds of rice. We have steamed rice to eat now."

Toto's thick eyebrows lifted in surprise, but before he could speak a stout fellow stepped up behind him. This was Lu Fuchin. Pulling Toto back, he laughed and said to Ah Four:

"You have thirty pounds of rice? Good! None of these people from Yang Chia Chao has rice for breakfast gruel. We'11 all share it."

Ah Four could not believe his ears. Were they going to

confiscate his little hoard of rice too? With a great hubbub of shouting and laughing, the people of Yang Chia Chao were crowding around his house. Beside him his father stood in the doorway shrieking. Then suddenly the old man threw up his hands and fell on the ground. Growling like a mad dog, Ah Four leaped on Lu Fuchin and tried to bite his neck. Lu held him off with both hands.

"Are you crazy, Ah Four? What does such a little rice matter? Listen to me, brother Four . . . Look at Toto, can't you? ..."

Ah Four whirled from Lu Fuchin and seized his brother around the shoulders.

"You're worse than a viper; snakes don't eat the grass around their own nests. But you bring strangers to eat the rice out of our house."

Old Tungpao sat on the ground, bitterly reviling his younger son. Toto could only answer in grunts. Lu Fuchin tried vainly to separate the brothers, then his sister Lupao, came up, and together they managed to pull Ah Four away.

"You can get rice on credit, Ah Four," Toto pouted. "But these others can't. Just because you have a little rice, you refuse to join them. Don't you realise that we'll all fail if we aren't together? And look, they don't want to eat your rice without return. You'll have your share too, if you join us and go into town."

Ah Four sat down in the doorway, his face as blank as a Buddha's. Rubbing the bitten spots on his own neck, Lu Fuchin came and patted his shoulder.

"We all settled this before, brother Four. Any rice in the village was to be shared among all of us, then we would go on to town. Don't blame me; we are all doing it."

"Even the 'long-hairs' were not so rude," screamed Old Tungpao, who no longer understood very well what was going on. With his eyes on the ground, he thought: "Good! you young people go on to town and take the judgment of the authorities. Then you will know that an old man is not so foolish."

Several members of the crowd squeezed into the house and

brought out the rice. Maid Four followed them with screams and oaths:

"The rice is ours to keep: Ours! Ours! You understand? You're taking from people like yourselves."

The men of Yang Chia Chao paid no attention to her, but carried the rice to the centre of the threshing-floor. Lupao pulled Maid Four around by the sleeve and shouted into her face:

"The rice is to be eaten by humans, can't you understand that? It will be food for all of us. Why should you have special rice, borrowed with bows and kowtows? You may have a way to get such rice, but these others have not. Can you go on eating your own while others are starving? . . . They certainly are going to eat your rice but they will return it when they come back from town. Now, stop screaming."

Ah Four, who had been staring at his hands, suddenly stood up and came towards his wife, saying ruefully:

" So all our efforts have come to nothing. We might as well join them. If the sky is going to fall, it will smash us all anyway."

Two big cooking pots were dragged to the threshing floor and the crowd set to work cleaning the rice for gruel. The fog thinned, and the reddish rays of the early sun gave a tinge of colour even to the faces of the starving. By the eastern bank of the little river, where the water was deepest, half a dozen empty brown junks came and moored. The boatmen on them chanted a cheerful tune.

Old Tungpao, stayed seated, silent and staring, as the crowd finished his rice and climbed aboard their boats. As the little fleet cast off and slid away, his eyes followed stupidly, peering for the four members of his own family. Toto, he saw, was rowing vigorously in one boat; Ah Four sat beside him, still sullen. Maid Four was chatting with Lupao, very friendly now, while Siaopao hung on Toto, trying to row too.

Old Tungpao suddenly leaped up and began to dart this way and that on the river bank, like a distracted hen. Why he should be goading his old feet up and down this foolish river he himself did not know; but he felt an unbearable chokin

near his heart and he needed someone to talk to. And the village was empty, not even a child was felt.

At last he saw someone stumbling along like a drunkard on the other side of the river. As he came near the log bridge he recognized Taoist Huang. Immediately he felt better and called out:

"Even the * Long-hairs' were not so bad, but you'll see all my years will count for something yet." He shook his fist at the disappearing boats." They will have their punishment in town."

Taoist Huang stopped dead gaping at Old Tungpao as if he could not recognize him. Then he burst into shrill cries.

"Justice is dead. Justice is dead. Brother Tungpao, they even killed my rooster and ate it.'"

"That's not much, after all. They can kill men as easily. Kill! Kill!"

Shouting and waving his arms, Old Tungpao scurried aimlessly away into the village, without another word to his friend.

That evening everyone returned safely, each man with five pounds of rice. Old Tungpao was shaken. He could not help thinking that the "Lords" in town had not been "lordly" enough. How was it that at the arrival of a hundred shabby villagers they had immediately opened "negotiations" and granted five pounds of rice to each man? If the lords were such weaklings, Old Tungpao thought with shame, this really was an age of dogs.

The movement to confiscate hoarded rice spread rapidly. In towns for two hundred li around, public robberies of rice by hungry farmers became a daily occurrence. The landlords and gentry modified their "benevolent" attitude and began to speak seriously of preserving "social order." The Magistrates put up notices—in six-syllabled rhymed lines—proclaiming that unofficial confiscation and consumption of rice stores were forbidden. All demands were to be made through " strictly legal" channels. At the same time, the "impartial" town gentlemen and country squires secretly advised the rice merchants and pawn-shop owners to reduce their margin of profit a little, in view of the difficulties of the poor.

But before any concrete measures could be worked out by such personages, the peasants reached the edge of starvation. The six-syllabled ryhmed notices were of little help. Even the assurances offered by the village leaders at the suggestion of the town gentry, proved a failure. The movement for the confiscation of rice spread farther and became more serious. The crowds were no longer scatterings of two or three hundred people, but masses of over a thousand. And no longer did they limit their actions to country towns; they began to form expeditions to the cities themselves.

In one prosperous city about sixty li from Old Tungpao's village, an armed battle between the peasants and the gendarmes resulted in the capture of several dozen farmers. On the next day the city was encircled by an army of hungry peasants. Consequently the city-fathers took "benevolent measures." Three "graces" were announced. (1) The peasants could borrow rice from the merchants on credit, the same amount to be returned after the autumn harvest, with one more picul as interest. (2) The pawn-shops would give credit without interest. (3) The chamber of commerce would devote a hundred and fifty piculs of rice for outright relief.

After this incident, detachments of the "Peace Maintenance Corps" came to stay in every important village, to maintain "social order." Under their influence and by other "benevolent" measures the confiscation of rice was gradually controlled. But by this time, the sixth month of the lunar year was almost over, anyway; all men hungry or not, were kept desperately busy in the rice fields.

Because of the confiscations, Old Tungpao's family had eaten two meals of gruel and one of steamed rice every day for weeks. And except for the thirty pounds which had been eaten by the people from Yang Chia Chao but must be paid by Old Tungpao, the family had not contracted any new debts. But now it was time to farm again, and to Ah Four, that meant nothing but sinking deeper in debt.

Old Tungpao noticed the lethargy of his son and daughter-in-law, and it made him furious. The old man's prestige had fallen off during the past few months, but now the question was

farming, not confiscating rice. Old Tungpao still thought himself wise in this matter, perfectly able to lead his family out of their difficulty. Every day he boasted to the others of his old strength in the fields. He told them again and again how busily he had worked the patches in his youth, how stubbornly he and his father had built their family into a well-to-do one.

"Tomorrow or day after tomorrow we must plant our rice. What's the matter with you, Ah Four? You know it's time you should arrange for the fertilizer."

"There is still a package of fertilizing powder left from last year," was Ah Four's half-hearted answer.

Old Tungpao stared resentfully at his son.

"Fertilizing powder? You mean poison. That powder was invented by foreigners to poison our rice. Soya-bean cakes are the fertilizer taught by our fathers."

"But where can we get money to buy bean-cakes?"

"What kind of wind do you make with your mouth?" Old Tungpao grew red. "I suppose you will want us to give up farming?"

The old man ranted on, but Ah Four stayed gloomily silent. The family's upkeep for the coming half-year, as well as the repayment of past debts, depended entirely on the rice patches. But his experience in recent years had taught Ah Four that farming under a burden of loans amounted to a half-year's labour for his creditors without any pay for himself. Serfs might be fed by their lords, but "free" tenants were not fed by their creditors, even though they worked for the creditor's benefit alone.

"What's the use of farming nowadays?" Maid Four kept repeating; Ah Four and his wife had both concluded Toto was right; once a peasant had taken on debts, he must work under them for the rest of his life. Though neither of them knew any other way to make a living, -they had decided that never again would they borrow money for farming.

When he realised that his son was not going to answer him, Old Tungpao was mortally offended. One afternoon he made a great show of leaving the house; and went off to town, "not to care for them any more," as he said. In town he told Ah

Four's father-in-law Chang, and the younger "Lord" Chen what a hopeless fool his older son had turned out to be. In a friendly way, both squires advised him to take things more easily as "the younger generation could always look out for itself."

Old Tungpao spent that night in town. Early next morning, when "Lord" Chen was half-asleep he called on him and asked for a small loan equalling the cost of one cake of soya-bean fertilizer. Chen, who was still very content with opium, promised to get a cake for him on credit from the shop.

Old Tungpao brought the fertilizer home in triumph. Placing the cake by the door, he said gravely to his family, "I shall never care for you again, but now let'snot talk about that. Only for work according to my plan."

The hopeful dreams which the old man had cherished during the spring silkworm season now sprouted in his stubborn head again, like young shoots of rice in a damp paddy-field. And thanks to a yellow sun and timely breezes the actual rice-sprouts in the fields grew as quickly as if they were being pulled up through the ground by human will. In a sense they were. Hand and foot-propelled waterwheels had been set up between the fields and the river, and everywhere patient men and women trod the pedals over and over, lifting the water to their rice.

Ah Four worked on his water-hoist like a man possessed. Enthusiastically Old Tungpao also tried to help, but no sooner had he pedalled the wheel around a few times than he fell back on the bank. "Aya, my bones are really old," he groaned. His stout daughter-in-law silently took his place.

As fast as the young rice sprouted, its thirst for water grew. But now for days on end the sun scorched down, lowering the water in the river as well as in the fields. The demand for man power on the water-wheels grew pressing among all farmers. Because of their poverty, Lotus and her quiet aimless husband had not been able to plant rice this year, so they were comparatively free. Many farmers asked them to help with the wheel, conveniently forgetting that Lotus was the one they used to call "White Tigress Star." Lu Fuchin was also

free, as he had given up the land he rented. Frequently he and his young sister Lupao came to help Tungpao's family. But Toto, Old Tungpao's son and mortal enemy, seldom appeared in the village and when he did, he helped others instead of his own family.

Every morning when the villagers came out of their houses and saw the sky as clear as blue grass, they cursed. In the evenings, when they saw a few tiny ships of cloud, they gathered to speculate. Gazing into the sky, the old women prayed and called the name of Buddha, but their efforts were in vain. Not a drop of rain fell during the whole month.

Old Tungpao's land stood somewhat above the rest and was especially hard to irrigate. Drawing water eight feet up from the river by way of other fields which would absorb half of it was a hopeless job. Gradually the rice in his fields grew paler, a sight which tightened bands about the old man's heart. He wrung his hands and stamped the ground, but could think of no practical remedy. Ah Four kept morosely silent, but Maid Four began to complain incessantly, saying there was no hope for a good harvest now , . . their labour was wasted, and to have borrowed money for a soya-bean cake was plainly idiotic.

"But if we can only get water, this harvest will be the best in years," Old Tungpao replied feebly to such complaints.

"Water! The little water we have managed to get into the fields might as well be our blood; it has cost us too much effort. There have been only two of us to do it all, with a little help from the Lus. How much blood do you think we have? Toto is strong as a bull, but you won't let him help!"

"Yes, why don't we call Toto back?" Ah Four echoed, mooning gratefully at his wife.

This time Old Tungpao did not answer though he spat angrily on the ground.

On the next day Toto came back, smiling and silent, and helped his brother lift water for the fields. But it was too late. The river had sunk into a string of pools in the centre of its bed and could only be reached with a chain of three wheels. By the middle of the morning the water-level sank so

that even this arrangement was useless. If it did not rain that evening, Old Tungpao's rice must be finished.

His were not the only fields in danger. Unless there was rain immediately the soil in all the village patches would begin to crack. That evening many people climbed trees to gaze at the sky in the distance. But everywhere the sky was blue without the slightest hint of clouds. There remained the possibility of hiring a "foreign water-pipe" from town to wet the fields with the last water in the river. Of course Old Tungpao's tolerance for this project disappeared the moment he heard the word "foreign." Besides, he was sceptical about the powers of the pump. Last year it had been hired by the people in a neighbouring village, but then it was easier to draw water as the river was much higher. Now that the water was half a mile away, deep in the bottom of the river, how could the pump send it into the fields?

Old Tungpao was expressing such doubts over the evening meal. His daughter-in-law snapped: "Don't be a fool! Of course the water-pipe can do it. But what money have we to hire it? Not a copper! I hear one dollar is the price for watering the smallest patch."

"If only God will bless us, a shower tonight will save us all," the old man replied piously, his face buried in his rice bowl.

His reply had suggested a new plan, so after supper Old Tungpao hurried to the ruinous temple of the God of Fortune and knocked several dozen kotows. Repeatedly he promised the clay image that he would repair its house if he were only blessed with a harvest good enough to supply the necessary money.

That night there was no more work to do on the water-wheels. Ah Four and his wife were able to have a sound sleep for the first time in weeks. But Old Tungpao could not close his eyes. He leaped up at every sound he could possibly imagine to be rain, and stumbled out to look at the sky. There was no rain all night, but neither were there stars. The sky looked greyish and this roused the wildest hopes in him. He kneeled in bed and prayed again

At length, on one of his many trips to the door, he saw that day was about to break, so he hurried out through the mist to his rice patches. Covered with dew, the sprouts certainly looked greener than they did under the scorching sun. But the earth they grew in was drier than ever. Old Tungpao pinched ' some between his fingers; it was hard as rock. Instantly his heart ached. He knew very well that by the time the sun burnt its way out of the mist, the rice would be done for, and his family finished as well.

Aimlessly he wandered back and stood on the threshing-floor, and the great red ball of the sun slowly began to appear. Below him, the river bed was covered with bright green fronds, rustling faintly in the morning breeze. Some of the villagers used the exposed beach to grow corn and the crop was already tall as a man. Half hidden among the clumps, several people were talking excitedly. In a doze Old Tungpao climbed down to them, and found they were discussing the hire of the "foreign water-pipe."

"If we want to get it, we must hurry," Old Tiger Li said. [1] 'It is usually busy everyday. I heard last night that it was not yet hired for to-day, but if we get to town late, we will miss the chance. Old Tungpao, will you join us? "

Tungpao stared as if he had not heard. Two ideas filled his mind; one, the foreign pipe must be useless; two, he could not pay for it anyway. But as the discussion continued he gradually recovered his wits. Then he also kept silent for he decided to wait and see how effective the pump was, then borrow some money for it if it worked.

Through the morning he wandered distractedly up and down among his rice patches. His family followed, hushed as if they were attending an invalid. And hour by hour the rice-sprouts became more hopelessly wilted. First the tassels drooped, then the stalks bent over towards the earth, which was beginning to crack apart with faint splitting sounds, To-day no water could be reached for any fields and all the villagers took to wandering among their rice-patches. Many gathered on the bridge, anxiously waiting for the "foreign water-pipe," the doctor for their sick rice.

At noon the sun burned like a great coal in the sky. Suddenly someone cried: "It has come!" A small boat appeared, with a block machine lying on it. Certainly it did not look like a marvel, this contraption that was said to work as hard as fifty young men. The whole village crowded the river-bank to stare at the monster. The boat anchored and a workman dragged a flexible pipe up the bank to one of the rice fields.

"The water comes right out of the pipe and pours into the field," the man in charge of the machine announced importantly.

Suddenly the machine began thudding and with a splash, water spurted out of the nozzle and spread over the field. Everyone burst out laughing and shouting; even the owner of the field seemed to forget that the water was costing him money.

Old Tungpao stood off from the crowd, watching the machine suspiciously. He was certain that an evil spirit of some kind was hidden in its noisily moving parts. Perhaps it was the Spirit of Eel, and the water it poured out was only its own saliva. It might return at night and draw it back, so the townspeople could cheat other villagers with the same magic.

But Old Tungpao's suspicions could not turn him from the sight of the wonderful rushing water. Before the pump filled the second rice patch, he made up his mind to resort to the Spirit of Eel. He also decided to guard his field with a heavy spade that night, lest the Spirit came to steal back its saliva. Without speaking to his son, he went off and asked Taoist Huang and Old Tiger Li to be his guarantors at the village usurer's for a loan of eight dollars, monthly interest two per cent. Then he arranged to have the pipe brought up to his own fields.

By sunset Old Tungpao's rice patches were full of pale water, wringling in the evening breeze. At the sight he took new hope and stopped listening to Maid Four's complaints about their new debt. Certainly the sum was not a small one, but couldn't one picul of rice be sold for ten dollars? During the shortage last year, even a picul of unpolished rice had cost eleven! Hopeful dreams were again beginning to flower in the head of the old peasant.

Ah Four, however, stared gloomily at the filled rice-patches. There was plenty of water now, but the rice was still wilting. The water had come too late; the tender young shoots were scorched to the root.

"If we put in some of the foreign fertilizer-powder, it may revive," Toto whispered, coming up, behind Ah Four.

At first the elder brother was taken aback, but he thought the matter over carefully. He did have a package of the powder and this might be the time to use it. The rice was already in so bad a state that little harm could be done by the powder.

But unfortunately Toto's words had been caught by Old Tungpao who was gloating at the other end of the patch. He came at Toto, clawing the air.

"Poison-powder, you reincarnation of a "long-hair!" Do you want to kill my rice?"

Some villagers standing by, pulled the father away from his son and no further mention was made of the powder. Old Tungpao announced he was going to stay with the rice all night; he did not have to say he wanted to guard against the Eel Spirit. He only said he was afraid Toto might persuade Ah Four to scatter foreign powder in the rice.

He stayed in the fields and the night passed peacefully enough. But in the morning the rice looked dead as before. In some places it was worse. Old Tungpao explained to himself that the Eel Spirit's saliva was of bad quality, but the rice in the other lower fields had turned green and healthy. Maid Four went about all morning clucking her tongue and swearing.

"That old block-head, he has gambled away the lives of the whole family."

Old Tungpao was so worried that his face turned livid. In the afternoon, when Lu Funchin also advised him to try the foreign fertilizer-powder he stared angrily but made no answer. So Toto and Ah Four scattered the powder on the fields freely as they wished. Old Tungpao turned his face away, pretending not to see.

The next two days were somewhat misty, with less sun. The water in the fields remained about half an inch deep

and gradually the withered rice straightened up and turned green. Old Tungpao stubbornly denied that the foreign powder had anything to do with it, but he no longer called it poison.

The weather became cloudier and a drizzling rain fell; mild sun followed the rain. The condition of the rice improved steadily, and the villagers sighed with relief. Surely the Gods were watching the poor. Now they were saved.

Autumn breezes from the hills began to cool the humid farm-land. The forty days of drought had vanished like a nightmare and the villagers smiled at each other optimistically. Past experience told them that rice of this sort could not forecast a bad year. Old Tungpao was confident again of all his opinions and dreams, and predicted it would be a rich year, with eighty per cent, of the crop successful. Fingering the heavily loaded tassels of his rice, he thought contentedly of the satisfactions of a perfect harvest. Each grain he examined was full and round and solid.

Then he began to calculate ahead. Say four piculs from every mow, and he would gather forty piculs. Paying six and a half for the land rent, he would still have more than thirty piculs for himself. Ten dollars, say, for each picul, then the rice would bring him at least three hundred dollars. That would clear more than half his debts—certainly ten dollars a picul was the lowest possible price they would have to take. This single rich crop could raise them all out of poverty. Heaven had eyes for the miserable at last.

But the merchants in town had eyes too, and their eyes were directed towards their own profit instead of the welfare of the miserable. Even before the new rice could be threshed, the market price of rice fell off. By the time the farmers had brought their baskets of good solid grain in from the threshing-floor the market price dropped to six dollars a picul. As they worked night and day to dehusk and polish the price sank to four dollars. When the villagers finally got their rice to market, they found they could not sell a picul for more than three dollars. The masters of the riceshops looked at their weeping faces and said indifferently:

"Three dollars is the price to-day. It will drop lower tomorrow."

Meanwhile the agents of the usurers and landlords went through the villages cursing and threatening, for the peasants had no cash to settle their debts. The unlucky farmers were forced to pay off the loans which they had secured with such difficulty for growing rice, in terms of rice. Yes, certainly the creditors accepted grain. But the price on which they calculated the amount of payment was two dollars and thirty cents a picul.

Now Old Tungpao's dreams had all vanished like foam in the wind. His neighbours wept, cursed and cried. "What's the use of farming? We get nothing for our work but heavier debts." Maid Four in particular repeated this over and over to anyone who would listen.

His sad experience with the silkworms in the spring had caused the old man a serious illness; now the gloomy end of the harvest season brought him to his bed for the last time. He lay inert, without further interest in what went on around him. As he neared his end, his tongue grew stiff and he could 1*0 longer speak, but his eyes remained clear staring at Toto vtho stood by the bed; they seemed to say:

4'I never believed you were right. How strange!"

WINTER FANTASIES

THE north-east wind that swept over the village soon stripped the trees down to bare trunks and branches. The autumn grass along the small river turned from gold to yellowish-grey and on it were scattered coal-black patches where the cow-herds had lit their fires. Sometimes on sunny days a lean house-dog might be seen lying on the threshing-floor, or perhaps some villagers in wadded cotton jackets,squatting in the sun with hunched shoulders, hunting their fleas. But on overcast days when the bare trees sighed in the wind, when dark clouds hurried across the sky as fast as a horse could run, no shadow of a living thing appeared on the once-noisy threshing floor, the whole village was pale and bleak as death.

Only in the cemetery of the Chang family, north of the village, was there a sign of being green; there huge pines guard the ancestral tombs of "Lord" Chang, the landlord. But this was a misfortune to the village, for one night a great pine was chopped down and carried away. Wanderers from other districts could steal trees from Chang's cemetery, but it was the villagers who were held responsible and would have to pay.

To-day the sun was yellowish-pale and the wind whistled sadly among the bare branches, but for the first time in weeks human figures appeared on the threshing-floor. They gathered around Lotus, contemptuously known as "White Tigress Star$_p$" who was cursing and waving her arms.

"I've just seen it. One huge pine chopped off. The chips smelt of resin. The thieves must have come this morning. A giant tree!" She made a circle with both arms to show the size, then squeezed her nose.

Her listeners scowled and sighed.

"Let's tell Chang right away" someone said, but several cried:

"Tell Chang? Do you think the old squeezer would let us off?"

"Let's keep it a secret. We may have luck and Chang won't ever find out."

Kenson, Lotus's husband, offered this, but his wife cawed:

*'Try our luck! Have you the money to pay if our luck is bad?" Her voice dropped:''But even if you had, we shouldn't have to pay. Chang doesn't feed us. Why should we be responsible for the trees in his cemetery?"

"He won't reason with you like that" Ah Four put in. "Last year when old Tiger Li spoke up to him, the poor devil was sent to the police."

"The damned thief ought to be hanged!" Maid Four said softly, on the verge of tears.

Now everyone broke out cursing the tree-thief, and after a while they began to tell each other that he must be one of the vagabond farmers who came to till unclaimed land in the farming season. They felt that only one of the "Crooked Tongues"* could play this cruel kind of joke, since all of them had suffered so much already at the hands of "Lord" Chang. A few began to say that the theft of the tree might be only part of a revenge planned by the wanderers, and some held that they themselves should expose the thief who might be hidden in the miserable huts, where the refugee wanderers lived in the winter.

But Toto suddenly burst out: "Expose the thief? Are you the old squeezer's serfs or his bloody grand-children?"

"I didn't say you were the thief. Why should you bother so about those tramps?" said Chao Ata, who had proposed the hunt.

Li Kenson pulled Toto away. "We don't mean it. None of us really wants to expose the thief."

"I say the thief didn't want to harm us. If Chang makes us pay, he is the one who does us wrong. He's the one we should fight. After all, why should we help him get the thief? I don't know the thief, but I feel . . ."

But as Toto was explaining, his brother Ah Four pulled him into their house and closed the door. Gradually the other men scattered to their work cursing Chang, the squeezer.

* Famished peasants who, unable to make a living in their own districts, wandered thither begging—Translator.

Only Lotus and Maid Four remained on the threshing-floor, staring rather stupidly toward the cemetery of the Chang family, green and purple with its luxuriant pine needles. Suddenly the clouds parted showing a bright sun in a clear sky. At the same moment, the wind fell. The two women raised their heads and sighed, then both sat on the ground to enjoy the warmth.

Lotus had been a slave girl in town, so she knew something of "Lord" Chang's history. She whispered confidentially to Maid Four:

"Chang is a thief himself. At least he shares stolen things."

"Ah?"

"All the smugglers of salt and opium are connected with him. And don't you remember that band of cattle thieves last year? They stole oxen from the villages and mules from the flour mills in town, and the squeezer's house was the place they kept them."

"Didn't the officers know?"

"Of course. But the highest officer has his connections too."

Lotus curled her lip and snorted. She had grown thinner and thinner lately. Her face was now so pale that it seemed blue, and her mouth looked abnormally large under her little eyes.

Maid Four stood up shaking her head: "No wonder Toto says an honest man can't make a living in this world ..."

"Yes . . . some change ..." Lotus closed her eyes and turned her face to the sun.

Maid Four, too, seemed hypnotised by the warmth.— "Yes . . . my father-in-law used to say the "long-hairs" would come again soon ..." she spoke very slowly. "You know we have a "long-hair's" sword in our house . . . but my father-in-law said that as long as a 'real God-appointed Emperor' had not been born ..."

Lotus looked up suddenly, popping her eyes like an actress— "Uh! How could he know whether that one was born or not? Last month I saw a red star as big as a wine cup, and it had eight rays. That's the star of the F

mean he's been down in the world eight years. Not been born!"

Maid Four was placid no longer. "That star belongs to the king of Rebels! My father-in-law said so," She looked at Lotus contemptuously. "Anyway, what could you know about it, you White Tigress Star?"

"Shu! Shu!" Lotus jumped to her feet and glared at Maid Four, who fixed her with a baleful stare. Now the old hatred between the two was completely revived. Maid Four had long despised Lotus, cursing her as a "born slave, an evil-smelling flower" and Lotus was not the sort to take this description mildly. Once she had schemed to blight Maid Four's cocoon-forming silkworms, and over that matter they avoided each other for half a year. Now each felt her stand could never be abandoned.

Maid Four spat on the ground, and turned away. But Lotus was one who preferred even a beating to an insult! She had not answered. She leapt at Maid Four.

"So you want to run off, now that you've insulted me? And you call yourself a woman?"

"And you're a low slave, you White[1] Tigress Star." Maid Four stumped off toward the river.

Lotus felt unspeakably lonely for she was fond of quarrelling and fighting. Almost always she was defeated, bitterly insulted or even beaten up, but she enjoyed this. She felt it was better to be insulted or beaten than to be neglected. When she was a slave girl her mistress had treated her as something without feelings, lower than a cat or dog. She had been hopeful and proud when she married Li Kenson, for by this she became a human being, but half a month after the wedding her husband had fallen seriously ill, then a plague struck his goats and poultry. This was taken to show the influence of her dirty soul and thereafter she was no longer treated as a human, but as a "White Tigress Star." In protest, she used to pick quarrels with the other women, and in order to shake off her loneliness she took every opportunity of flirting with the bachelor villagers. In her quarrels and flirtations she seemed to find some status as a "human being,"

In recent weeks, when all the villagers were wandering together on the edge of starvation, she had seldom heard the heart-breaking nickname of "White Tigress Star." But now Maid Four had pricked the wound again, and had even pretended she could not bother to quarrel. Watching her move off toward the river, Lotus had to clench her teeth, for her spirit felt more painfully bruised than would her body after a thorough beating. The north wind sighed again, and it seemed that the circling air was reviling her too: "White Tigress Star! White Tigress Star!"

-By the edge of the river Maid Four turned and spat on the ground. This was too much. With a shrill cry, Lotus ran to the attack. But after a few clumsy steps she stumbled and tripped over a stcfhe, spinning and falling on her back.

"Ee, ee, ee! Lpok at the 'White Tigress Star' Maid Four stood over her, laughing in little jerks. Another girl ran over from beyond the river, laughing and clasping her hands. She was Lupao, also Lotus's enemy.

Lotus sat up, panting. She turned her flat face up and cursed passionately. Though her fall had been a bad one—her back seemed afire—she forgot the pain in her need for revenge. But two were now against her. Should she seek satisfaction in a duel of curses? Lupao's mouth had some reputation for sharpness. By hand-to-hand combat? But they were a pair! As she struggled to her feet a man came sauntering along the river, and she abandoned both plans.

The newcomer was a well-known figure in the neighbourhood, Taoist Huang. He lived alone, and sometimes the villagers almost forgot that this "eccentric monster," as they called him, was still among them. Originally he had been a farmer too, but fifteen years before, while he was planting rice in his patch, he had been taken by passing troops and forced to serve as an army coolie. When he came back that winter, on New Year's Eve, he found his loved wife dead. Soon he sold the two acres of rice field, inherited from his father, keeping only a narrow strip of vegetable patch to support himself. Every week he took some vegetables to the market in town, and in one way or another his years had passed without starvation.

Sometimes Huang left the village for a couple of days or half a week. Stories about these disappearances varied, but most of them had him drinking away his money in town, listening to idle tales by the table of the fortune-teller at the temple of the God of Wisdom, and dozing off at night under the altar in the temple.

As he was thus half a "townsman," Huang had learned some of the fine talk of townspeople. It sounded elegant in a way, abstruse too, like a recitation from a story book at one time, like a quotation from a priest's scripture at another. The villagers could not understand him and consequently did not like to listen to him.

Recently, when the income from his vegetables would no longer buy enough rice, Huang had given up drink and went to town only on business. At home he usually sat on the root of a tree by the river, gazing blankly about. If any passer-by glanced at him more than once, he would jump up and seize the man's sleeve, shouting," Great Chaos rules the world! The real God-appointed Emperor from the East—the East—will now come to the throne." He would mumble on until his listener fled.

But since the bitter north-east wind began to blow, Huang had seldom been seen squatting by the river. He hid away in his dilapidated house, rustling about, mysteriously busy. The villagers who peeped through his door said that *' the monster" kotowed in the four directions every day, and prayed to three straw idols set up on a table in the centre of his room. The young fellows of the village made a joke of him, but the women and children were fascinated by his ways and pestered him with questions. His answers were evasive from the start and eventually he became so annoyed that he never replied. Later, he pasted up all the cracks in his door with paper. The tale about the "eight-rayed red star," so often mentioned by Lotus, was only one of the fantastic stories which had sprung up as a result of his secrecy.

Now that she saw the mystic approaching, Lotus rushed to him for help.

"Look, Taoist Huang! Maid Four says that the eight-rayed star is the King of Rebels. What an insult!"

She turned to her enemies and began laughing harshly. But the bruises she had forgotten sobered her. Ruefully she pressed her hands to the seat of her trousers.

Taoist Huang's eyes widened. He stared at Lupao and Maid Four, then at Lotus. He shook his head and intoned:

"Totah Ti, King of Heavens. Nacha, the Third Prince. Second Son, the Deity. Ha! The Second Son is the grandson-in-lawof the Golden King, the King of Deities , . . Ah, Maid Four, listen! . . . The real God appointed one has been born; now he stays as far away as the horizon but also as near as your own eyes! Yah! Everyday, tu-tu-tu, someone knocks at his door, and asks him, 'Has the day broken? Has the day broken?' Ha! Of course the day has not broken! The old man therefore answers 'No!' He understands that the questioner is the God-appointed Emperor himself."

"What would happen if the old man answered: 'Yes, the day has broken' " Maid Four was impressed, a little frightened.

"In that case, well ... in that case, well, well . . . Taoist Huang whispered squinting and cocking his head mysteriously. Then he jerked his head up, and his eyes flew wide. "That will be the time when we poor people will be saved!"

Forgetting her bruises, Lotus shouted triumphantly into the faces of Maid Four and Lupao: "Yah! And when the Emperor is on his throne, many changes will come. For instance ... uh ... for instance ... we won't have to pay the land rent for three years at least!"

Taoist Huang sighed, grateful for any help with the mystery or its explantaion.

Lupao began a volley of sceptical questions. Maid Four murmured:

[44]Why doesn't the old man answer 'the day has broken' sooner? Surely it's time for a change."

"How can he? How can he?" the Taoist replied. "He can't violate divine law . . . And look, Lupao! You ask what will happen when the day has broken. Well . . . well, then divine soldiers and divine generals will come down to help

the real God-appointed one, kill the lords and squeezers, and set up a paradise in our world."

Lupao was plainly doubtful but she only pursed her lips and kept silent. Lotus again forced out a storm of laughter and tried to think of a mocking nickname for her.

"Is the old man also a star turned human?" Maid Four asked, "and, oh, Taoist Huang, how do you know that the one who knocks is the Emperor? What does he look like?"

Taoist Huang frowned peevishly. "How do I know? Of course I know! The old man in the bean curd shop? Tu-tu-tu, every morning his door is knocked, Understand? Knocks on his door only, not on the others! 'Has the day broken? Has the day broken?' Every day the same question. The old man hears the voice but never sees the face. Does he dare peep at it? No! It's against divine law. A thunderbolt would strike him. But the one who knocks is certainly the Emperor appointed by God!"

As he spoke his voice had become more and more ominous. He scowled, then dilated his eyes.His listeners' flesh crawled as if they also had heard the portentous knocking tu-tu-tu. A gust of wind swept their faces and all four felt suddenly chilly. Then Lupao squeezed her nose clean, and asked practically:

"How about those straw images of yours?"

"Of course they have some origin—some origin" Taoist Huang murmured cryptically. He lifted a hand and slowly extended the middle finger. Then he pointed to the sky in the north several times.

The three women followed his finger with their eyes. When it pointed it seemed to Maid Four that its thin black tip had stuck to something in the air. Her heart beat painfully.

"That is where the real God-appointed Emperor was born," Taoist Huang intoned, his eyes wide and glittering. "There shines the bloody glowing light! Understand? The bloody glowing light!"

All three women were a little frightened now. They did not know what these words meant, but under the influence of the menacing voice they felt as if they almost knew. Maid Four feared it must mean the death of millions, perhaps the cost to

the human race for a gracious Emperor sent to rescue it from poverty and starvation and debts.

Taoist Huang placed his finger beside his nose and whispered: "Here too the bloody light shines. In half a year, or at most a year, all of you will be ghosts and the village will be a heap of ruins." There he lowered his head and moved his lips as if murmuring a spell.

Lotus looked calculatingly at Lupao, as if to say "Which of us will die first." Lupao stared in dismay at the pallid face of the prophet. Maid Four sighed, whispering faintly:

"Is there no star to save us? My ..."

Taoist Huang threw up his head importantly. "Who says that? I have three straw images to take the blow for us people. I've been breathing souls into them—the whole process requires forty-nine days. A few more days now. Give me the date and hour of you birth and five hundred coppers, then the straw creatures will suffer for you. Understand? A few more days."

"When will the real God-appointed one come to the throne?" Feeling a twinge behind, Lotus remembered the old subject.

Taoist Huang stared ahead as if he had not heard. A bitter gust of north wind swept past and in the distance the pines in the cemetery of the Chang family rustled with the gale. The Taoist dashed the rheum from his eyes with his middle finger.

"When will he ascend the throne? When all the pines in the cemetery of the Chang family are gone!"

"Ayah! the pines, the pines!" the women exclaimed in confusion. They and the other villagers were held responsible for each pine which disappeared, but after the trees had gone would come the Emperor who could save them from all misery. In fear and hope they began to believe the Taoist's words, which had been flung from his mouth without the least discretion.

At home Maid Four was in a dilemma. Her husband Ah Four still clung to the idea of farming the land but her father was urging her to come to town as a servant, since she could at least feed herself that way and perhaps make a few extra dollars a month as well. Her father's idea was right, she

believed, but if Ah Four did not farm, what could he do? It was ten times harder for a man to find a job in town. And if Ah Four stayed at home to work on the land, then Maid Four's hands were also needed.

Toto, the younger brother, had another opinion.

[4]'Hire land again?" he asked angrily. "You'll still starve even if you work till your back breaks. Tooh! In a good year an acre grows three piculs of rice. You rent five acres and get fifteen piculs. Taking out the six and half piculs for rent, what have you left to live on? Do you think you can avoid the interest on your loans and the cost of your fertilizer? In the end you won't even have slops to feed yourselves."

Ah Four was silent, his face creased with worry. He knew in his heart that farming was now an impossible job. Maid Four could make some money as a servant; he himself might get a living as a piece-worker in town. But he could not take the step. It seemed as if something were choking him when he thought of it. He was obsessed with the idea that his family must be ruined if he gave up farming. He rolled his eyes anxiously toward his wife, hoping for a decision from her. But Toto spoke again:

"Don't wait! Now that we have sold our land and all our things including the house, what use is there of staying on? My plan is that all of us go to town to find jobs."

"But we'd have to leave our Siaopao with his grand-father …" Maid Four cried, then caught herself.

But Maid Four's father had no home either; he lived at his employer's. If he kept his grand-child, his boss might not like it and that might lead to the loss of his job. Nobody liked an employee to keep an extra mouth—thinking of her child, Maid Four realised how bitter it would be for her in service.

"I've thought it all over," Ah Four said to his younger brother, "and that's the real trouble. I have no place to put the kid.[11] Rolling his eyes toward his wife again, he seemed ready to weep.

"Chuh! You're a spineless fellow," Toto cried. "Let me keep Siaopao. I'll feed him. He's not a baby; he doesn't need to live on milk!"

Ah Four only shook his head, but Maid Four answered violently:

"No, it won't do! I can't trust the child to you! And think what a family ours would be, split up like that. It won't do."

"My God!" Toto bawled, glaring at the stubborn pair as if he would swallow them. "Thousands of people are starving to death. What does the splitting up of one family matter? In a year like this, when the death of a man is no more important than the death of a dog, what does the breaking up of one household count?"

Maid Four and Ah Four were silent. Ah Four felt himself sliced open by Toto's words. The emotion which had been choking him was exposed. His need was to work the land, even land rented from others, to stay independent and to keep the family together. Because they had always had a house and land under it, "free and independent," the meaning of life to Ah Four and Maid Four was the maintenance of their house. How could they leave it, to adopt the life of wanderers? It was an offence to their fathers as well as their child Siaopao. Toto *s words pierced like a wedge into their ears. * * What does the splitting up of one household mean at a time like this? The death of man is no more than the death of a dog!" The more Maid Four thought of this, the greater was her despair. At last she cried:

"When will the real God-appointed Emperor ascend his throne? Can Taoist Huang' s straw images really be trusted?" She felt she had caught sight of a ray of hope.

The days grew colder and colder, then it began to snow and the vegetables still in the ground froze and spoiled. There was nothing more to take to town in exchange for rice; so the road between town and village was almost totally abandoned. The villagers discovered that the roots of young trees were nearly as edible as potatoes, and all fell to digging for the roots of the mulberries.

Though the mulberry trees had once been her entire livelihood, and were now at least providing her family with an occasional meal, Maid Four regarded each root she uncovered

as an enemy. These trees had fed the spring silkworms, and the silkworms had caused the bankruptcy of her household; that bankruptcy forced the sale of their last land, a mulberry patch, to their creditors.

Owing to the hunger, several men now disappeared from the village. They included Lupao's brother, Lu Fuchin; Old Tiger Li, the enemy of "Lord" Chang; and Toto, the late Tungpao's "unfilial" son. But no one took much notice of their disappearance. The villagers were more concerned with the pine in the Chang cemetery. Even on snowy days some of them trudged over to see how many trees were left, for Taoist Huang's prophecies had been widely circulated and many were beginning to believe them.

In the shabby house of the Taoist, the three straw images were decorated with slips of paper bearing the birth-dates of many villagers, among them Siaopao. Now Maid Four was collecting another five hundred coppers as she wanted to hang another slip bearing the birth-date of her husband. Among the women of the village only Lupao had been sceptical about Taoist Huang's talk, and now she was gone. Some said she had gone to Shanghai and was working in a cotton mill; others said she was still in the nearest town.

Towards the end of the year it was rumoured that the real God-appointed Emperor had been born at last, in the neighbouring village of Chi Chia Pang. One morning on the threshing floor, Chao Ata blustered on:

"Well, if you don't believe me, go and see for yourself. The real Emperor never shows his face! Yah! Well, this one does! . . . Wait! What was the story? . . . Oh yes, it was last summer when the kid, the real Emperor that is, fell sick. He grew weaker for three days and three nights, then when he got well his mouth turned out to have golden powers. Nobody knew it then, of course, but in August when he was out digging yams, he stumbled on a stone—a big stone, too. He yelled at it 'Away with you!' and in fact it rolled off. That's how people began to find out that his mouth was golden."

His listeners stared at Chao Ata, stupefied, then turned to

peer at the emaciated Siaopao who was crouching uneasily behind Maid Four.

Someone sighed with relief and whispered: "He should have been born a long, long time ago."

"What else did his golden mouth say, Ata?" Ah Four inquired.

Chao Ata looked smug, but remained silent. He was not used to lying and could not add anything to what he had heard. After a few more questions, he bawled again:

"All the villagers around know the story. The Emperor is there, aged eleven or twelve, with sniffs hanging out his nose, like Siaopao."

"Ayah! Only eleven or twelve," Maid Four shivered as she spoke. "Before he comes to the throne, our bones will be in our graves."

Eager to contradict her enemy, Lotus cried: "The enthronement may seem far off to you, but actually it will occur very soon. A divine creature can ascend the throne at any age . . . But of course, if we had to wait until your bones were rotting, which would be nice, we might starve for years."

"Is your filthy mouth 'golden' too, shameless Star?"

Still Maid Four did pray in her heart that the White Tigress Star's words were true.

Then Taoist Huang cried:

"But Ata, how far is Chi Chia Pang? Nineteen miles? Then our village is within reach of the bloody light! Last week the Gods in the temple beyond the ridge wept copiously and the water in the river gave out a red glow. Ah, it's near! . . . Half a year, or perhaps a year! Don't forget that!"

His words boomed hollow like the hooting of an owl. All his listeners trembled, with chills, fears, and hopes. His straw images floated before their eyes, each with paper slips hung around its neck; those who had paid up five hundred coppers and inscribed their birth-dates on the Taoist papers looked at the others piously and complacently.

"In the last few days three pines have been chopped off by thieves," Lotus called out, pointing north toward the cemetery.

Everyone nodded; some sighed with relief, others with despair.

Chao Ata wasn't the only one who was thinking of shifting this "contribution" to Taoist Huang. Each month, every villager was supposed to pay ten, twenty or thirty cents to the Peace Maintenance Corps, and many had already decided it would be better to pay five hundred coppers to Taoist Huang once and for all. Nobody knew whether or not the straw images could save the village, but the Peace Maintenance Corps consisted of three men only—commander, lieutenant, and private, each with an old-fashioned rifle. What could they do if the world was going to be overturned?

To tell the truth, the villagers did not believe this three-man Corps was much protection, even in ordinary times. They had always done without it before. The soldiers came to stay only last July when the hungry villagers organised to demand rice from the rich merchants in town. Now that they were still starving, what valuables did they have which needed "protection" by a "Corps?"

Still the three-man "Corps" was really busy now. Though the entire detachment hid from the cold in an old temple most of the time, they did know that a God-appointed Emperor had been born in Chi Chia Pang, and they had caught what Chao Ata, Taoist Huang, and the others discussed that day on the threshing floor. Most important, they knew that many villagers were no longer going to pay the monthly tribute for the maintenance of peace, but would offer their money to Taoist Huang instead. Three days after the circulation of Chao Ala's story about the God-appointed one, the Corps arrested the snotty "golden-mouthed" child of Chi Chia Pang, without mistake, and imprisoned him at their headquarters in the Temple of the God of Earth.

It was a drizzly afternoon. Grey clouds sagged across the sky, leaking cold rain which threatened to turn to snow at any moment. The entire Corps—commander, lieutenant, and private—were deadly tired by their expedition to capture the rebellious Emperor. Seating himself, the commander issued orders to meet the emergency; the rebel was to be trussed to the clay leg of the God of Earth; the lieutenant was to watch the prisoner, and the private was to watch the door. This case

of treason would be judged tomorrow at the main headquarters of the "Peace Maintenance Corps" in town.

Tied fast to the stiff leg of the Earth-god, the snotty "God-appointed Emperor" wept and howled for his mother.

With much rummaging, the commander fished a bent cigarette from his pocket, and after careful straightening and tightening operation, he lit it and sucked away loudly.

"Now that we've discovered a case of treason, how much reward do you think we will get?'f He asked the watchman with the rank of lieutenant.

"Reward, for God's sake!" the watchman with the rank of lieutenant spat on the floor. "I hear that the members of the main Peace Maintenance Corps in town haven't even got their winter clothes yet."

The commander puffed his cigarette and knit his straggling brow like a man with many decisions to make. Slowly the night closed in.

At length the watchman with the rank of lieutenant lit the lamp. He was going to relieve the watchman with the rank of private, so that the latter could cook supper, when the commander banged the table and snatched up the lamp. He stamped over to the real God-appointed Emperor and glared down at him. Then he bayed:

"So you want to be Emperor? You know that's a crime for which your melon-shaped head can be chopped off?"

The child no longer dared sob, much less speak.

"Who are your accomplices? Speak up!" In order to increase the atmosphere of an official examination, the lieutenant also began to howl at the child.

But the boy could only answer by shaking his head. Infuriated by his stupid silence, the commander snatched at the captive's hair and jerked his head back. Looking into the dirty, tearful face he bared his teeth in an angry grin.

"I don't know anything, I don't. Every day I collect firewood in the hills. Nothing else."

4'You bastard, if you don't tell!"

The commander cuffed his captive's head against the stiff clay leg of the Earth God, The child screamed like a butchered

pig, while clay and dust from the shaken idol showered over him.

The lieutenant, standing by with his hands clasped behind his back, carefully scrutinised the white beard of the god, now weathered and yellow with age. He knew the thoughts of the commander. He also saw how stupid and innocent the boy really was. When his chief's anger began to subside, he pulled at his sleeve and spoke into his ear. Then the two went to a corner and began whispering. The child's head swelled in lumps like the side of a rocky hill. He gazed dumbly up at the idol and gradually forgot even to weep.

"We'll get it all tomorrow, when we arrest Taoist Huang," the lieutenant said finally, in a louder tone.

The commander nodded and grinned. He walked over to the captive and said with bullying friendliness:

"My child, I know you've been tricked; I'll let you go home tomorrow." Then he roared: "but you have still got to tell who the rich ones in the village are, or I '11 have it beaten out of you!" He scowled ferociously, and kicked the base of the idol.

The stupefied child gazed past him to the ceiling. He shook his head wildly and burst into a storm of weeping.

"You bastard," the commander yelled, "if you don't talk, it will be thrashed out of you!"

The lieutenant picked a stick of fire-wood and raised it to strike.

Just then there was a scuffle outside and a desperate cry split the air. Commander and lieutenant turned in fright, and saw the doorguard with the rank of private rush in followed by a black crowd of shadows. The lieutenant dropped his rifle and fled out of the back door. The commander tried to keep his official air, howling ferociously at the intruders. But before he could reach his rifle which had been left on the floor at the foot of the Earth God, he was gripped around the waist by huge arms. Immediately a heavy blow from a hoe cleaved his skull. Without a cry he slipped to the ground.

The door-guard was caught and disarmed by Lu Fuchin.

"Still one more" Toto said, wiping the blood from his face.

"All three guns are here with their cartridges. Let's pardon the fellow who gave up his." This was the hoarse voice of Old Tiger Li.

With three rifles to start their work, the three men looked at each other and grinned.

Toto wrenched off the chains of the "real God-appointed Emperor," and held the lamp up to examine him. The child was swooning with fear, his eyes staring and his teeth chattering. Lu Fuchin and Old Tiger Li helped him up and dusted him off. They straightened his hair with clumsy hands. The child wept uncontrollably.

Toto put the lamp on the table and smiled.

"Goodness! So you're the 'real God-appointed Emperor?' Well, go away with you!"

It was snowing outside now. The flakes whirled in the chilly wind.

HALF A CARTLOAD OF STRAW SHORT

HALF A CARTLOAD OF STRAW SHORT

"LOOK at that fellow! He's a regular Half Cartload of Straw Short."

In our workers' guerrilla brigade "Haifa Cartload of Straw Short" was the most common oath. If the commander hid his cigarettes in his pocket and refused to pass them round, we shouted: "Hey, Commander Haifa Cartload of Straw Short!" Or if someone sneezed loudly and then wiped his fingers on his sleeve, we said sarcastically: "You Half a Cartload of Straw Short.'[1]

Lice and the Japanese devils were equally our foes. During drill periods we would scratch and try to crush the vermin under our clothing. But when we were off duty, that was a different matter. We would sit round a blazing fire, take off our clothes and dangle them over the flames. Then our enemy met his end. The lice swelled up like roasted sesame seeds and dropped into the fire. And we would jump for joy and slap each other on the back over our victory, shouting:

"Half a Cartload of Straw Short, hurrah! Nibble it with your teeth!"

In short, we used "Half a Cartload of Straw Short" to ridicule anybody and everybody, never caring whether the usage was proper or not. But there was no harm meant—we used it so often as it was almost the only joke we had. Without it our life would have been as humourless and dry as the winter hills.

We gave the name to anyone, but the original "Half a Cartload of Straw Short" had left our troops long before. And he certainly was an original character. From the time when as a farmhand he joined our troops until he was carried off unconscious on a stretcher, we reckoned him our best comrade.

None of us could forget him. Even our commander treasured Half a Cartload of Straw Short's old pipe as though it

were a love letter from his sweetheart. You see, Half a Cartload of Straw Short never appeared without his pipe, and it made no difference to him whether there was tobacco in it or not. He would wander off alone and squat under a tree, his pipe in his mouth, wrinkling his brows as he gazed beyond the rolling fields. Sometimes he would pull at his pipe automatically and then two spirals of grey smoke drifted slowly out of his notrils. Standing around, we would ask him:

"Is it your wife again, Half a Cartload? Still thinking of your sallow-faced woman and the kid?"

He would flush and then stammer: "Why shouldn't I? It's been a long spell since our commander has told me where they are."

According to him, our commander was omniscient; and his failure to tell the whereabouts of Half a Cartload of Straw Short's family could only be due to his apprehension that our volunteer would desert in order to join them. But Half-a Cartload did not always daydream about his wife and home—more often he longed to return to till the rich land.

"Look," he would point, "how thick the wild grass is growing in the fields. Eh?" And he sucked his pipe profoundly, puffing out the last part of his sentence with a great cloud of smoke. "The Japanese are the cause of that. Before, people could live and work in peace. Then the wild grass never grew rank."

Cleaning the corners of his eyes, he would bend over the earth and pinch up a bit of soil between his fingers. Feeling its texture between his thumb and forefinger, he would carefully examine, taste and sniff it. Then he would nod to himself and murmur:

"What richness! How rich the land is!"

Half a Cartload of Straw could never succeed in learning even one patriotic song. Once he attempted to sing in chorus with the rest of us; but as soon as he croaked out the first line we all exploded and laughed until the tears came to our eyes. After that he refused to sing another note. He merely smiled, with his pipe in his mouth, keeping his bloodshot eyes on our singing faces. Yet he knew two simple lines which he had

learned in his boyhood—and these he always sang whether marching or camping, whether merry or sad:

> *When we depart from our metropolis,*
> *It either blows or pours . . .*

It happened like this. One frosty evening all of us rushed out into the courtyard. We crowded round our commander, trying to catch a glimpse of a newly-captured traitor. This unfortunate creature was securely bound and fettered. His face was deadly pale and his body was quaking all over. On his head was a brown fur cap, and a sickle and pipe were sticking into his belt.

Our commander was standing sternly by, holding a little 11 sun banner" (Japanese flag), which he had found on the prisoner. We stamped our feet and shouted: "May the devil take him! See how he has disguised himself as a farmhand."

"Shooting's too good for the traitor!"

Somebody kicked him, and he immediately slumped on the ground and lay like a paralytic at the feet of our commander. Such a display of cowardice was too much for us, and some said, "Ha! ha! this fellow's nothing but a heap of duck-shit."

But our commander was unmoved by this shameless spectacle. He continued to stare coldly at the traitor, determined to get more information.

"Your lordship," the wretch pleaded, "1 am an innocent man. My name is Du-Du-Dumb Wang—everyone knows me by that, everyone—"

"Is it your 'small name?' " * I could see the hair on our commander's cheek twitching.

"Yes, your lordship. My father it was who gave me this little name. He was not an educated man, and he gave it to me with the purpose of warding off devils."

"Then what is your big name? Stand up and say!"

"I haven't one, your lordship." Poor Dumb Wang was so worried by this that he sobbed. " My father said that a farmhand never goes to school, never sits in a lord's reception-room, and therefore doesn't need a formal name."

*** Chinese peasants give their young children a temporary name, as uncomplimentary as possible, in order to ward off devils and thus enable the child to mature successfully.**

"Then what are you called?"

"Oh, Half-Half—your lordship, Half a Cartload of Straw Short."

"Eh?" Again the hair on his cheek quivered. "What is it you are short of?"

"Half a Cartload of Straw Short, your lordship."

"To whom do you owe it?"

"That's what people used to call me," Dumb Wang replied with a blush. "The name was given me by pock-marked Wang because he was always repeating in idle chatter that I was a good-for-nothing loafer."

"Ha, ha!" We could contain ourselves no longer, and everyone roared with laughter.

But the commander did not laugh. He continued to question the traitor.

"I live in Wang-chuang village," Dumb V/ang stuttered, "in the big Wang-chuang, not the small one. Then the damned 'Northern troops'* arrived. They insulted our women and shot and beheaded the men. My woman said:

" 'Let's move away now that all the others have gone. In a peaceful place we would be happier, even if we can only get water for food.'

"So we left the village—my son Little Puppy, my woman and I. Now it's two days since she has tasted rice and water, and her stomach is as empty as a dry pouch. Yet our Little Puppy's still crying for her breast, though he has drained it of all milk,"

At this our bound prisoner dropped his head as two streams of tears went rolling down his face. The commander said in a deeper tone:

"Tell me briefly, why have you got that 'sun-banner' ?"

"Your lordship, my woman said: 'Look here, in time of war like this we may starve and die any time. But our child must live. We must look after him. Why should Little Puppy die, who is innocent?' And so my wife spoke up again: 'Go back to the village and dig up some carrots in the fields so that the baby can have some food to keep alive on.'

* The Japanese.

In the morning I went back to my village. But as I drew near some accursed soldiers with fur caps on their heads started shooting at me all of a sudden. I ran back. When I reached our hut I saw Little Puppy sobbing on his mother's breast."

And Wang himself now sobbed convulsively.

"Don't weep!" our commander ordered. "So that's how you became a traitor?"

"The devil take a traitor! If I was one, your lordship, the heavens would fall on top of me!" Jerking his shoulders, Half a Cartload of Straw Short excitedly went on: "Some people say that the 'Northern soldiers' won't attack you if you have a 'sun-banner' in your hand. So my woman gave me the flag; she had made it herself. 'Don't waste any time,' says she, 'but be off, and come back quickly.' Then I asked her: 'Won't it be dangerous to have such a cursed thing in my hand if I meet the 'Southern troops' ?' 'They are Chinese like us, you blockhead!' she said. Being Chinese, your lordship, why should I become a traitor? My woman be damned for advising me to take the flag!"

He stared at the commander, who was clenching his teeth. A few more questions and the officer's features relaxed; with a smile he ordered us to unbind the prisoner. As soon as he was free, Half a Cartload of Straw Short blew his nose with his fingers and stooped to wipe them on his shoe. I noticed at once that he had on a rather new pair, both of which were smeared with dried mucus that shone in the light.

"From now on, don't call those Japanese devils 'Northern troops', understand?" the commander explained in a friendly voice. "The present situation is quite different from the past. There are now only two armies—the Japanese and the Chinese. Do you see what I mean?"

"Of course," he nodded; "I am not a good-for-nothing."

The commander returned his "sun-banner" and said:

"Have some soup with us to-night. If you like, you can go back to your village and dig up the carrots after we have driven the enemy away. Take the flag along with you, and if you ever meet them, show it; but don't tell where we are."

At supper we all crowded round him. At first he was quite embarrassed; but when he saw that we were friendly he grew braver and soon began to eat voraciously. He emptied his bowl and even licked the bottom. After our meal he pressed a handful of mucus from his nose, rubbed it on his shoe, hiccoughed, and, picking a bit of onion peel from his teeth, he threw it over the head of a comrade.

One afternoon, a few days later, Half a Cartload of Straw Short appeared in our courtyard again. As we gathered around the commander told us that the farmhand had joined our partisan brigade. At this good news we jumped with joy and loudly sang the "Partisan's Song." But Half a Cartload of Straw Short only stood and grinned from beginning to end, puffing at his everlasting pipe.

At night I shared a bunk with Half a Cartload.

"Why did you join our guerrilla troop?" I asked him.

"Why shouldn't I?" he solemnly replied. "Aren't you all honest men?"

After pausing for a moment to suck his pipe, he added: "Unless we drive those devils out, we shall never be able to till our land again."

I asked him with a smile: "Where is your 'sun flag'?"

"My woman is using it as a napkin for Little Puppy," he answered casually, as if it were a matter of no account.

And he began to tell me about his family. I found that he was anxious to drive out the Japanese because he could no longer work on the land as in former, peaceful days. He had decided to send his wife and child to the rear with other refugees so that he might join our guerrillas. During our talk I noticed that his eyes were wandering about the room as if something was worrying him. I watched him silently, wondering what was wrong; but he continued to sit quietly smoking, now looking at me and then at the lamp. At last he became quite agitated, got up and went outside. In the courtyard he made water, coughed intentionally for a moment, and then returned. After knocking the ashes out of his pipe he looked at me for a while, put his pipe under the bedding, and lay down.

"What a peculiar fellow!" I said to myself. "In spite of his rough appearance he is so gentle."

Partisans generally like to sleep with a lamp burning when possible. Soon after Half a Cartload of Straw Short joined our brigade two strange things happened on two successive nights. One night a comrade who had got up in the night to make water, stumbled over another chap and broke his nose. Who could have blown out the lamp? The next night we were all awakened by a sound of firing. Sure that the enemy was near, we rushed about, grabbing any gun or sword we could find. When we discovered that it was a sentinel who had accidentally pulled the trigger of his gun we were as mad as tigers and cursed each other, trying to solve who had put the lamp out.

The commander asked each of us who had extinguished the light, but nobody would own up to it. However, T had a notion of the culprit's identity, and glanced at Half a Cartload stealthily. Noticing my eye on him, he suddenly turned pale and his knees began to tremble. The commander walked over him. "Hell!" I said to myself. "He's in for twenty strokes." By now his legs were quaking so that he was almost falling down. But the commander unexpectedly smiled and asked him quite affably: "Do you like the life with us?"

"Of course I do, your lordship." He took the pipe from his belt and offered it to the commander. "Does your lordship like smoking a pipe?"

At that we roared, and even the commander held his sides with laughter. But Half a Cartload of Straw Short kept his composure. He rubbed his pate, then scratched his chest. Nipping out a louse, he squeezed it and bit off its head.

Next day I took him aside and asked him in an undertone why he had blown out the light. He flushed and smiled. "Because the oil is so dear, much dearer than before——" And, scratching his chest, he added: "I am not used to sleeping with a lamp. Here, do you smoke a pipe?"

By and by he grew accustomed to our community life. He became bolder and more lively. Sometimes he would

pronounce on our common activities. He knew some bandit jargon, which he used now and then. For instance, he called a road "a line", a river "a ribbon", a cock "a pointed beak", the moon "a stone", and so forth. He criticized us like this:

"Many words are unlucky to use and should be avoided. When we were labourers there was no harm in using them; but now, you know, we are playing at guns."

We comrades would shun such "bewitched" words, but we often embarrassed him by pointing out that revolutionaries should not use bandit jargon. Though he did not agree with us he stopped insisting that certain words were unlucky. To justify himself he would only say humorously: "Being a farm-hand, I know nothing of such new fashions." And then he would grow silent.

"Hullo," I said to him one day. "From now on you should call me 'comrade'."

He shook his head and smiled. He condemned this suggestion, muttering: "We natives of Shantung Province used to call each other 'second brother', which is a far more respectful title."

"But we are revolutionary troops, don't you understand?" I said.

"Ha, another new fashion!" he answered gloomily. "I cannot understand——"

"The word 'comrade' means 'to work together'," I explained to him. "Just think, we share life in common, death in common, sufferings in common, battle in common, against the Japanese. Are we not 'comrades'[1] ?"

"Right, second brother!" he shouted joyfully. "We have nothing to fear so long as we really do work together like 'comrades'."

One evening, as we were marching out to battle, Half a Cartload of Straw Short touched me furtively on the shoulder and in a low voice murmured, "Comrade!" Then he blushed and beamed like a child.

"Comrade!" He put his hand on my shoulder. "Are we going to fight the Japanese devils?"

I nodded to him and asked: "Are you afraid?"

"Not I," said he. "I have often fought against bandits.[1]'

And we marched along, side by side. When I heard the rapid thumping of his heart T could not help laughing aloud.

"Now I've caught you!" I cried. "You've just told me a lie. I can hear your heart hammering."

He looked embarrassed. Twisting the pipe in his hand, he stammered: "I am not afraid of the devils, never! If I were, I would not be a man. When I used to fight bandits, at first I would feel my heart thumping inside me, but after a few minutes 1 would be quite calm again. 'Second brother', a villager like me only fears the government officials."

About a mile from the village held by the Japanese we halted in a graveyard. Two plucky comrades volunteered to go ahead and spy out the land. A small detachment went round and lay an ambush behind the village, while the rest of us were to follow the advance guard. Suddenly Half a Cartload of Straw Short stepped right up to the commander and proposed himself.

"Your lordship, I know the 'line' well. Please allow me to enter the village first."

We were amazed at his words. For a moment our commander looked at him incredulously: "Do you mean that you want to spy for us?"

"Yes, your lordship. I have had a lot of experience in grappling with bandits before."

Some of the men whispered in undertones behind the commander, saying that he was not fit for the job and would ruin the whole affair. But our leader spoke to Half a Cartload without hesitation:

"All right! But you must be cautious."

Then he turned to me: "You keep him company; mind you look alert!"

Hand in hand we leapt out of the graveyard. We heard some discontented muttering behind us and then the commander:

"Never mind. He is a careful fellow in spite of his stupid appearance."

An arrow-shot from the village we lay on our bellies and

looked and listened for the enemy. It was very quiet. Half a Cartload whispered in my ear:

"Those damned Japanese have fallen asleep. Just wait a minute."

He pulled off his shoes, tied them to his waist and walked towards the village, crouching low. I felt pretty anxious about him. I moved forward a few steps and hid behind a willow. With trigger cocked, T stared at the village. Nearly twenty minutes passed. No news from Half a Cartload! Growing more and more uneasy, I crept forward. Near the water-wheel shelter I saw a black shadow slowly moving on the ground. A sound, and my heart began to beat like a galloping horse. Aiming my gun at the black figure I called in a loud voice:

"Who's there?"

"Me! Comrade!" A familiar voice: "Those blasted devils have all gone away. I looked for them in vain."

I jumped out and asked anxiously: "Did you search the whole village?"

"I've pried into every courtyard and every house; but there wasn't even a human hair to be found."

"Why didn't you cough and signal to me a bit sooner?"

"Well—well——" Half a Cartload of Straw Short touched my shoulder, stammering: "Because I still wanted a rope for my buffalo cow. Isn't it a fine one? When I was fighting bandits before, I would sometimes take things from others."

And he showed me the rope with a gleeful smile.

"Put it down!" I ordered. "The commander will shoot you if he catches sight of that!"

Half a Cartload stared at me in disappointment, slowly unwinding the rope from about his waist. I gave a piercing whistle, and torches flashed suddenly. Our comrades rushed to the village from every direction.

" 'Second brother'," Half a Cartload murmured in a frightened, tearful voice, "look, I've taken off the rope——"

On the way back Half a Cartload of Straw Short followed close behind me. He was as silent as a child who has broken a cup and is awaiting punishment. Understanding the cause

of his anxiety, I whispered a promise not to report the matter to our commander. He gently sighed and thrust his pipe at me. I asked him:

"Do you know why we shouldn't take things from the people?"

"Because we are revolutionary fighters."

Silence again for a moment. Half a Cartload of Straw Short suddenly asked me in a coaxing voice: "Comrade, couldn't we profit a wee bit by the revolution?"

"The revolution will do a lot of good for us as well as for many others," I said. "If we succeed in driving the invaders out of our country, millions of people will be able to lead peaceful lives. Won't we also get some benefit from that?"

"Of course, if we can live and work in peace, we shall naturally also——"

"Then we shall have a glorious time of it. And our sons and grandsons will be able to walk in the streets with heads erect."

From that time on he became a vigorous and energetic partisan. He did not worry himself with thoughts of his wife and child. He began to learn to read; each day he learned one character by heart, but when he had mastered about thirty he was badly wounded.

One moonlit night, twenty of us were ordered to destroy a railroad and wreck a train. We had no dynamite, nor had we very up-to-date weapons. Our plan was to demolish a section of the track and attack the military train when it was derailed.

Although we worked with great care we could not help making some sound as we loosened the steel rivets. In the midnight quiet our noise carried far. A shot! Then rapid firing.

"Lie down!"

Just then we heard machine-guns. Bullets fell all around us, their smoke streaking through the air. Ten minutes of this and the firing ceased. A train was coming down the line.

Our detachment commander knew what to do. He bound six bombs together and stuck them under the rail.

"Run!" he ordered.

We rushed headlong to a graveyard close by and fell flat on our stomachs. Half a Cartload of Straw Short stood with his pipe in his mouth as if nothing had happened. Our officer pulled the pipe out of his mouth and hissed:

"Get down!"

"Bullets only have eyes for bad men," muttered Half a Cartload.

The military train roared down the track. Our bombs exploded like a blast of thunder. Dust, smoke shrapnel, and the train crashed down the slope.

"Hit!" twenty voices shouted.

Again silence.

Then shouts of victory and commands from our officer. In the tumult I could hear a melancholy song:

" *When we depart from our metropolis* . . ."

We rushed out of the graveyard towards the wrecked wagons. Immediately machine-guns opened fire. Half a Cartload was running ahead. He cried with pain and stumbled. We rushed on. Then the gallop of Japanese horses. We retreated. We found Half a Cartload firing like mad at the enemy.

"Wounded badly? Can you still walk?"

"In the leg," he said. "I don't want to run away. I want to kill those devils."

He struggled against it, but I got him on my back and ran with our men. Sometimes we both fell into a ditch. Firing, galloping horses, and the load on my back seemed nothing to me then. I only knew that I was running and that I had to run . . .

Another bullet had hit Half a Cartload of Straw Short during our retreat. He was unconscious. Back at our camp we revived him and found that it was a severe wound. We put him on a stretcher to be moved to our rear hospital. He was very feverish and mumbled:

"Da, da, da—my ox, my yellow ox—da, da, da . . ."

ALONG THE YUNNAN-BURMA ROAD

ALONG THE YUNNAN-BURMA ROAD

ALONG the newly-paved base of the highway which stretches through Szechuan and Yunnan and along the Burma border, under the bushes and the scrub trees, there extends a long line of huts. These are the houses of coolies who are building the road. Before them huge camp-fires are flaring and human shadows move here and there in the light of the flames.

Duck sits before his hut, hugging his knees in his arms and staring stupidly at the long chain of bonfires. The scene does suggest a battlefield. And as some educated man has told him, "Those who work in the rear also carry on the war." Duck agrees with that. Building the road is like fighting. He remembers the time when he and his fellow villagers, in the dead of night, killed the big trout in the Dragon Brook with their sharp flashing spears. Then he recalls all the times he guarded his beanfields against thieves during the long nights. He would pick a few green pods and cook them by the side of the pool at midnight. Or the village head comes to his mind and he sees again this petty official carrying off his cooking-pot in lieu of the house tax. Now he sees again, in the light of the fire, the detestable face of the village head, his triangular eyes like a wolf's, a big red nose and thick lips!

He leans forward and stares into the fire with indignant, defiant eyes as though he wants to fight the fellow. Never before had he been roused to such a pitch of fury.

Uncle Hu the Third slumbers on in his hut. His pipe still glows in his mouth and as the last of the tobacco burns the drying bowl rattles and awakens Uncle Hu. He sits up with a start, hastily sucking in the last of the smoke, and with the back of his hand wipes off the saliva, which had drooled down one corner of his chin. Then he crawls outside, undoes his trou^a and makes water. He refills his pipe and as he lights

it with a coal from the camp-fire he catches sight of Duck, pondering like a philosopher.

"Brother Duck! Why don't you lie down and get some sleep? It's too cold out here."

"Oh, I like to sit here and think about things."

"Perhaps you watch for the wild wolves ? Or think of your old mother ? Chao the Second brought us rice from our village to-day, and what did your mother ask him to bring you?"

"Humph. A small cloth pouch. And what did it contain ? —three coppers, three sesame seeds and three green beans. It's supposed to ward off evil spirits and the Japanese devils' flying machines."

"Stupid woman! Who told her that?"

"The village head! He told every family they must buy such a pouch at fifty coppers each."

"I hope your Auntie the Third won't buy one for me.* My store of rice at home is almost gone."

And Uncle Hu the Third crawls back into his hut, rather out of sorts.

It is cloudy and no stars shine. The wind is blowing steadily down from the hills and it looks like rain.

Duck wipes the mud off his feet with the wet grass and then he too retires into his shelter. Their little huts are set up against a big pine tree. Uncle Hu the Third occupies a narrow space and Duck a broader one. Since Sanman has neither cotton pad nor blanket, he shares Duck's bed.

Sanman is a hard-working and generous fellow. He will spend all his pay at one throw. As soon as evening closes down he throws himself on the straw and begins to snore. Duck is small in size and he huddles up at Sanman's feet to pass the night. The heavy smell of tobacco and hay fills the enclosure.

Uncle Hu the Third calls from his bed:

"Where do you wear the precious little cloth pourh my stupid Duck?"

* A Chinese villager never refers to his mate as "my wife." He always uses some such form as "your aunt" to express the relationship ft*Vu [illegible]ther person to her rather than his own.

"I threw it away rather than have the squirrels gnawing my clothes to get at the seeds."

Uncle Hu the Third often dreams of how he would put the village headman in his place by inviting him to the camp and then showing him the great ones who come from outside to direct the road building. One day he says with great excitement:

"Duck! We'll be seeing great things soon now!"

Early the next morning, while the dense fog still hangs over the valley, they begin the day's work on the road. Ho Yusen, the foreman of this road gang, edges up to Uncle Hu the Third and begins to pull his leg.

"Uncle the Third, to-day we'll see our great official of such high rank! Three ranks higher than our district magistrate he is! This fellow Chen Tahsiu once happened to lunch with our district magistrate and he came back to the village with such a face! So long and ghostly with importance that he nearly frightened the villagers out of their wits! But you, my dear uncle, you will see a Nanking official of the very highest and the most supreme rank here with your very own eyes. Then when you return to our village, will you still recognize old Uncle the Second as your elder brother?"

It was true, a high official of the government is coming to inspect the road building. And all these peasant workers are fired with excitement at the thought of the approaching event.

Excited, yes, but they are apprehensive about it all, too. Folks like Uncle Hu the Third knit their brows and feel a headache coming on whenever they think of such an official as the village head. These officials are fellows that require much preparation. You have to present smoked pork or baked beef before you can expect them to do anything for you. Uncle Hu the Third has a treasure—a long pipe carved out of a bamboo root. Every morning he smokes three pipefuls the first thing after getting up. After that he carefully hides it in his waistband. Chen Tahsiu, the village head, had often hinted to Uncle Hu how much he admired this pipe—how fine the bamboo was, how tough it was with many knots and what a deep bowl it had. Yes, but Uncle Hu the Third likes his

pipe too and for the very same reasons. And this very fondness has grown on him so much that any threat to his possession gives him stomachache.

Ho Yusen, the little foreman, pretends to great sophistication and learning. He thinks Uncle Hu a very ignorant peasant, who has never seen the outside world. He does not realise that Uncle Hu the Third, thirty years ago, saw a great mandarin provincial official. But Uncle Hu has an answer for all his jokes.

"Your excellency, Mr. Foreman! I know the reason! You divorced yourself from your yellow-faced village wife; went down the river to a foreign school; learned a few meaningless words and now you are as proud as a water buffalo. If you really know something then take this shovel and build the road! You're always insulting us with your 'dog-shit—that's all you're fit to eat'—now tell us what does it taste like anyway, since you know so much about it?"

At that everyone roars with laughter.

The supervisor, whose name is something like Tsau, is very fastidious and pretentious. His eyes are small like a rat's, and he wears his hair long and oiled and brushed back smoothly in the foreign style. Hearing the coolies laugh he rushes up, brandishing his horsewhip that has never felt a horse.

"You laugh, do you? And what for, you lazy bums? A great official comes to-day and if your work is not done well I'll see you beaten till you cry! CRY!"

The supervisor has great difficulty in speaking. He squeezes the words through his stiff lips, now fast, now slow—every muscle in his long face contracted into an expression of intense majesty.' Sanman feels quite uncomfortable watching him mutter; and he can hardly restrain a laugh at the end of the tirade. The supervisor's small eyes grow redder and he glares round more fiercely. Then he points the horsewhip at Ho Yusen's forehead.

"Fore-foreman! Look what you're doing! Here—here are plenty of stones. Remove them from the roadbed and throw them down into the ditch at the side. Do it at once! You only know how to laugh with these stupid fools——!"

This is too much and the gang echoes him with guffaws and harsh laughter.

"Laugh! Let me see you laugh once more and I'll whip you until you cry—one by one!" He cracks his horsewhip in the air and then trots off indignantly.

Ho Yusen, the foreman, busies himself with the rocks and the rest follow. They drop their mattocks and set to, removing the stones. But Sanman simply piles his up to one side of the road like a wall.

Duck, too, is puzzled by this order: "Throw all the stones down into the ditches."

Sanman puts down the stone he is carrying and straightens his back, saying:

"Devil take him! Why don't we keep these stones for the surfacing of the road? The trucks will be bogged in the mud here if we don't."

And the others have been thinking, too. They nod their heads at these words. But Ho Yusen, the foreman, is silent. His superior has so ordered.

Uncle Hu the Third becomes encouraged by the foreman's silence and he makes bold to say:

"Yes, after the roadbed is done, we'll have to climb down' into the ditches and haul up all these blasted stones again. Stupid fool! We'll all have humped backs yet! Ho Yusen, be brave and speak up! Don't you see how foolish this business is? You're a cat before the mice, but a mouse before the cat. But if a man's right he ought to have a chance to speak. Why are you dumb all of a sudden? I don't understand it at all."

"No use quarrelling with him. Pile up the stones here!" Sanman slaps his brown belly. "I've worked for four district magistrates; travelled North and South of the river. I've never worked on a road before, but I've seen plenty of paving and tramped a lot of roads and I know better. Ho Yusen, my stupid child, address the supervisor with diplomatic words —I'll help you!"

The supervisor sees them talking again and starts for the spot on the run. But before he can reach them the men have forced Ho Yusen to call out:

"Supervisor! Shall we pile the stones up at the roadside or must we throw them down into the ditches?"

"Certainly, certainly." The supervisor trots up panting. "Throw—throw them away down into the ditches below there. Throw them all down."

Sanman stares indignantly at Ho Yusen, so that the foreman asks once more, quietly:

"Perhaps we should save the stones to pave the road. Shall we?"

"Shut up! This is a matter of engineering science. Close your babbling mouth! How could you ever understand the profundities of engineering?"

"Sure, I understand it." Ho Yusen's face is rather white; but his voice is firm. "I have studied engineering science in Rangoon University, and I have seen with my own eyes the construction of the Burma Railway."

"My dear foreman," the supervisor shouts, "don't quarrel with me, because we're all working for our country. You know this Yunnan-Burma highway is being built to meet the needs of the present Sino-Japanese War! You—you should know that the high official who is to see us to-day is a very careful man. He will notice every minute point: where a patch of grass should be saved, where the stones must be thrown away—all has been calculated in his mind! Before the road was even surveyed and designed he had examined the place many times. We should not make him criticize us. The coolies at the upper section of this stretch are on very good terms with me. You see, they have given me many valuable presents; but you—well, I'm sorry——"

Uncle Hu the Third points his finger at Ho Yusen behind the supervisor's back and whispers philosophically:

"Oh, oh! Do stay with us. Since you're also an official you must help us. It's a calamity for two such great officials to quarrel this way!"

When the supervisor has gone off Uncle Hu the Third cracks his toothless mouth in a smile and says:

"Other days that fellow has not dared to walk on the road, lest his shining hair, creamed face and western dress should

be stained with the yellow dust! But to-day—to-day he must come personally to see that no stones may obstruct the embroidered shoes of his excellency, the visiting high official. And there's no helping it, by God!"

Everybody laughs at that and Uncle Hu the Third turns very merry and brags of the time when he was eleven years old. He had gone down the Yangtze valley with his second uncle to see the world. It was the first of the month when the county official visited the temple of Chen Huang, the Earth God, to kowtow that there might be good crops that year. A gun was fired three times before the august personage himself actually came out of the official Yamen. Uncle Hu the Third's ears had been almost deafened by the great sound. And the gongs, the official banners which said "make way" and "hide yourself", the sign boards, the huge official silk umbrellas, the horsemen with swords, the *la-la* band with pointed hats who ran ahead—what glories there were! Finally Uncle Hu warns the peasants not to be scared:

"When you hear the reports of the gun, don't be scared. The palanquin will still be on the other side of the hill! When you hear the *la-la* band humming like weeping nightingales you must not laugh——"

Uncle Hu then pulls a very serious face. Sanman stops breaking the stones and wipes the sweat off his face. He will not let Uncle Hu brag so freely:

"How your tongue wags again! According to what I know of officials, they haven't got any gongs, banners or *la-la* bands! What you describe are nothing but those old plays we see on the stage."

"I saw these things with my own eyes, thirty years ago!"

Although Uncle Hu the Third is almost fifty now, yet he knows that his sight is as good as when he was a boy. Uncle Hu is also a barber, and even now Chen Tahsiu, the village head, still asks him to clean his ears for him, with complete confidence.

"Do you think one can use rice for seed that has been stored for thirty years ? I won't deny you as I never saw your great official. But according to what my eyes have seen: officials,

be they great or small, are only accompanied by soldiers; and you can determine a man's rank by the number of soldiers following him. In my time I have served four magistrates. And each had four big rifles and four small rifles when he came out. Another thing—have you ever seen soldiers arresting a man in the hills? If he's to be fined $50.00 one soldier goes after him; if the man's to be imprisoned—then thirty soldiers are sent and the fellow who's to be imprisoned for three years is arrested by the whole garrison! You can tell the rank of an official in the same way. And I'll wager the official who's coming to see us to-day will have no less than eighty rifles. The small rifles will all be seven-volley, ten-volley and twenty-volley ones; the big rifles are all Belgian-makes, seven by nine, and there'll be two machine-guns to each company!"

Duck is lifting stones and dropping them down the bank into the ditches below. As he works he thinks of what this official must be like. The officials he has seen have not been very great—only the village head and the supervisor. These two are arrogant fellows. He thinks that if the official coming to-day is like that supervisor here, then he will be a mutterer, too. It is likely that he never opens his mouth and that when he does he is so furious that he can devour people, and that his voice must be even louder than a broken gong or a cracked bell. Or if he is like the village head, then his eyes must be permanently turned upward, his mouth tightly pursed on the end of his chin and a nose as long as a foreign devil's.

Now the men are all at work. They lift the heavy stones and dump them down into the ditch; then Ho Yusen comes running up, bawling:

"He comes! He comes!"

All work stops, they drop the stones where they stand and the whole crowd gazes intently into the distance, their heads bent forward. But they cannot see a thing. A few minutes —and the supervisor comes toward them with an old man and three young lads, all in khaki uniforms. The supervisor is muttering for all he is worth to the old man and he waves his arms to this side and to that in great consternation. Uncle

Hu the Third sidles up to Ho Yusen and asks in a low voice when the official is coming. Ho Yusen points at the old man with shocked amazement.

"He's the official—that—that old bearded fellow!"

Uncle Hu the Third is bitterly disappointed. No gongs. No banners, not even a *la-la* band! Ho Yusen shakes his head sadly and whispers the news to all the men. Slowly the coolies gather around the old man who has come to see them. Duck is laughing in his sleeve that so many people should crowd around this uninteresting old man. While Sanman furtively steps behind the visitors to sec where they have hidden their rifles. According to him guns are concealed at the stomach, on the back, in the sleeves, or down a leg. But he can find no signs on these youths, nothing but mud on their uniforms. The supervisor passes through the crowd and whispers fiercely:

"Listen to the instructions! Don't make any noise. Don't —don't make noises!"

Then the old man leads the crowd down to a grassy slope below the roadbed. He sits alone in front of the workmen; Uncle Hu the Third is gloomy with disappointment in the back row; Sanman squats by the side of a stonemason, and Duck, who is still curious, lounges on the ground in front.

The old man wears a thin brown beard on his chin, and when he removes his hat they see that his hair is as though it were covered by the early autumn frost. Thick lips, short stature—he looke like an honest peasant. He speaks in a friendly way:

"I've been greatly concerned about you. The work on the upper section was finished yesterday. But you—are you fellows tired? How many of you have been ill in this bad climate here?"

Every man feels his heart slowly warmed by the words of the old man. He goes on to ask if the food is not enough, and if the huts are too uncomfortable. And about this and that. At first they answer his questions one by one; but soon they are replying in chorus and sometimes a wave of cheerful laughter sweeps through the crowd.

The old man goes on:

"We must be efficient and the work should be done as if for a contest. We must not waste our labour! Just now I saw that you were throwing the big stones down into the ditches. How well does the foreman supervise the work? Why does he neglect his duty to direct you? Pretty soon we will have to use those stones to pave the road. Then won't you have to carry all those rocks up to the roadbed again? Then you'll have wasted half your labour."

At this everyone turns his eyes on the supervisor. Sanman blurts out:

"It was the supervisor who forced us to do that."

And all the young and brave workmen stand up as witnesses to the accusation.

"Dismiss the supervisor!" the old man says decisively and with finality.

"These times do not allow us to make such mistakes," he continues. "Our resistance is also carried on in the rear. Think of the thousands of our compatriots who are fighting at the fronts! How then can anyone dream of personal power, or personal glory? Every drop of your sweat means that a stronger barrier has been erected to protect the life of our nation! I'm also a workman, a coolie and the same as you!"

What words! Duck wants to jump up and shout. But the supervisor falls down in a swoon and rolls on the ground as if in a fit. Uncle Hu the Third and the foreman go up to the old official and ask pardon for the supervisor. All eyes are on Uncle Hu the Third—for look! He has his old bamboo pipe in his mouth and doesn't even remove it when he speaks to the old man, though the wind blows the ashes into his eyes.

When the day is nearly gone the supervisor walks up to Ho Yusen and begins to chatter in his friendly way:

"It's said that Rangoon University is very good."

"Of course, very good!" Ho Yusen pretends to be a graduate of this school.

"Where is the university located?"

"In Singapore."

"And who founded it?"

"The overseas Chinese,"

This is too much for Sanman. He butts in abruptly:

"Don't tell such lies! Have a look at the stones whether they're useful or not!"

Uncle Hu the Third sucks contentedly on his pipe. After a while he knocks the ashes out on the root of a pine tree and then offers the pipe to Duck, saying:

"Duck, would you like a smoke?"

"No, I'm sleepy!"

"Smoking keeps off the bad air here."

Duck has no answer; he rolls into his hay bed and is so sleepy that he even forgets to pull up the blanket.

"Aya! You village head—you dead dog!!' Duck suddenly shouts in his dream and begins to beat Sanman with all his might.

The same old nightmare. Once when Duck was feeding cracked rice to his chickens the village head had come to seize his mother's cotton quilt, under the pretext that Duck had not paid all the house tax. The mother had held fast to the quilt and would not let him carry it off at any cost; and Duck himself had become so enraged that he had cried. He had pushed the official back and begun to beat him.

Sanman yells: "Duck! Duck! Wake up! Wake from that nightmare. Why do you beat me?"

And Uncle Hu the Third rolls over in his dream crying: "Wolf! Wolf!"

Duck wakes up and crawls out of the hut—his head reeling and heavy. The sky is like a great sweep of blue silk. The stars are winking. Over the hills in the distance clouds are massing. Silver moonlight floods the whole scene. A gust of chilly wind brings the fresh scent of newly-turned earth from the highway. Duck breathes in great mouthfuls of the sweet, night air.

From the hut Sanman calls with great concern:

"Duck! Take care you don't catch cold! Didn't you hear the new official say that to-morrow we start our Rearguard Defenders' Contest, Didn't we all say we would? And if you get sick then your work will be bad!"

THE THIRD-RATE GUNNER

THE THIRD-RATE GUNNER

LOOKI That's the one. When we saw him holding his rifle as though it were a hoe and fondly polishing it we always burst into fits of laughter.

"What's so damned funny?" the company commander shouted at us, his eyes protruding like a goldfish's. But as soon as he had turned and looked, he began to laugh, too.

"Heh, heh, heh!"

Victory Hu had described him like this: "People say 'A blind cat can still catch a dead rat.' But this fellow—he's like a blind man trying to catch a louse—it can't be done."

His name was Li and something else, but everyone called him 'the third-rate gunner.' He had been a poor farmhand, and then his sole worldly possession, a small mud hut, was burned down by the Japanese. One day as we marched along the field where he was working he threw down his hoe and joined up with us.

Every time we went out for target practice the men would ask him:

"Hullo, there, Third-rate Gunner! How many bowls of rice did you eat to-day?"

He was always casual. "Oh, not very much. Two bowls and a little over."

Then came the taunt: "Why eat so much? It won't be long before you'll be eating bread* again. Yes, not very much, you say!"

In our guerrilla company we only had first- and second-rate gunners—never anyone so low as third-rate. Newly-enlisted peasants were called "second-rate gunners"; but this farm-hand, who had been with us for ages, had never learned to

* Mien-pao is the cheap white wheaten bread common in North China, and because of its round shape it has come to symbolise "zero" to the villagers. In Peking it is a slang term meaning "good for nothing." Our "Third-rate Gunner" misses the target when he fires and thus scores a "mien-pao." Rice is more expensive in the North.

shoot. His fellow recruits had all been promoted to the rank of corporal or had become machine-gunners, while he remained our "Third-rate Gunner." In every shooting match, without fail, he would register three blanks or—and this was even more reprehensible—he would attend a ceremonial service!*

His first few months were the period of greatest torture to this peasant. The officers tried hard to train him: they gave him special instruction, then punishment and extra teaching. Every possible device was attempted, but all were in vain. He could not even hold the rifle properly when they had finished. The senior officers themselves showed him how to handle the gun. They would hold it firmly, aim carefully, and hit the centre of the target—pa! But he held the rifle loosely as if it were a hoe, or sweating with nervousness would rigidly grasp it as if he were holding on to a plough.

At their wits' end the officers gave him the beginners' course all over again. He had failed in it eight months before.

"Hold the rifle straight!"

He held it straight. One minute passed, then two, and by that time the barrel was sloping, sloping down—and he could not explain why. The officer would push his belly in; but, as if in response, one hip would immediately jut out, as if he were driving a water buffalo and plough. And when they pushed his hip back his belly would promptly swell out. This was too much, and the officer would shout in agony at his stupidity:

"Hold the rifle straight. Try it once more."

So he tried to keep it straight. He was ashamed, his legs trembled, his face flushed, and then he would take a breath and his belly would sag all over again.

"Just look at yourself!" the officer exclaimed. "Just look at that position. Can't you even stand straight? Look at your gun—it's waving in the air!"

But the Third-rate Gunner could keep erect no longer. His

* Since the Revolution all ceremonial services are decorated with the two Chinese national flags crossed above the portrait of Dr. Sun Yat Sen. Army target boards have two flags, one red and one white, above the target itself, and anyone hitting them "attends a ceremonial service."

hand loosened and the rifle fell to the ground. The officer jumped up, shouting that he had damaged another gun. For punishment he could have only one bowl of rice and a cup of salt water for supper.

Another officer tried to argue that his trouble was an inability to control his muscles. He could not even hold his breath. Then this officer repeated the whole formula to him all over again. He must have heard it five hundred times.

"Breathe in! That's right! Well—now breathe out a little. Now stop breathing—stop!"

The Third-rate Gunner did just as he was told and the officer nodded to himself, saying:

"Well, that's all right. But remember to do exactly the same next time."

Yet as soon as he faced a target he forgot all the rules, and without thinking held his rifle as he had been taught to hold a hoe.

"You blockhead!" the officer bawled.

And this time his punishment was to clean the rifles of those who had made more than twenty points in target practice. Only four rifles to clean, but he left everything smeared with oil and it took him half a day to do the job!

Once a company captain remarked to him in jest: "A guerrilla like you can't even be called ka second-rate gunner'; you're a third-rate gunner!"

So he became known as Third-rate Gunner.

In time people ceased to take his blunders seriously. The officers no longer shouted at him and the men only laughed when they saw him or called "Another loaf" when he missed again. Our officer would occasionally sigh:

"Do you realize how much our country pays for these bullets?"

Then the Third-rate Gunner would be greatly embarrassed and feel ashamed and upset about his mistakes. But after a while he ceased to care very much, and when a man called him "Third-rate Gunner" he would answer as though to a brother.

When the course of training was over and the guerrillas

were setting out for engagements with the Japanese the company commander called the Third-rate Gunner, and asked him:

"What can you do, comrade? Our bullets are very few—they are as precious as our lives. What work would you prefer? We think you'd better be a stretcher-bearer."

So he became a stretcher-bearer.

But soon after that he became a regular soldier again, for he had been with the troops many months and was better than a novice. But all the new recruits called him Third-rate Gunner, too, as soon as they had learned how to shoot. But the Third-rate Gunner never thought of reprisals. He was very friendly and told the newcomers all he knew about target practice and army life.

A month passed by. We had eleven engagements with the Japanese. The Third-rate Gunner never hit even one enemy soldier. Many of the newly-recruited younger farmers made rapid progress. And so the Third-rate Gunner would sigh to himself:

"Poor peasant that I am, what good am I? I can only plough the land. This damned rifle won't obey me like my plough."

One time a scouting party of six set out. There was the Third-rate Gunner, Victory Hu, Nine Dragons Wang, two veteran soldiers and a newly-enlisted peasant. They were to reconnoitre a neighbouring village recently occupied by the Japanese. But just as they came to the crest of the first small hillock Victory Hu waved his hand and slipped behind a tree. He pressed himself close to the trunk and levelled his rifle through the underbrush. Pa! A puff of smoke in the leaves.

The Third-rate Gunner saw a Japanese soldier fall to the ground on the next hill. A score of Japanese stampeded in four directions like a disturbed nest of grasshoppers. But they soon got under cover and took up positions in the underbrush. Six of them dropped behind a mound and a volley of bullets came in our direction. They all passed over our heads—shu-shu . . .

The Third-rate Gunner also flopped to the ground in great

haste and then, like a big frog, crawled up behind a grave mound. He saw a Japanese run crouching along a path. He levelled his gun and fired—pa!

He missed, and the soldier ran back unscathed.

Nine Dragons Wang was firing away in great excitement. Every time a Japanese poked his head up we would see him fall back, flinging his rifle in the air, Another cap would appear, and another hit. Another. Then a third—and a fourth!

The Third-rate Gunner was carried away with excitement. He would carefully level his rifle, press his cheek to the stock, and then hold his breath as we had all been taught, Then very, very carefully he released the trigger. But he couldn't hit a thing—even when the enemy was in full sight. His palm got soapy and the sweat ran down his back. In consternation he saw one wounded Japanese crawling slowly along the grass. He fired four times, but nothing hit the devil. He watched his target crawl up to a ditch and disappear—he could even see the bullets hit the ground beyond him.

When we counted our scores in this skirmish we found that Victory Hu had killed five and wounded one, and that Nine Dragons Wang had hit two, but the veteran guerrilla Third-rate Gunner had only cut the air.

"Lo-lo-lo! You bastard! You're a regular loaf—just a loaf." The more conceited Victory Hu grew the lower our Third-rate Gunner hung his head.

Then Nine Dragons Wang joined Victory Hu's chorus: "Loaf, loaf! Ha!" The commander had forbidden this ragging, but they kept it up, over and over. " Ha, ha, ha! You loaf!"

The poor Third-rate Gunner could not even smile. He could not find a word to say.

"Third-rate Gunner, ya! You eat one less bowl of rice to-night. How much do you eat? Four bowls a meal? Ha, ha, ha!"

Now the Third-rate Gunner could contain himself no longer. His eyes were bulging, he was so enraged. He reproached Victory Hu in a deep, gruff voice:

"What's the good of your mockery? What's the good of it? Why should you be glad that I can't hit the Japs? What kind of bastard pleasure can you get out of that? When 1 waste bullets, it means fewer for all of us. What pleasure can that give you?"

After a moment he went on: "I've wanted to throw down this rifle many a time—it's better not to be in the army than to be a 'third-rate gunner/ as you call me. But put yourself in my place! Do you think I like pretending that nothing is wrong, when all of you are shooting the Japanese? What else can I do? Do you think 1 miss on purpose? From now on I'll hit the mark every time. Every bullet will get an enemy!"

"Get a Japanese!" Victory Hu was scornful.

"You're not happy unless you can insult me," the Third-rate Gunner continued. "Sometimes 1 bite my fingers; sometimes 1 curse myself and want to smash the rifle. Do you think I enjoy my awkwardness? But you laugh at me and get a bastard pleasure out of it. I admire your accurate marksmanship—that's why I don't object to cleaning your gun. And 1 wish 1 could do the same as you—but what can 1 do? In every skirmish when you hit a Japanese I'm as happy as though I'd hit one myself. But you only laugh at me. It's the enemy who should laugh at my mistakes. If I hadn't been a farmer working so long in the fields my muscles would be good for other things as well. Then I'd be just as good a shot as you ..."

Victory Hu flushed and said no more. Nine Dragons Wang also seemed to think that the joke was over. They walked along in silence—then everyone hummed a tune.

"Swing your swords at the Japanese devils' heads . . ."

After that Victory Hu nursed a grudge against the Third-rate Gunner. He would not speak to him and stopped calling him "Third-rate Gunner." The latter, too, kept silence. He asked the captain to give him sentry duty so that he could avoid hearing Victory Hu's ridicule and seeing his long face.

He was stationed in a bamboo thicket by a brook, on the

other side of which ran the highway from the occupied village. Although the post was only a mile from the town no Japanese had ventured out so far. So the Third-rate Gunner had plenty of time to practise shooting by himself. He tried to remember all the rules he had been taught and tried hard to follow them.

Two months passed by, and he felt that his muscles were growing more obedient to his will. They were no longer quite so stiff and he could control them. One afternoon he dozed off after a long shooting practice. Suddenly his senses became alert as he heard somebody talking beyond the wood. He opened his eyes and looked cautiously through the leaves. Who were they? There were two Japanese officers in green uniform just across the stream, nodding their heads and smiling and drawing on a piece of paper.

"Is this a dream?" he wondered. But he grabbed his rifle. "To-day! 1—the Third-rate Gunner! The sight is good—let's see what I can do!"

His heart pounded, his hands trembled and the gun shook in his hands. Finally he mastered himself and levelled the rifle, holding it very firmly. But, poor farmer, he couldn't hold his breath.

"Maybe another blank," he thought. But he wouldn't lose his chance. Pa!—he fired.

One fellow with a little moustache wobbled a few steps and then fell to the ground. At that the Third-rate Gunner wanted to shout out loud. But he loaded again quickly and fired. The second Japanese had begun to take cover, but as he stumbled over a bamboo stump the bullet struck his hip. A third bullet threw him down.

Hearing the rifle fire the guerrilla commander sent up a detachment of men. The two dead Japanese were carried back to headquarters. Some very important documents were found on them as well as a pair of beautiful pistols such as the guerrilla mobile arsenal could never make.

The other day we all gathered in the village. The captain commander treated us to millet wines, freshly brewed by the villagers in our area. This time Victory Hu dropped his old

hostility for the Third-rate Gunner and gave him special marks of friendship and respect. He tapped him on the shoulder, laughed, held up his thumb before all the comrades and praised him highly.

"You're a regular guerrilla now, I say. Brothers, we won't call him Third-rate Gunner* any longer—he's an excellent shot!"

"Agreed!"

"Agreed!" from every man.

"We have all killed scores of the enemy, but all these put together were not worth so much as those he got!" Victory Hu shouted excitedly, as he raised his wine-cup. "Let's all drink to the health of our excellent gunner!"

The "excellent gunner" also raised his cup. But instinctively he looked down at his feet and belly. Ah, so big were his feet and so clumsy his belly that he could never match these nimble young guerrillas. So he said modestly, as a polite villager should do:

"No, brothers, I'm a simple farmhand . . . he, he, he!"

Then he swallowed a drink and his whole face flushed with pride.

MR. HUA WEI

MR. HUA WEI

IF I had cared to look through the family records closely enough I suppose I might have found that he was a distant relation. But I always called him Mr. Hua Wei. And he objected to this title.

"Brother Tien-yi, you're too . . .!" he said. "Why is it you always call me 'Mister'? You should call me 'Brother Wei', or, if you like, 'pal Wei'."

When he had settled this matter all over again he put on his hat and said:

"We'll gossip together some other day, Brother Tien-yi. 1 often wish I could talk with you to my heart's content but, alas, time never permits. To-day, you know, Magistrate Liu wants to see me. He has drawn up an outline of work for the office staff to do after hours, and he insists that 1 give him advice and correct his draft. Then at three o'clock I must attend a meeting ..."

Here he shook his head in an aggrieved manner and smiled bitterly. He had told me a good many times that it was not that he could not bear hardships—and in wartime everyone must make sacrifices—but, in all justice, one's responsibilities should not exceed the amount of time at one's disposal.

"Mr. Wang, the Committee man, has sent me three telegrams urging me to fly to Chungking for an urgent official conference. Now, tell me, how in God's name can 1 leave my duties?"

Then he shook hands with me hastily and hurried out to his private rickshaw.

He always carried his handsome leather portfolio with him and never forgot his heavy black walking-stick. On the ring-finger of his left hand he wore a thick gold wedding-ring. And whenever he was smoking a cigar he would arch the ring-finger and extend the little finger, as though his hand were an orchid in full bloom.

In our town the rickshaw pullers never went very fast. They always dragged them slowly as though they were taking an after-supper stroll. But the private rickshaws were a different matter. Ding-dang! Ding-dang! Ding-dang! They flew like sparrows. Lesser folk had to make way for them; wheelbarrows went into the gutters; pedlars hastily pulled back their wares, and the poor pedestrians looked in terror for the nearest refuge.

The bell on Mr. Hua Wei's rickshaw rang loudly; the steel spokes on the wheels flashed in the sun, and before you could clearly see him he had flown into the distance.

And, according to the statistics of the few national salvation volunteer helpers who were interested in such things, the fastest private rickshaw of all was Mr. Hua Wei's.

You see, time was extremely important to him. As he once told me, in all seriousness: "I am thinking of cutting out sleep at night. If only the day had more than twenty-four hours! Alas, the national salvation work is so formidable!"

And he would hurriedly glance at his gold watch. Then the muscles of his round face would tighten; his eyebrows knitted and lips pursed out. He would take leave as fast as his heels could carry him—he must go on to the meeting of the Refugee Relief Association.

He was always late. Everyone else had come long before and was waiting. As he left his rickshaw he would tap the bell once with his foot—ding!

Then everyone looked at each other. So Mr, Hua Wei had arrived. Some sighed with relief, while others pulled long faces and stared stupidly at the door. One fellow even clenched his fists and glared around him as though he wanted to pick a fight.

And there was Mr. Hua Wei. He came in wearing a very solemn expression, and walked with heavy, deliberate steps. It seemed as though all the strain on his face had merged into this awful seriousness. He halted at the door for a moment so that everyone might have a good look at him—apparently he meant to inspire all with confidence and assurance. He nodded knowingly to himself, his eyes on the ceiling. Thus

he let the humble masses know that he recognised their presence.

Complete silence in the room. The discussion was about to begin. Someone was turning over some papers.

Mr. Hua Wei ceremoniously took a seat in a corner of the room quite far from the chairman's platform. Not a word. He would sooner not act as chairman.

"I cannot be the chairman." He waved his hand with the cigar held daintily between his fingers. "The Executive Committee of the Workers' National Salvation Association is holding its meeting to-day, and then there is a discussion meeting of the Popular Literature Research Society. I have to be present at both. Besides, I must see how the work is progressing in the Service Corps for Wounded Soldiers. You know well, 1 am sure, that my manifold duties completely occupy the limited time at my disposal. Actually, I have only ten minutes to spend with you here. I cannot be the chairman. I propose Comrade Liu as chairman."

As he finished speaking he smiled and tapped the arm of his chair with his gold ring.

While the chairman proceeded with the report to the Committee, Mr. Hua Wei was busy relighting his cigar. He seemed quite preoccupied—as though he were counting.

"I have a proposal to make!" he called out loudly. "Our time is very precious, and I propose that the chairman make his report as brief and concise as possible. He shall be allowed only two more minutes."

He busied himself with his cigar and his watch, and when the two minutes were up he rose suddenly and waved his hand at the babbling chairman. "That'll do, that'll do. Although the chairman has not yet finished his report I understand the essentials clearly. Now I must hurry on to another meeting, but I wish to make a few suggestions before I leave."

Then a long pause. After a few thoughtful puffs of his cigar he glanced at the audience.

"My suggestions are very brief. There are only two points I wish to make." Then he smacked his lips. "The first concerns ca'canny. I must urge that everyone work very

energetically. I shall not over-emphasize this point. All of you are good people and enthusiastic about your work. I thank you very much. But there is another point which you must constantly bear in mind. This is my second point."

Then he sucked twice at his cigar and let the smoke roll gradually out of his mouth. He lighted another match.

"The second point is the need of direction and guidance. You young people require guidance! The national salvation work can only be well performed when there is good direction. You young people are very enthusiastic in your work; but you lack experience, and consequently it is very easy for you to make mistakes. Unless you have direction and guidance the results can only be hopelessly bad."

He quickly scanned the expressions of his audience and the strain on his features seemed to relax. He smiled and then went on:

"I can be very frank with all of you young comrades. I don't have to go through any hypocritical formalities. Indeed, we are all engaged in national salvation work and formality is not required. I thank you for it. That's all I have to say to you to-day. Sorry, I must be going."

So he put on his hat, caught hold of his portfolio and stick, and after peering at the ceiling for a moment and nodding a few times to himself, he marched out, his stomach jutting well out in front of him.

But when he reached the door he appeared to have forgotten something he wanted to say. So he called the chairman aside and whispered:

"Do you feel there is any ca'canny in the work?"

"I—I was just going to report that we . . ."

Mr. Hua Wei pointed his thick forefinger at the chairman's chest: "Well, well, I know, I know that. I've no time to talk with you now. Later on, whenever you hit upon a plan, you may call on me and I will discuss it with you."

One young man sitting near by stared at this conversation, and at last he could keep silent no longer. He put in: "We called on you three times last Wednesday and you were out every time . . ."

Mr. Hua Wei scarcely glanced at him as he said through his nose: "Well, many things engage my attention." Then he went on whispering to the chairman:

"In case you find that I am not at home, you had better discuss the matter with Miss Huang. Miss Huang knows my policy. She can tell you what to do."

Miss Huang, you see, was his wife. But he always referred to her as "Miss Huang" before other people.

Having settled all these problems he stpped into his rickshaw and was borne to the meeting of the Popular Literature Research Society. Here he found that the discussion had already begun and somebody was talking. He sat down, relighted his cigar, and then tapped sharply three times on the chair arm to show his irritation.

"Mr. Chairman!" he called out. "As I must hurry on to another meeting today I cannot remain with you long. I have a few suggestions to propose and would like to do so before I take leave."

Then he offered the Society two opinions. First, he pointed out that all the members present were cultural workers and that since cultural work was very important at the moment all should work hard. In the second place, he said, all cultural workers should have direction so that they might be better unified and greater solidarity achieved.

At 5.45 p.m. he went on to the meeting-rooms of the Workers' National Salvation Association.

This time his round face beamed and he even nodded to one person.

"Sorry, very sorry. I have missed three-quarters of the meeting."

The chairman smiled at him. And Mr. Hua Wei stuck out his tongue as though he were a naughty urchin before a severe mamma. He looked round at the audience for a minute before choosing a seat next to a little man with a moustache.

In a nervous and solemn tone he whispered to his neighbour:

"Did you get drunk last night?"

"Thank God, I was only a little dizzy. How about you?"

"As for me, I shouldn't have drunk those last three cups."

He spoke with great earnestness. "Especially that Shansi wine. One can't take much of that. But Magistrate Liu forced me to drink—alas! I fell asleep as soon as I got home. Miss Huang said she would settle accounts with Magistrate Liu for making me drunk. Just think of that!"

Then he opened his portfolio and, taking out a slip of paper, hurriedly scribbled a few words and handed it to the chairman.

"Please wait a minute," the chairman interrupted the speaker. "Mr. Hua Wei has to leave on other business. He must give us his advice first."

After nodding his head several times, Mr. Hua Wei stood up.

"Mr. Chairman!" A deep bow. "Ladies and gentlemen!" Another deep bow. "I beg your pardon. I arrived late and must now leave early . . ."

Then he made his suggestions: he stressed that this Executive Committee was the leading group in the town, and that it must always give direction and guidance to the work of other societies.

He further explained that the masses were very confused, especially the masses of to-day. Unless "we" gave them direction and guidance the future would be very black. In fact every part of the National Salvation work needed leadership and "our" burden was really very heavy indeed, but "we" did not fear hardship and therefore must shoulder the burden.

He reiterated this importance of having leaders and direction. Then he put on his hat and left for another meeting. Every day he was thus engaged, going from meeting to meeting or attending dinner parties.

Whenever I met Mrs. Hua Wei she would complain of her poor husband's innumerable tasks. "The poor man! It is such a pity. He is so busy that he has not even time to take his meals."

"Couldn't he drop some of the work and just concentrate on a single job?" I asked her.

"How could he do such a thing? All the work needs his guidance, you know."

But it must be admitted that Mr. Hua Wei was taken by

surprise on one occasion. The women of the city had organized a War Orphans' Relief Committee and they had not asked him for guidance or direction. As soon as he discovered who the sponsors were he brought them to his house and said:

"I know that you have organized a committee. I think you should select a few more members."

When he saw them hesitate he added:

"I am wondering whether your committee can direct its work. Can you give me a guarantee that there are no undesirable elements on the committee? Can you guarantee that you will not make mistakes? Can you guarantee these things? Can you? If so, sign your guarantee on this paper for me. Later on, when you make mistakes, you yourselves shall be held responsible."

Then he hastened to declare that all this was not his idea, of course. He himself was merely an executive. His finger pointed at the chairman's chest:

"If you cannot do what I have just said, your organization is not a legal one."

Having expressed himself in this manner two or three times to the committee he was elected a member of the War Orphanage Institution. Consequently at every meeting of the committee Mr. Hua Wei was present for five minutes, spoke a few words, and then mounted his rickshaw with his portfolio and stick and rode away.

One day he invited me to dine at his house because he said someone had presented him with some winter salted pork from the country. As soon as I arrived I could see that he had lost his temper with two young students.

"Why did you not attend the meeting? Why?" he was bawling. "I told you to urge some of your friends to accompany you. But when I got on to the platform to make my speech—you!—you were absent! I wonder what the hell you were doing!"

"I was at the meeting of the newly-organized Society for the Education of Refugees," said one.

Mr. Hua Wei jumped up in consternation.

"What! What is that? A newly-organized Society for the Education of Refugees! Why haven't they told me? Why wasn't I informed?"

"We had decided to invite you. But when we called at your house you were always out."

"That'll do! So you are plotting in secret, are you!" He glared at his guests. "Tell me truthfully what the purpose of your Society is. Now tell me the truth!"

This made them angry, and they said: "What do you mean by our 'purpose'? We're all citizens of China. What do you mean by 'secret plotting'? You never attend a meeting on time. You never stay through a meeting. When we call on you, you are always out. We cannot stop our work just on your account!"

Mr. Hua Wei flung his cigar on the floor and beat the table with a heavy fist—bang!

"You sons of bitches!" He clenched his teeth, his lips were quivering. "Be careful! You—you!" Then he threw himself on the sofa, cursing: "You goddamned sons of bitches!"

Five minutes elapsed. Then he timidly raised his head and peered round the arm of the sofa. The two men had gone. He uttered a deep sigh:

"*Ai-yah,* to think, brother T'ien-yi, what modern youth is like! Just look at them!"

That evening he drank too much wine, and muttered curses on the two unfortunate students. He became so violent that he smashed a teacup. As Miss Huang supported him on his way to bed he suddenly shuddered:

"There's another meeting at noon to-morrow . . ."

AN APPENDIX

SMALL TALK IN CHINA

FROM time immemorial the Chinese have delighted in stories and even in the most ancient philosophers, such as Chuang Tzu, we can find passages of pure imaginative fiction. The Emperor Jen Tsung of the Sung dynasty, who reigned from 1023 to 1056, is said to have demanded a new story to be told him every day, "to amuse as well as to acquaint him with the morals and customs of the people." But unlike *The Thousand and One Nights* these stories were brief and were therefore called *Hsiao-shuo,* or "small talk", a name which has since clung to every kind of fiction, short or long. And the majority of old Chinese novels are exceedingly long. They were written in the spoken language of the time, and though some of them had millions of readers they were never considered as a branch of literature. The self-respecting *lileraleur* of the old school regarded them, if at all, as an agreeable distraction: it was a sheer waste of time and talent to devote more than one's leisure moments to such trivialities. A scholar, for instance, who in one of his compositions should allude to any incident in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms,* though the most literary of Chinese novels and the nearest to actual history, would soon become the butt of all his colleagues. If he deigned to write fiction it was with some ulterior, personal motive, either to attack an enemy or to air a grievance: he had no aesthetic or commercial aims. To avoid compromising himself he would print it under some fantastic pseudonym. It was not until the beginning of the Manchu dynasty that picaresque romances were composed with a definite eye to profit.

The masses were constant in their demand for fiction: scorned by the man of letters, it became the province of professional story-tellers. Most of these had scant education, but a gift for coloured narrative and an instinct for symmetry must have always been Chinese characteristics, for their tales

are generally vivid and well composed. Their chief defect was a desire to show off what learning they possessed, which impelled them to weigh down their narrative with unsuitable quotations, allusions, discursions and chunks of unwieldy verse. Though this is recognized, we find similar qualities and defects in many contemporary Chinese writers, whose novels might also be improved by condensation.

The old-fashioned story-teller survives in the popular tea-house and market-place, and the modern writer is now attempting to compete with him. For a creative artist the problem is none too easy.

The new movement in Chinese literature is largely a result of contact with the West, and its pioneers received a modern, Western education. A Westerner may therefore approach it with greater ease than he could approach the Chinese Classics, and apply his own criteria to modern Chinese fiction without impertinence. But unless he has some acquaintance with the Chinese language he will scarcely appreciate the difficulties involved.

While classical Chinese was a remarkable medium for written communication between areas with widely different dialects, it could neither be spoken nor verbally understood. Classical school-texts had to be paraphrased and explained in the local dialects to become intelligible. With the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty in 1911, reformers began to look for a simpler, more suitable language as a means of popular education. At first sight what could be more appropriate than *pai-hua,* the common speech of the people, which is practically free from classical expressions? But there are numerous forms of *pai-hua,* and it was finally decided to adopt the most widely spoken *kuan-hua,* which foreigners translate as "mandarin", since it has long been the speech used by officials all over China, as distinct from the local dialects. To practise what they preached required more courage than these reforming scholars possessed; and they could hardly demean themselves to write in a language they despised.

It was for a younger generation to experiment seriously in

this form. A group of Peking National University professors composed the vanguard of the movement. *New Youth,* a monthly edited by Mr. Ch'en Tu-hsiu, then Dean of the College of Letters, was their chief organ of opinion, and Dr. Hu Shih rose to fame on the strength of his provocative contributions to it. "The three great principles of the Army of Literary Revolution," wrote Mr. Ch'en in 1917, "were: 1. To destroy the painted, powdered apd obsequious literature of the aristocratic few, and to create the plain, simple and expressive literature of the people. 2. To destroy the stereotyped and monotonous literature of classicism, and to create the fresh and sincere literature of realism. 3. To destroy the pedantic, unintelligible and obscurantist literature of the hermit and the recluse, and to create the plain-speaking and popular literature of a Jiving society."

As can be imagined, *New Youth* created a tremendous upheaval in the scholarly world, and violent controversies. There was a general outbreak of short-story writing comparable to that at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century in England, when reputations were made by writing them. In China this was something new, for with rare exceptions the shortest of stories had been as long as the average French novel, discursive and loose in texture. This outbreak may have been partly due to reaction, but it was chiefly due to an instinctive realization that the form was particularly suited to Chinese talent, which either in poetry or prose had never expressed itself happily in *oeuvres de longue haleine.* Concentration of style and economy of effect had always been the aim of conscious Chinese artists.

The first mature fruits of this exciting phase, which was one of reconnaissance rather than of renaissance, were some short stories by Lu Hsun. Strikingly unusual as his subject matter and technique appeared to his compatriots, a foreigner will immediately recognize the Russian influence on Lu Hsun's work. His brief essays called *tsa-kan,* or "random thoughts", are reminiscent of Gorki's *Fragmentsfrom my Diary;* his short stories, of Chekov. He has justly been compared to both these writers, yet he is no mere imitator; his whole outlook,

his restraint, his irony, his subtle understatement and submerged satire, his humorous unsentimental treatment of gloomy, and even tragic, themes, are essentially Chinese. The Chinese, moreover, have a lyrical attitude towards Nature and a bitter-sweet humour so akin to the Russian, that the influence of the latter may often be exaggerated. If Lu Hsun picked up some of his thread from Chekhov he has certainly sewn a Chinese coat with it. This is clearly illustrated by two of his earliest stories, *K'ung I-chi* and *Medicine,* which first appeared in *New Youth* and have since been translated into English, albeit with injury to their "sense, shortness and salt."* *Medicine* is an attack on rural superstition—in this poignant and gruesome case a superstition prevalent in South China that human blood is a remedy for consumption. Executioners were wont to enjoy the privilege of selling the warm blood of their victims for a handsome profit, and *Medicine* tells of a poor couple who administer such a "guaranteed cure" to their dying son with a pathetic baffled trust in its efficacy. The story ends among paupers' graves, "so numerous and closely arranged that they remind one of the sweet buns laid out in a rich man's home for a birthday celebration." The consumptive's mother is so touched by the grief of another woman that she almost forgets her own and goes over to comfort her. The latter implores her son's spirit for a sign that he is listening. There is a crow on a neighbouring tree. "Let the crow fly here and alight on your grave!" she cries. And the two old women stand in the dry grass gazing at the crow, which sits on and on, as if cast in iron. After a long while they walk off and the crow suddenly startles them with a hoarse croak, flapping towards the far horizon. Everything is crystallized in a few vividly etched scenes; the dialogue is sparse and bitingly to the point. *Medicine* is very near to poetry: it haunts one even in an uninspired translation.

Lu Hsun's resemblance to Chekhov is more apparent than real. Temperamentally he is closer to Gogol, whose *Dead*

* In *Living China,* a collection of modern Chinese short stories compiled and edited by Edgar Snow, London, 1936.

Souls he finished translating just before he died. As well as a natural power of observation he has that capacity to turn back with perfect naturalness of feeling to scenes of his childhood which struck Lafcadio Hearn as essentially Oriental. His subtlest effects; the deft, pointillistic tints of his miniature portraits, such as *K'ung I-chi,* the destitute pedantic old classical scholar whose legs are broken by the local magistrate for stealing books; the touches with which he can evoke the spiritual individuality of a nation; all are achieved by a gentle understatement and a lack of emphasis which defy the translator's efforts. His scalpel cuts at the very heart of Chinese apathy. Throughout his work he never forgets that he is a writer with a social message. In one of his prefaces he tells us that after studying medicine in Japan he came to realize that China's diseases were mental rather than physical. He returned to China to teach, first in his native province of Chekiang and then in Peking. But he is too fine an artist to be drearily all message, like Gorki in his later novels. Sardonic, sceptical, burning with anger against cant and injustice, he depicts—a Chinese Breughel with sombre Goyesque moods—the lives of poor country folk. One of his best long stories, for instance, *The True Story of Ah Q,* which has been translated into English, French, German and Russian, illustrates the mentality of most Chinese villagers at the beginning of the revolution, as well as the psychology of many townsfolk, rudely awakened from their dreams of an omnipotent Son of Heaven. Weichuang is a typical Chinese village—if not, as some have suggested, a microcosm of China. Until recently the Ah Q's were numerous; vaguely they existed and vaguely they died. But Ah Q's existence is lit by one flickering gleam: the long-suffering yokel has been badly buffeted by the whole village and determines in a sudden rebellious mood to join the ranks of the revolutionaries. "Of late Ah Q had experienced some hard knocks; in addition to this, during the afternoon he had gulped two bowls of wine on an empty stomach and had promptly become intoxicated. So he pondered this matter as he strolled along. He seemed once more to be soaring on airy pinions, and without so much

as knowing how it happened, it appeared that the Revolutionary party was *himself* and that all Weichuang were his captives. In his excessive elation, he could not refrain from shouting: 'Revolution! Revolution!'"

But when the revolution reaches Weichuang, poor Ah Q is the first to be snuffed out, and his execution is a swift and pungent passage of irony. One is reminded of Gissing's devastating sentence: "We only live our lives by laughing a little in the presence of suffering." All Lu Hsun's writings abound in pathos, but a pathos that has been frozen, that glitters with sharp icicles. Who that has read it can forget his description of a crowd assembling to gaze at an execution, while the raucous voice of a boy persists in calling attention to hot dumplings? His attacks on selfishness and callousness are never tedious; the least substantial of his stories are salted with wit and steeped in insight with phrases like sweet-sour sauce.

The vernacular movement gathered momentum with the mass meeting of Peking University students on May 4th, 1919, to protest against the Versailles Peace Conference decision to hand over Germany's former possessions in Shantung to Japan, and against the pro-Japanese policy of a corrupt reactionary government. Public sentiment was all on the side of the students and the government was forced to capitulate. The students who had been arrested were set at liberty and three notorious pro-Japanese ministers were dismissed. This triumph gave Peking University an added prestige; a spate of periodicals began to appear in *pai-hua,* and in 1920 the Ministry of Education ordered that the text-books for the first two grades in primary schools were to be written in the vulgar tongue, now dignified as the National Language of China.

It was natural that writers should separate into cliques, but in spite of their published creeds and manifestos, such organizations were very flexible. The "Realists" formed a group called the "Literary Research Society" which published a *Short Story Monthly* and *Literature,* both edited by Cheng Chen-to, the dynamic Dr. Johnson of the movement, and

supported by the vigorous contributions of Mao Tun and his *"Blood and tears"* school. Mao Tun's long story, *Spring Silkworms,* and his trilogy, *Pursuit, Turmoil* and *Disillusion,* which describe the bankruptcy of China's rural economy, are the outstanding masterpieces of this school: they are ambitious, solid, carefully constructed piles of realism—the very antithesis of the inspired character-sketches and impressionistic landscapes of most Chinese writers. Mao Tun has exerted a powerful influence and should remain important to students of sociology. But apart from the value of his meticulous documentation, he is too heavy-handed to appeal to many Western readers. Chinese critics compare him rightly to Upton Sinclair, with whom he has much in common.

The "Romantics" were led by Kuo Mo-jo, a spontaneous, impulsive and amazingly prolific novelist, poet, dramatist and archaeologist. For many years he was the leading spirit and editor of *Creation,* a monthly magazine which from about 1922-1928 had a larger influence and circulation than any other Chinese literary review and was supported by such well-known contributors as Yu Ta-fu and Chang Tzu-p'ing. The latter's cheaply sensational stories of amorous intrigues used to sell like hot cakes but were as void of literary merit as our own sexy magazine products. Yu Ta-fu, however, serves as a useful guide to the psychology of Chinese youth during that restless period. He has been called a decadent, but his quest of sensation was never sterile. As a student in Japan he was more preoccupied with prostitutes than with political economy. Lacking robustness, extremely susceptible to feminine charms, he lived in a continual conflict between excitement and repression. Besides sexual torment, his consciousness of China's dismal plight made his existence more poignant than if he had stayed at home. His imagination became morbid, his outlook suicidal. It is difficult to disentangle autobiography from fiction in his writings. Many of his stories are interesting merely for the ache of adolescence they communicate; the landscape, the whole atmosphere, is flushed with it. Divorced from this and scrutinized as stories they are often faintly absurd. Because his wife has died of

consumption at home the young student in *Silvery Death* takes to drink; eventually, on discovering that the only girl who can console him, a Japanese waitress, is engaged to be married, he drinks himself into a stupor from mixed motives of self-pity and revenge, and expires of cerebral congestion on the square before the College of Medicine, with a volume of Ernest Dowson's poems in his pocket.

When he returned to China Yu Ta-fu's outlook became like that of T. S. Eliot's *Hollow Men.* "In this world to-day," he wrote, "the blind are many; the clear-sighted few. They have ears but no eyes. They cannot distinguish between the clean and the foul. They only have faith in reputation." But he was young and the apathy he sank into was partly pose or he would never have troubled to express it so intensely. If introspection was one of the maladies of Chinese society it proved a boon to Yu.

"My past—half my life," he exclaimed, "is a fragment of misery. When I recall it, it seems nothing but tears and sighs. Some time ago I still took a certain pleasure in this misery. I still had dreams to deceive and comfort me. To-day, not only have I stopped tasting this sweet bitterness, but even the last defence of a fool—to dream with eyes wide open—has also been snatched away from me by a pitiless fate." And as if the Chinese language were not sufficient he breaks into English: "I am a man truly superfluous! I am therefore utterly useless to society and the world. *A superfluous man\ A useless man\"*

Yu's writings abound in such passages and we may find plentiful parallels among the *pai-hua* poets of his generation. He depicts himself "warts and all" and inclusively, sharing his own predicament, some hundreds of returned students, intelligent, hypersensitive, struggling and disillusioned. We must take their environment into consideration before we pass judgment on them; compared with ours it was chaos. Even so there were optimists and doctrinaire enthusiasts, and Yu satirized them in a story called *Blood and Tears.* For at that time he showed definite affinities with Taoist thought, in the same sense that Keats showed when he wrote: "The only

way to strengthen one's intellect is to make up one's mind about nothing."

Yu Ta-fu wrote well under the lash of frustrated desire, but as soon as he abandoned introspection for left-wing politics his virtues of candour and innocency disappeared. His writings exerted a considerable influence during the twenties, especially those attacking "the feudal institution of arranged matches", sex taboos and fossilized conceptions of filial piety, but his pessimism has little appeal for the present, more constructive, generation.

The differences between these Romantics and Realists are really superficial; both the *Literary Research Society* and *Creation* shared a strong opposition to static feudalism and revolted against China's hoary ethical teaching. They wanted above all an independent China. Both Mao Tun and Kuo Mo-jo became fervid advocates of proletarian literature. "Our literature," wrote Kuo Mo-jo in 1925, "must be pervaded by the spirit of the proletarian revolution. We writers of China must reach the masses, the barracks, the factories, and the very rank-and-file of the revolutionary army. We must create a literature that is realistic and that can fulfil the aspirations of the Chinese people."

In spite of this determination revolutionary writers remained way above or beyond the Chinese masses. Though they expressed themselves *inpai-hua,* their form and substance were too alien and exotic. Ninety per cent, of their readers were university and middle-school students. The man in the street preferred the traditional tales of magic and derring-do recounted in the tea-houses: he was quite satisfied with old-fashioned entertainment. And after a spell of the "blood and tears" school one is bound to agree with him. Mao Tun's imitators were monotonously and mechanically dreary; they forgot the strong sense of humour of their race. Having little direct contact with "life in the raw" or power of observation, their peasants and factory workers and rickshaw-pullers were mere pegs for a motley patched with rhetoric and ill-digested ideas. More important and influential than their fiction was their formidable activity in the field of translation. Dr. Hu

Shih and Cheng Chen-to enabled young writers to concentrate on this work by granting them monthly allowances. Assured of a modest living they could produce original work besides their allotted tasks. Apart from translations, the period from 1927 to 1930 was one of intensified literary feuds. Suppression of Communism involved much tragic martyrdom and ephemeral leftist journals sprang up like mushrooms in Peiping and Shanghai. It is bewildering to pick one's way between their quarrels. First Lu Hsun is denounced as a reactionary; then he is elected Chairman of the League of Left Writers, whose principles—ruthless attack on the old ideology, etcetera—were not so dissimilar from those of Ch'en Tu-hsiu. At this time the best *pai-hua* poetry appeared, in the *Crescent Moon,* a monthly of which Hsu Chih-mo was the moving spirit. Hsu had grown familiar with English literature at Cambridge, where Lowes Dickinson helped to make him conscious of his powers; after his return to China, where he became a professor at Peking National University, he took the students by storm. More than any other poet he "introduced the Western rhapsody" into Chinese verse, and it was a tragedy for Chinese literature when he was killed in an aeroplane crash in 1932. Though *The Crescent Moon* was attacked for "ivory towerishness", it introduced a number of brilliant poets and essayists like Wen I-to and Ch'en Meng-chia, conscious artists who believed that poetry should "dance in fetters" and obey certain metrical rules. It also introduced a story-writer who is far from esoteric, the versatile Shen Ts'ung-wen, who produced over forty books before the age of thirty. In his early 'teens he was an army scribe in his native province of Hunan, and it was from his wanderings in China's "Wild West" among the Miao-tzu and other strange tribes that he derived the experience that enriched him as a writer. Some of his stories have been translated, but it is hard to render justice to his fresh and picturesque idioms and vivid local colour.

Eventually all groups of writers buried their party hatchet in the common cause against the Japanese. Shortly before his death in 1937 Lu Hsun wrote: "The problem for every

Chinese to-day is how to preserve our national life. The only course is for our people to unite and drive out the invaders." Political unity was achieved by the peaceful conclusion of the Sian Incident in 1936, and writers were quick to join the National Front. Mao Tun was their spokesman and prophet when he wrote in the *Literature Monthly.* "Our new literature is essentially a literature of national defence. It expresses the struggle of the Chinese people for their freedom, but it is not chauvinistic. True, it has hatred for the enemy invading our country, yet it has sympathy for the enemy soldiers, who are innocent folk driven to the front for cannon fodder. But not only sympathy for them. We must kindle them with our brotherly sincerity and enthusiasm so that they can stand up beside us and we can fight our common enemy together. We shall ruthlessly attack the traitors who serve the foe and we shall urge the people to exterminate them." A mass meeting of writers was held in Hankow, then provisional capital, on April 27, 1937, and "a resolution was passed for the immediate formation of a union of all writers so that all could work more systematically and effectively for the common cause." A committee was elected and the Federation of Chinese Writers thus established. With headquarters in Chungking, the Federation has branches in all the larger cities and hundreds of members all over China.

When war broke out many publishers closed down, but the writers soon combined to issue their own publications. Mao Tun and Pa Chin brought out a new weekly called *Outcries,* Hu Feng a monthly called *July,* and the two playwrights Sheng Chi-yu and Hung Sheng a magazine called *Light.* Several newspapers began to print literary supplements. The first and most influential of these was the *Ta Kung Pao's,* edited by Hsiao Ch'ien, a story-writer of talent, to whom I am indebted for much valuable information. Writers became men of action, went to the front to drive lorries, wrote letters for the wounded in hospitals, taught refugees in camps. Pien Chih-lin and Ho Ch'i-fang joined the Eighth Route Army, and it is difficult for one who knew Pien as a fragile figure, the pale, shy, and bespectacled translator of Baudelaire, Mallarme,

Gide, Virginia Woolf and Strachey's *Queen Victoria,* to visualize him enduring the rigours and privations of the campaign against the Japanese. The war has not ousted everything else from their attention; on the contrary it has strengthened and canalized their creative impulse. They continue to write, refreshed and invigorated by their experiences. Under the pseudonym Hsueh Lin, Pien has produced some short stories which are symptomatic of the new trend; while they contain a "message" they are written with all his innate concern for style. A translation of one appeared in *Life and Letters',* it begins characteristically: "All of a sudden the village of An-chu was put out of countenance. The women promptly discarded their red trousers." These red trousers are the keynote, as of a painting by Manet. Pien Chi-lin remains a subtle impressionist, but his palette has become more vivid in the Sino-Japanese thunderstorm.

The war scattered writers all over China and brought them into natural contact with the people; instead of viewing them as abstract masses from some literary laboratory in a Shanghai skyscraper, they saw them in huts and in the open air and perceived their intellectual wants at first hand. Some carried on their activities just behind the Japanese lines; others tramped to far-off towns in the provinces. The chief universities of Peking and Tientsin had trekked to Ch'angsha and from there to K'unming, and the importance of literary students who could do propaganda was generally recognized. Most of these students spent their time between bouts of schooling and guerrilla work. As William Empson wrote in a too-brief article: "You normally have an experienced sergeant over a group of fifty to two hundred men, but they need a man who can read messages and make political speeches, supposed to be of equal rank to the sergeant, and he is normally drawn from university or failed-university young men." In the meantime new literary magazines appeared in Hankow, Canton, Kweilin, Sian, Ch'angsha, Ch'engtu, Yenan and K'unming. A catalogue of their names would bewilder the Western reader. There was even a literary revival in Shanghai, that hornet's nest of Japanese

terrorists and Chinese traitors, where Cheng Chen-to still pursues his voluminous research work. In fact China's Renaissance may truly be said to have begun with the Sino-Japanese War. The pioneers of the *pai-hua* movement were conscious artists with a narrow public of students and intellectuals. But since the war modern writing has had an increasing circulation, and the interest in recent experiments is widely diffused among an altogether different class of readers, including Government clerks, post-office employees, soldiers of the Central Army (the majority graduates from Middle Schools), policemen—many of whom have literary aspirations. The vogue of the short-story is expanding and the writers are in closer touch with their public. The magazine *July,* for instance, printed a moving sketch called the *Third-rate Gunner,* by a soldier writing under the pseydonym S. M. This brief study of a patriotic but pathetically clumsy peasant who is goaded into vindicating himself as a shot by the insistent mockery of his companions, enjoyed a sensational success. Finer than this is Yao Hsueh-yin's *Half a Cartload of Straw Short,* which deals with a similar theme and has obvious affinities with Gorki at his best. One of the most promising younger writers, Pai P'ing-chieh, whose *Along the Yunnan-Burma Road* (*Folios of New Writing,* Spring 1940) is a robust, firm-footed evocation of the builders of that highway—"the workers in the rear who carry on the war"—is a pure descendant of the Miao, the "aboriginal" tribe of Yunnan. The influence of Russian fiction is as powerful as ever, and in some stories so strong as to make them read like clever parodies.

Writers who were born about 1907 are already described as belonging to the older generation, and of these Chang T'ien-yi has gone from strength to strength. *Mutation* was one of the best stories in Edgar Snow's collection, to which Chang contributed an interesting autobiographical sketch. "The characters in my stories," he confesses, "are taken from my friends, relations, and those with whom I have had frequent contact. Formerly I had the weakness of making my characters act merely for the sake of bringing out the themes

of my stories, thus neglecting their complex human natures. Recently I have attempted to correct this mistake. I shall remember the necessity for 'creation of types' and learn to do it." In *Mr. Hua Wei,* a satirical exposure of the cant and opportunism of many a pseudo-patriot, Chang T'ien-yi has drawn a universal type with a Chinese economy of effect which does not evaporate in translation. The only English writer who has influenced him is Dickens, and his dialogue is strongly humorous as well as realistic. But one of his finest stories, *Hatred,* a translation of which has already appeared in *New Writing,* has a harsh and mirthless poetry, a terror and sorrow new to contemporary Chinese writing. One can only compare the accumulated, concentrated force of this story to a masterpiece of Chou bronze. In his exploration of language and human behaviour Chang T'ien-yi has mastered and moulded his discoveries as few others have succeeded in doing.

The danger of war to writers is that they may become too easily satisfied with slick and promptly effective reportage. The work of modern Chinese writers betrays a tendency to mistake mere anecdotes and snapshots, good in themselves", for self-sufficient stories. It would be excessive to demand gem-like distinction at such a time. The material, however, is magnificent, and among much mud and blood are plenty of gems which only need to be polished.

From a distance Lu Hsun still dominates the scene.

NOTE BY THE TRANSLATOR

In the midst of war I managed one way or another to translate quite a few stories from Chinese into English. I sent them in succession to friends abroad for eventual publication in foreign magazines, hoping that they might succeed in getting through by the precarious routes over the Himalayas and on the high seas. For myself I kept no copy as I knew by experience that it could be destroyed at any moment by bombing or through other war-time calamities. Besides, while one has to shift about all the time with the developments of the war, carrying things other than the simple necessities is an impossibility. However, after I had come to Britain on a war job in the winter of 1944,1 discovered that seven of the stories had survived. Again, by sheer accident, they form an almost natural sequence dealing with a single topic: the life of the Chinese peasants shortly before and during the war.

In the translation my friends D. Allen and G. Peck have rendered me valuable assistance. But no less am I indebted to John Lehmann for his encouraging suggestions and interest in Chinese writing. Some of the stories have been published in the pages of his ably edited *New Writing Folio* and *Penguin New Writing*. I am also grateful to Harold Acton for permission to reprint his article on contemporary Chinese literature, which has also appeared in *New Writing Folio*. His long residence in Peking has enabled him not only to become familiar with modern writing in China, but also to be in close contact with Chinese writers.

I must also say a few words about the authors, whom I happen to know quite well. All except Mao Tun, who is now approaching sixty, are young and ambitious. Yao Hsueh-yin has produced three long novels during the past three years. S. M. is trying to restore his health, damaged by the war, in order to put his rich experience as a soldier on record in the

days to come. Pai Ping-chei is planning to return to his folk at Tenchun, his native town on the frontier between Burma and China, which was liberated shortly before V-J Day. Chang Tien-yi, one of the most talented writers, who refused to leave his people in Hunan Province during Japanese occupation, has been suffering from serious tuberculosis, a disease prevalent among all good Chinese intellectuals who did not want to escape from the long war. At the time I left China he was said to be dying. I have not heard of him since. But I hope he is still alive, for he is much more needed in peace than in war,

C. C. Y.

Cambridge, 1946.