

Other Works by Lu Xun

(in English)

A Brief History of Chinese Fiction

A study of the development of Chinese fiction from early myths and legends down to well-developed long novels written at the end of the Qing Dynasty.
452 pages 20 × 13.5 cm. Half-cloth

Selected Stories of Lu Xun

A selection of 18 short stories, which show clearly Lu Xun's method of creative writing and thoroughgoing critical realism.
264 pages 21 × 13 cm. Half-cloth and paper

Old Tales Retold

A collection of eight stories based on ancient myths and legends.
136 pages 18.5 × 13 cm. Paper

The True Story of Ah Q

The story deals with the tragedy of Ah Q, farm labourer, who suffers a lifetime of humiliation and persecution, dreams of revolution and ends up on the execution ground. It bitterly criticizes the bourgeoisie, which led the 1911 Revolution and failed to arouse the peasants.
76 pages 18.5 × 13 cm. Paper

Wild Grass

A collection of 23 prose poems.
68 pages 18.5 × 12 cm. Paper

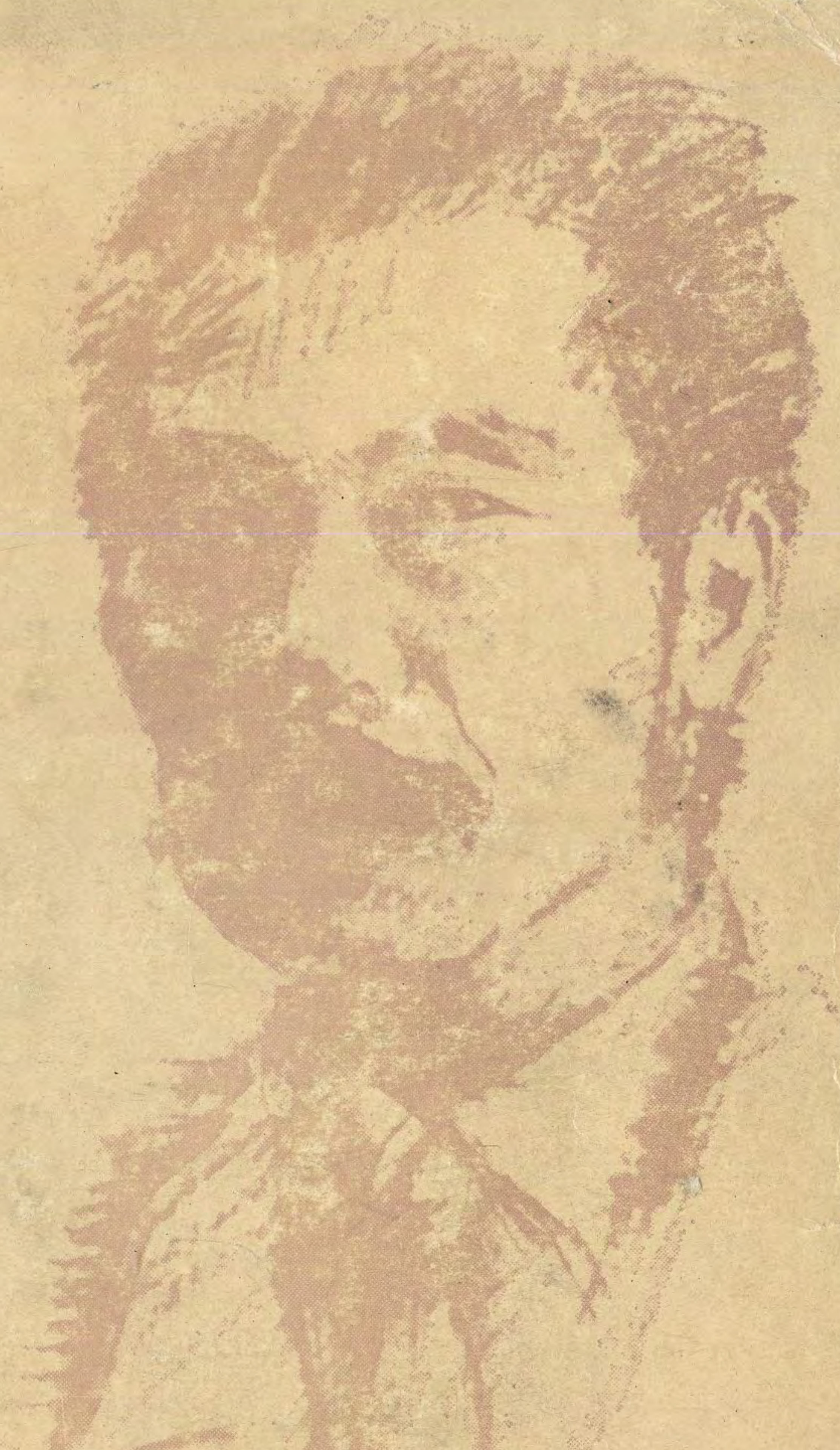
Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk

A collection of ten essays dealing with the author's childhood and early youth.
130 pages 18.5 × 12 cm. Paper

Published by FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS
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Beijing, China

Volume One



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Translated by

Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang

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Volume Two

LU XUN

SELECTED WORKS



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SELECTED WORKS

Translated by

Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang



Lu Xun at fifty,
photographed in Shanghai in September 1930

LU XUN

SELECTED WORKS

VOLUME ONE

Translated by

YANG XIANYI *and* GLADYS YANG

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This selection of Lu Xun's works includes stories, prose poems, reminiscences, polemical writing and essays dealing with many aspects of life and letters. It comprises four volumes, the last three of which contain selected essays.

Lu Xun's works are exceedingly rich and varied. Outstanding as a writer of short stories, he is even greater as an essayist and thinker, and we value the brilliant ideas and art expressed in his sixteen volumes of essays even more than his short stories. Again, he was well-known as an authority on Chinese literature, who did pioneer work with his original and profound researches in this field.

Lu Xun's studies on the history of Chinese literature have been left out of this selection, as they are for specialists in this field. A part only of his essays is here, and his poems in the classical style as well as his letters have not been included.

These four volumes, however, are representative of Lu Xun's writing during different periods of his career. From them the reader may gain a general picture of his role as the founder of modern Chinese literature, his ideological development from a revolutionary democrat to a communist, and his great contribution to China and humanity.

Volume One contains selections from his short stories, prose poems and reminiscences.

The first nine short stories are taken from Lu Xun's earliest collection of short stories, *Call to Arms*, the pre-

face to which is also included. The next seven stories are from his second collection of stories, *Wandering*.

"The Flight to the Moon" and "Forging the Sword" are from his third book of stories, *Old Tales Retold*.

The fourteen stories in *Call to Arms* were written between 1918 and 1922. The eleven stories in *Wandering* during 1924 and 1925. The eight stories in *Old Tales Retold* were based on ancient myths and legends. One of them was written in 1922, the two in this selection were written in 1926, and the others during 1934 and 1935. All Lu Xun's stories are contained in these three collections.

The nineteen prose poems are taken from *Wild Grass*, a collection of twenty-three pieces written between 1924 and 1926.

Of the nine reminiscences, the first seven come from *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*, which contains ten essays written in 1926 dealing with Lu Xun's childhood and early youth. The remaining two essays, from *The Last Essays of Qiejieting*, were written in 1936, the last year of his life.

A number of these selections have already been translated into various languages; but this is the first attempt at a systematic introduction of Lu Xun in English. The translation in this new edition has been revised.

LU XUN: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Feng Xuefeng*

I

Lu Xun (Lu Hsun), whose real name was Zhou Shuren, was born on September 25, 1881, in Shaoxing in the province of Zhejiang. He came of a scholar-official family. His grandfather, who was holding office in Beijing at the time of Lu Xun's birth, was thrown into prison when the boy reached his thirteenth year; and the family never recovered from this blow. Lu Xun's father, a scholar who had received no official appointments, had always been a poor provider, moreover, he fell seriously ill about this time and remained an invalid till he died three years later. Because of this, Lu Xun's family was reduced to poverty. His mother, however, was a capable woman. The daughter of a scholar, she was brought up in the country but taught herself to read, and her generosity and pluck remained a lasting inspiration to her son. Her maiden name was Lu, and it was from her that Lu Xun derived his pen-name.

In his boyhood, all Lu Xun's relatives were struck by his intelligence. He entered school at the age of six, and immediately began to study the ancient classics. He remained in Shaoxing until he was seventeen, only leaving it once during all this time for a short stay in the country with one of his uncles. Lu Xun read a great

* (1903-76), a contemporary Chinese writer.

number of Chinese classics during these twelve years. Not only did he have a photographic memory, but he often hit upon a new interpretation of an old text and had the courage to challenge the established point of view and the traditional ethics of that feudal, patriarchal society. In addition to studying the orthodox classics and histories, he took a special interest in mythology, unofficial histories, miscellaneous essays, and anecdotes.

Young Lu Xun also took great delight in folk art: New Year pictures, tales and legends, religious processions and village opera. As a boy, we know, he loved painting. He collected picture albums and illustrated books, and used to trace the woodcuts in such albums and in old romances. He also drew cartoons.

One of the features of Lu Xun's boyhood which greatly affected both his character and his writing was the fact that he was acquainted with the countryside and a number of his friends were the children of simple, honest peasants. As he grew older, Lu Xun recalled these contacts and friendships as the best times in his life. In fact, they served as the significant beginning of his spiritual ties with the working people.

But, of course, what impelled Lu Xun to take the path which led to revolution was the encroachment upon the country by foreign powers and the bankruptcy of Chinese feudalism.

Lu Xun's boyhood coincided with a period of intensified imperialist aggression, when the Qing Dynasty was becoming more and more corrupt and impotent. In a vain effort to prolong its rule, it attempted to appease the foreign powers by yielding to them its own sovereignty and parts of its territory, while suppressing the patriotic resistance of the people. Reduced to a semi-colonial status, China was in imminent danger of being partitioned by the imperialists.

Although Shaoxing was comparatively cut off from the outside world, it could not fail to be shaken by the general

social crisis and the danger confronting the nation as a whole. The decline of Lu Xun's scholar-official family, coinciding, as it did, with the intensified threat from abroad and the tottering of feudal rule, made the sensitive lad reflect not only upon the fate of those around him, but also upon that of his country. From the age of thirteen to seventeen, owing to his family's poverty and his father's illness, Lu Xun became familiar with pawnshops and pharmacies; and the cold treatment he received left its mark upon him. He began to be conscious of the oppressive nature of a feudal, patriarchal society and, aware of its flaws and contradictions, he learned to hate and despise it. He did not want to follow in the steps of his grandfather or father, nor to become a merchant or a clerk in the magistrate's yamen, as did most of the sons of the impoverished gentry in Shaoxing. He insisted on taking a different path.

And so, when he was eighteen, with the eight dollars his mother had managed to raise for his fare, Lu Xun left for Nanjing to take the entrance examination for the Naval Academy, where no tuition fees were charged. He passed the examination, but was not satisfied with the institution. The following year he transferred to the School of Railways and Mines attached to the Jiangnan Army Academy, also in Nanjing. This school did not satisfy him either, but here he became acquainted with the ideas of bourgeois reform and constitutional monarchy, and read a number of translations of modern literary and scientific works by foreign writers.

Lu Xun was in Nanjing for four years. His stay there coincided with the Reform Movement of 1898 which aimed at setting up a constitutional monarchy, the anti-imperialist Yi He Tuan Uprising, the subsequent invasion of Beijing in 1900 by the allied armies of eight imperialist powers, and the humiliating Protocol of 1901 which the invading powers imposed on China, when the country's fate hung in the balance. During these four years, Lu

Xun became convinced of the need for the whole nation to revolt against imperialism and the Qing Dynasty. The Chinese translation of T. H. Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* had a great influence on him at this period. It not only caused him to take Darwin's theory of evolution as his guide, but made him choose the study and promotion of science as his own revolutionary path.

In 1901, he graduated from the School of Railways and Mines, and the following year was awarded a government scholarship to study in Japan.

Directly Lu Xun arrived in Japan, he became a more ardent patriot than ever. The anti-Qing movement among Chinese students there was at its height, and Japan was preparing belligerently to become an imperialist power. Lu Xun's bitter indignation at conditions in China made him determine to devote his life to his country. In his spare time he studied European science, philosophy and literature. It was also in Japan that he first discovered such revolutionary poets as Byron, Shelley, Heine, Pushkin, Lermontov, Mickiewicz and Petofi, whose works he read in Japanese or, with more difficulty, in German.

Lu Xun entered the Medical College at Sendai in the belief that medical science would aid the revolutionary movement in China. In less than two years, however, something happened to change his mind. He saw a news-reel lantern slide of the Russo-Japanese War which showed the tragic apathy of the oppressed Chinese. This incident shook him to his depths.

Soon after that Lu Xun left the Medical College, because, as he wrote, "this slide convinced me that medical science was not so important after all. The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they might be, could only serve to be made examples of or as witnesses of such futile spectacles; and

it was not necessarily deplorable if many of them died of illness. The most important thing, therefore, is to change their spirit; and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I decided to promote a literary movement." This happened in 1906.

Although the literary magazine that he planned to publish in Tokyo between 1906 and 1907 never saw the light of day, essays written that year, such as "On the Demoniac Poets," together with the translations he made in 1908 from Russian and other writers of eastern and northern Europe, formed an extremely important beginning to his career. In 1908, he joined the anti-Qing revolutionary party, Guang Fu Hui.

Thus, during these eight years in Japan, Lu Xun became a convinced revolutionary democrat, and grew firm in his decision to use literature as a means to arouse his fellow-countrymen.

Lu Xun returned to China in 1909, and taught physiology and chemistry in Zhejiang Normal School and Shaoxing Middle School. Then came the Revolution of 1911, which he welcomed with all his heart. He urged his students to work for it, and accepted the post of principal of Shaoxing Normal School. In 1912, after the establishment of the provisional government of the Chinese Republic, he was appointed a member of the Ministry of Education.

Very soon, however, he was disillusioned and began to go through a period of hard thinking and agonized groping in the dark.

The Revolution of 1911 was highly significant, but it did not accomplish its historical mission, for it merely overthrew the Qing Dynasty, while imperialism and feudalism remained unshaken. State power passed into the hands of warlords and politicians of different cliques whom the imperialists utilized to intensify their assault upon China. Thus, with warlords establishing independent regimes, ceaseless civil war, and a scramble among

the imperialist powers for spheres of influence, the semi-feudal, semi-colonial condition of the country became aggravated. In the sphere of ideas, a reactionary movement calling for a return to the past gained influence.

Lu Xun's painful groping lasted till 1918, the eve of the well-known May 4th Movement. He passed the whole of this period in Beijing, except for two visits to his mother in Shaoxing, when what he saw of the increasing impoverishment of the countryside made a deep impression upon him.

During these years, while working at the Ministry of Education he was engaging at the same time in most valuable studies of Chinese culture — annotating and compiling certain classical texts, and doing research into old bronze and stone inscriptions. It was during this period that he edited the works of Ji Kang, a great poet and patriot of the third century A.D., who dared to oppose feudal tyrants and the rigid Confucian traditions, thus reflecting to some degree the aspirations of the people.

During this period, Lu Xun also made a study of the Indian Buddhist classics translated into Chinese since the third century A.D.

Meantime great changes were taking place in the country. The European and American powers were so busy fighting the First World War that they had to relax their grip on China. This enabled Chinese national capitalism to develop to a certain extent. At the same time, the October Revolution of 1917 caused a new revolutionary upsurge in China which, led by revolutionary intellectuals, was to develop into a thoroughgoing, anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggle. This came to a head in the May 4th Movement of 1919.

In April 1918, under the pen-name Lu Xun he published his first short story, "A Madman's Diary," written in the vernacular. This appeared in *New Youth*, a magazine which guided the cultural and democratic revolu-

tion It was also the first magazine to introduce the ideas of the October Revolution and of Marxism-Leninism At this time Lu Xun also began to write penetrating, militant essays dealing with social problems In 1923, the publication of his first volume of short stories, *Call to Arms*, which included such immortal works as "My Old Home" and "The True Story of Ah Q," established his position in China as the father of the new literature

All this time Lu Xun was in close touch with young people. From 1920, he was a lecturer at Beijing University and the National Teachers College He edited a supplement to a daily paper, and helped young writers to establish several literary organizations He spent much time reading the manuscripts of young writers, which he revised with great care; and he was visited by many young people and corresponded with many others In 1925, he gave keen support to the students of Beijing Women's Normal College, where he was concurrently a lecturer, in their opposition to the Minister of Education who had illegally dissolved the college. In 1926, when the Northern warlord Duan Qirui massacred students on March 18, Lu Xun assisted the students in practical ways, in addition to writing articles to support their cause. The battle he waged on the literary front and the guidance and help he gave young people made him one of the most beloved figures in Beijing from 1924 to 1926

In August 1926, when a high tide of revolution was sweeping over South China, he was forced to leave Beijing by the reactionary warlord government. In this year his second collection of short stories, *Wandering*, was published 1918-1926 was his first period of brilliant, prolific authorship. Prior to leaving Beijing he had written, in addition to his short stories, four volumes of collected essays, one volume of prose poems, *Wild Grass*, and *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* Furthermore, in his translations, larger in bulk than his original writings, he had introduced to the reading public the

literary theories of the Soviet Union and A. A. Blok's poem *The Twelve*

In August 1926, Lu Xun accepted the professorship of literature at Xiamen (Amoy) University, he resigned, however, in December of that year. In January 1927, he went to Guangzhou (Canton) where he became dean and concurrently head of the Chinese Language and Literature Department of Sun Yat-sen University. In April of that year, when Chiang Kai-shek betrayed the revolution and arrested and murdered Communists and other revolutionaries, a number of students of Sun Yat-sen University were seized and executed. In sharp protest Lu Xun resigned from his post. Since his own life was now in danger in Guangzhou, he left in October for Shanghai where he remained until his death, no longer teaching but devoting all his energies to literary work and literary movements.

In 1928, he founded the magazine *The Torrent*, and began to study Marxism-Leninism and translate Marxist literary theory. At the same time, he took part in the mass movements led by the Communist Party. In 1928, for instance, he joined the Revolutionary Mutual Aid Society; in 1930, he was one of the founders of the China Freedom League. When the China League of Left-Wing Writers was established in Shanghai in March 1930 — a historic event in the revolutionary literary movement — Lu Xun was one of its founders, and he remained its chief leader until 1936 when it was reorganized owing to changed conditions. In January 1933, he joined the China League for Civil Rights, and in May he went to the German Consulate in Shanghai and handed in a protest against the brutalities of the Nazis. He helped to organize the international anti-imperialist, anti-fascist conference in Shanghai, which, owing to the White Terror, had to be held in the strictest secrecy. In September, Vaillant-Couturier and others arrived to attend this con-

ference, at which Soong Ching Ling was the delegate for China; and although Lu Xun was not present, he was one of the honorary chairmen. These were his chief political activities apart from his writing.

During the last ten years of his life, Lu Xun wrote nine volumes of essays. He also completed a volume of short stories on historical subjects, and many more translations than in his first period. The most important of these were *The Theory of Art* by Plekhanov and *The Theory of Art, Literature and Criticism* by Lunacharsky, Fadeyev's novel, *The Nineteen; October* by Yakovlev, two volumes of short stories by Furmanov and others, Gorky's *Russian Fairytales*, and Gogol's *Dead Souls*. He also introduced Serafimovich's *Iron Flood*, Gladkov's *Cement*, Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*, and Ivanov's *Armoured Train*.

It was during these ten years, too, that Lu Xun introduced Soviet woodcuts and those of the German artist, Kathe Kollwitz, to the Chinese public. At the same time he encouraged and guided the new, revolutionary woodcut art in China.

A third of Lu Xun's time during these years was taken up with editorial work for various magazines, with reading and revising the manuscripts of young writers, and answering their letters. He hardly ever rested. Even during his last illness in 1936, he went on reading manuscripts and writing prefaces for young writers, besides meticulously editing and publishing the writings and translations of Qu Qiubai, a leading Chinese Communist who had been murdered by the Kuomintang.

These ten years, moreover, saw the sanguinary rule of the White Terror, by means of which the Kuomintang hoped to encircle and wipe out the revolutionaries. Lu Xun was able to associate with a few young people and one or two Communists only, whom he had to meet in secret. He was obliged to live in isolation, and was in hourly danger of arrest or assassination. Nevertheless,

he fought to the end and continued to give unwavering leadership to progressive writers and artists. More than this, by keeping the cultural front going, he succeeded in smashing the Kuomintang's ten-year campaign to silence revolutionary writers.

The last articles to come from Lu Xun's pen were published during his illness in July and August 1936, and consisted of an open letter exposing the schemes of the Chinese Trotskyites to undermine the Communist Party's policy of a national united front against Japan, and an article accepting and advocating the policy of the Chinese Communist Party.

Although suffering from tuberculosis, till the last Lu Xun never spared himself. He died on October 19 in Shanghai.

II

As we see from Lu Xun's life, when he began to write, he was already closely linked to the struggle for liberation of China's oppressed millions.

He first attracted attention with "A Madman's Diary." In this story he appears as a great humanist, who uncompromisingly rejects the feudal system with its ideas and morality. His readers' response was immediate and enthusiastic. They agreed that this powerful protest against feudalism marked a new departure in Chinese literature. This was Lu Xun's first piece of realist writing, and he went on to write many outstanding works in the same vein.

"As to why I wrote [stories]," said Lu Xun later, "I still felt, as I had a dozen years earlier, that I should write in the hope of enlightening my people, for humanity, and of the need to better it. . . . So my themes were usually the unfortunates in this abnormal society. My

aim was to expose the disease and draw attention to it so that it might be cured ”

“A Madman’s Diary,” “Kong Yiji,” “Medicine” and “Tomorrow,” as well as “My Old Home,” “The True Story of Ah Q” and “The New-Year Sacrifice,” were all written with this in mind. The chief characters in these stories — the madman, Kong Yiji, Runtu, Ah Q and the rest — are all unfortunates in an abnormal society. Lu Xun made a strong protest against their unhappy fate and mercilessly exposed and attacked the forces that oppressed them, at the same time giving true expression to their wishes, demands and potential strength. He showed that the only way out was through changing society — through revolution.

For instance, in connection with his immortal work “The True Story of Ah Q,” Lu Xun declared that he wanted to portray the “silent soul of the people” which for thousands of years “grew, faded and withered quietly like grass under a great rock.” While portraying Ah Qism, Lu Xun is above all pleading for Ah Q and others like him; and through Ah Q he lets readers see the age-long oppression of the Chinese people. It is here that he shows himself such a brilliant realist. He makes it clear that Ah Q’s greatest failing is his habit of deceiving himself as well as others whenever he is defeated, by consoling himself with the thought that he has won a moral victory. This is defeatism. Moreover, not only does Ah Q often forget his enemies and oppressors, he takes revenge on people weaker than he is, assuming the airs of an oppressor himself. Lu Xun shows us that this is simply the result of thousands of years of feudal rule and a hundred years of foreign imperialist aggression. Although the Chinese people have always resisted oppression and fought back, their many defeats have produced defeatism which, combined with the age-old teaching of the feudal ruling class — that a man should submit to his superiors — gave rise to Ah Q’s method of

winning moral victories, the Ah Q-ism which prevents him from facing up to his oppressors. This is what Lu Xun tries most to reveal to his readers.

Another thing which Lu Xun strives to make clear is that, in the continuous clash between Ah Q and his oppressors, Ah Q himself is torn between submission and revolt, and has always an urge to revolt. Ah Q, like all the oppressed, can liberate himself only by smashing his fetters — by revolution — and this strength he does possess. Thus when the 1911 Revolution comes, Ah Q's fate is naturally linked with it; and the fact that he is forbidden to take part only proves that the revolution has failed. Ah Q's urge to revolt is still there, there still remains a revolutionary way out for him. This is Lu Xun's conclusion.

"The True Story of Ah Q" gives us a picture of the 1911 Revolution, which failed because the peasants were not mobilized. While exposing and attacking the landlord class, Lu Xun bitterly criticizes the bourgeoisie as well, which led the revolution. By publishing this story Lu Xun draws the attention of the leaders of the May 4th Movement to the historical lesson of the 1911 Revolution, indicates the way out, and voices the demands of the people as a whole, of whom the great majority and the most important economically are peasants.

The way out and the people's demands are pointed out as a prelude to hope and to a new life for China in "My Old Home," written before "The True Story of Ah Q." "I would not like them . . . to have a treadmill existence like mine," he writes, "nor to suffer like Runtu until they become stupefied, nor yet, like others, to devote all their energies to dissipation. They should have a new life, a life we have never experienced. . . . The earth had no roads to begin with, but when many men pass one way, a road is made." This is the only conclusion Lu Xun can reach after portraying honest Runtu, who has suffered so much owing to "many children,

famines, taxes, soldiers, bandits, officials and landed gentry" that had squeezed him as dry as a mummy. Runtu is typical of most Chinese peasants at that time. Though still inarticulate, they were the foundation and chief moving force of the democratic revolution. This story depicts the increasing bankruptcy of the countryside during these years, and predicts the peasants' awakening and the imminence of revolution.

In another significant story, "The New-Year Sacrifice," Lu Xun sketches the life of an ordinary working woman. Xianglin's Wife is trampled upon, cheated, insulted and abandoned; yet we see her innate goodness, courage and kindness. Because of her pluck, her faith in mankind and the dignity she has acquired, all her misfortunes and ill treatment cannot break her spirit; but finally the mental torture caused by feudal morality and superstition destroys her faith and sense of dignity, so that she goes to pieces. Through his deep insight into this woman's heart, Lu Xun makes a profound analysis of society. He shows the layer upon layer of social pressure which surround this widow like a spider's web. The utterly inhuman Confucian morality, much of it pure superstition, is the focal point of all these pressures. This has power to kill secretly, and the landed gentry rely upon this force. These pressures have always seemed quite commonplace, and all the time Confucian morality and men like Fourth Mr Lu have kept claiming their victims in secret. Countless women and young people perish in silence, unnoticed, not knowing who has killed them. The situation revealed here is more horrifying than that exposed in "A Madman's Diary." At the end of this story, Lu Xun's brilliant powers of observation are shown most clearly by his discovery that this woman who has shown such fortitude finally comes to doubt the existence of hell, refuses to go on submitting meekly to her lot, and takes her fate into her own hands.

These stories show Lu Xun's fearlessness in facing reality and exposing abuses. In the effete China of those days, most men had suffered so much that they were no longer sensitive to pain; but Lu Xun still heard the cry of agony in the hearts of the oppressed, and felt impelled to express it. His exposure of evil is like a strong beam of light to awaken men. And although he writes soberly, and tries not to let himself be carried away, the more detached he appears the clearer his readers hear the cries of the wretched — cries which come to express awakening and revolt.

In all these stories, Lu Xun entirely rejects the old way of life and the old society. Readers are convinced that only a complete social revolution can put an end to these evils and the people's agony. "A Madman's Diary," "My Old Home," "The True Story of Ah Q," and "The New-Year Sacrifice" — all carry this message. This is also true of "Medicine," which commemorates a revolutionary of the 1911 Revolution and throws light on the fundamental cause of its failure.

Lu Xun describes not only the agony of the oppressed but also their potential strength, and many of his stories bring out the fine qualities of China's working people. Xianglin's Wife and Fourth Shan's Wife are good, kind, courageous women; and the decency of the rickshaw man in "A Small Incident" is used to debunk the importance of so-called affairs of state. In "The Divorce," Lu Xun describes the pluck of the country girl Aigu, though she cannot get the better of the powerful local gentry. In "In the Tavern," to show up the colourless surroundings he describes a boatman's daughter, Ashun, and her passionate longing for beauty and happiness. Her heart, like her eyes, is as clear as "a cloudless night sky — the cloudless sky of the north on a windless day." In "Village Opera" above all, with deep feeling and a fine poetic touch, Lu Xun describes the goodness of country folk and

the intelligence and spirit of their sons. In the same way he describes Runtu's childhood.

Lu Xun also uses Chinese myths and legends as his themes. "Mending Heaven" portrays the inventiveness of the ancient Chinese, "The Flight to the Moon" deals with the legendary archer Yi; "Pacifying the Flood" and "Against Aggression" show us the great Yu and Mo Zi, hero and sage of ancient China, and "Forging the Swords" encourages the weak to revolt against tyrants and to take revenge.

Stories such as "In the Tavern," "The Misanthrope" and "Regret for the Past" describe the disillusionment and struggles of intellectuals at that time. The integrity of characters like Lu Weifu, Wei Lianshu, Juansheng or Zijun depends upon whether or not they believe that society can be reformed. Once they lose this faith, they cease to be true to themselves. Then they have to destroy themselves like Wei Lianshu, deliberately compromise like Lu Weifu, or surrender like Zijun, who goes home to die exposed to "the blazing fury of her father . . . and the cold looks of bystanders, colder than frost or ice." What makes them lose their faith? Lu Xun's analysis is clear. Lu Weifu and Wei Lianshu are men who were aroused by the tumultuous events preceding the 1911 Revolution. As young men they had the courage of the madman in "A Madman's Diary" who dared to trample on Mr. Gu's old ledgers, or the lunatic in "The Ever Burning Lamp" who dared to defy the old society by shouting "I want to set fire to it all!" They were comrades, too, of the young revolutionary in "Medicine." Progressive intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century did in fact pin their hopes on the victory of the 1911 Revolution; but when they came up against all the forces of reaction which this revolution failed to sweep away, they grew disillusioned. This shows the weakness of these intellectuals. Unless these men who were so full of hope before 1911 learned a lesson from

the failure of the revolution and linked their fate with that of people like Old Shuan, who were beginning to become aroused, there was nothing for them but despair. Juansheng and Zijun are two young people awakened by the May 4th Movement. They fail because they depend only on their own little strength to oppose age-old social pressures. Thus Lu Xun judged the ideals of intellectuals and young people according to their relationship with the people as a whole.

So Lu Xun's standpoint and his motive in writing are clearly seen in his stories.

This is equally true of Lu Xun's prose poems and reminiscences and, especially, his essays. The most moving passages in his reminiscences are his glowing descriptions of the charm, wisdom and interests in life of peasants and handicraft workers, and the folk art which they create. Most of the prose poems in *Wild Grass*, which describe Lu Xun's feelings during his struggle against the imperialists and the Northern warlords, reveal the courage of a revolutionary intellectual and his experiences in his fight against the powers of darkness. The way in which he conquered despair with hope is in strong contrast to Lu Weifu's disillusionment or Wei Lianshu's self-destruction.

Lu Xun's essays form the bulk and the most important part of his literary work.

The age in which he lived and his dogged fighting spirit made him look for other weapons besides the short story to enlarge the scope of his struggle on the literary front.

From the standpoint of a fighter as well as an artist, Lu Xun explained why he adopted the essay form. "Some people have tried to persuade me not to write these short, critical essays," he said. "I am very grateful for their concern, and I know that writing stories is important. But there comes a time when I have to write in a certain way. And it seems to me if there are such troublesome taboos in the palace of art, I would do better

not to enter it, but to stand in the desert and watch the sandstorms, laughing when I am happy, shouting when I am sad, and cursing openly when I am angry. The sand and stones may bruise me till my body is torn and bleeding, but from time to time I can finger the clotted blood and feel the pattern of my bruises, and this is not less interesting than following the example of the Chinese literati who eat foreign bread and butter in the name of keeping Shakespeare company.”

So Lu Xun broke through the existing literary taboos and enlarged the sphere of ideological struggle, creating the “daggers” and “javelins” which he needed in the form of these essays, which he used to fight a way out for himself and his readers at a time when “wind and sand lash your face, and wolves and tigers prowl.”

In 1918, a few months after he published his first short story, he wrote “My Views on Chastity.” From then until his death, he wrote six to seven hundred essays, which provided him with an immense arena, through which he could gallop freely as a pioneer thinker and fighter and give full expression to his artistic genius.

Lu Xun needed a vast arena because he considered his mission was to “settle old scores and blaze a new trail.” He had to have space to observe and analyse every aspect of history and society, to probe into every corner of men’s lives, to tear off all disguises, and to attack all enemies he discovered.

The content of these essays is so diverse as to be virtually all-embracing, ranging from fundamental problems of the revolution to such topics as children’s toys. He waged innumerable battles and attacked innumerable enemies: imperialists, warlords, Kuomintang die-hards, the men who advocated a return to the past, reactionary writers, “those who trade in revolution,” “murderers of the present and future,” and “preachers of death.” He turned his attention to this great variety of topics because he wanted to indicate and break through to a new way of

life for the Chinese people — the democratic revolution which was being carried through, and the socialist revolution which was to follow. Lu Xun pointed out that Chinese history from time immemorial was filled with “feasts of human flesh” for the rulers and foreign aggressors, because two fates only were possible for the people the oppressors “ate.” Either it was a period “when we longed in vain to be slaves,” or a period “when we succeeded in becoming slaves for a time.” So it was necessary to “sweep away these man-eaters, overturn these feasts and destroy this kitchen,” to “create a third type of period, hitherto unknown in Chinese history.” Thus he said, “Our chief aims at present are first, to exist; secondly, to find food and clothing, and thirdly, to advance. Any obstacle to these aims must be trampled down, whether it is ancient or modern, human or supernatural, ancient canon, rare text, sacred oracle, precious idol, traditional recipe or secret nostrum.” And finally he declared, “The facts taught me that the future belongs solely to the rising proletariat.” Hence he proposes to use “the roaring storm of proletarian revolution” to “sweep clean our land” and clear away all that is “stagnant, vile and rotten.” He was for the Soviet Union and hoped that China would also have a socialist society, because he wanted the oppressed to live “like human beings,” and “a brand-new, totally unknown social system to emerge from the depth of hell,” so that “hundreds of millions of people might become the masters of their own fate.”

It is clear then that the goal which Lu Xun tried to express and strove for in his stories became more sharply defined in his essays, and he became more confident of its attainment. His important historical role, his great stature, his contribution to political thought and to art, are much more vividly reflected in his essays than in his short stories. Turning his back on the past, he looks towards the future of the people and of China. Except

to "strike a blow at the enemy behind" he never looked back. No power on earth could make him compromise; no obstruction could stop his advance. He was firmly convinced that the old society and old way of life, with all that was rotten in them, must inevitably perish, and a new society and new way of life must inevitably triumph.

The class struggle and revolutionary problems of these years are also reflected more accurately and comprehensively in the essays than in the stories. In these essays, Lu Xun's artistic genius expanded more freely and characteristically in step with his activities and mental development as a revolutionary. The enemies of the people whom he satirizes here are too many to count. And he paints vivid and splendid pictures of the people's heroes, ranging from those of past ages who were "the backbone of China," to the young revolutionaries of his time who fought on undaunted through a hail of bullets, and the Communists "who are now doing solid work, treading firmly on the ground, fighting and shedding their blood for the survival of this generation of Chinese." Almost every one of these essays bears the imprint of a brilliant mind, and each is clearly the handiwork of a genius in the creation of types and a master of satirical writing, while readers are moved by the passion of a true champion of the people, with his burning love and hate, his blazing anger, and dauntless, invincible might.

It was as a great essayist with his own distinctive style that Lu Xun became an outstanding polemicist, and a giant in China's cultural revolution who dwarfed all his predecessors.

The foregoing is a general account of Lu Xun's writings — short stories, essays, prose poems and reminiscences. After choosing to be a writer, he transformed himself from a revolutionary democrat to a communist. He searched and fought for a way to free humble folk like Old Shuan, Runtu, Ah Q and Xianglin's Wife from

their wretched fate. He proved loyal to his purpose, advancing in the cause of the revolution. And as soon as he took this road, he was bathed in the light of China's future liberation, and his genius constantly received new life from the infinite creative powers of the people

Lu Xun's sixteen volumes of essays and three collections of stories, prose poems and reminiscences form an encyclopaedia of Chinese society, the people's life and struggles, and the lessons drawn from these during the great historical period from the beginning of the twentieth century to the thirties. They constitute, above all, a bold declaration of war against imperialism and feudalism, against all oppressors of the people, and all the dark, corrupt forces which would obstruct China's advance. Lu Xun's brilliant works give us the most comprehensive and profound reflection of conditions from the time of the 1911 Revolution, through the May 4th Movement, to the First and Second Revolutionary Civil Wars.

Throughout this period, Lu Xun remained the central figure and chief representative of the new literature. The realist approach and theory of art which he introduced to modern Chinese writers were a weapon to reject the old and affirm the new, a way to bring new aesthetic criteria into writing. His own work and his partisanship of socialist realist literature during his later years marked a new stage of development in modern Chinese writing.

Lu Xun's style is distinctively and superbly his own, yet at the same time unmistakably Chinese. He worked for a renaissance in Chinese literature, and because he based his renovations on popular demands he was the firmest supporter of and greatest heir to the best traditions in Chinese literature, with its long and glorious history. From Lu Xun's taste and style we can see the wisdom, taste and style of the Chinese working people.

With his roots deep in Chinese culture and with a reformer's zeal, he read widely in foreign literature. His works show the influence of foreign, especially Russian

writers — of Gogol in particular, and thus linked Chinese literature with the progressive trends of modern world literature. The way in which Lu Xun assimilated foreign literary influences and made them a part of China's national culture was of historic significance. He achieved this through his own writing. For instance, of his earliest work, "A Madman's Diary," he wrote, "I must have relied entirely on the hundred or more foreign stories I had read and a smattering of medical knowledge." In 1834, the Russian Gogol wrote a "Madman's Diary," but this later "Madman's Diary" aims at exposing the abuses of the clan system and Confucian morality, and its indignation goes deeper than Gogol's.

Lu Xun has also explained how his desire to enlighten people impelled him to look for suitable means of expression in traditional Chinese art forms, and how this influenced his style. "I did my best to avoid all wordiness," he said. "If I felt I had made my meaning sufficiently clear, I was glad to dispense with frills. The old Chinese theatre has no scenery, and the New Year pictures sold to children show a few main figures only. . . . Convinced that such methods suit my purpose, I did not indulge in irrelevant details and kept the dialogue down to a minimum."

The scope and profundity of Lu Xun's thought are paralleled in his art, giving evidence of the most penetrating observation of Chinese society and culture, and the closest links with the people. To describe events or people, Lu Xun uses a method he calls "drawing the eyes," which implies conveying the spirit of a thing with the utmost conciseness and refinement.

"I forget," he wrote, "who it was that said that the best way to convey a man's character with a minimum of strokes is to draw his eyes. This is absolutely correct. If you draw all the hairs of his head, no matter how accurately, it will not be of much use." So the salient feature of his style is the accuracy, penetration and vivid-

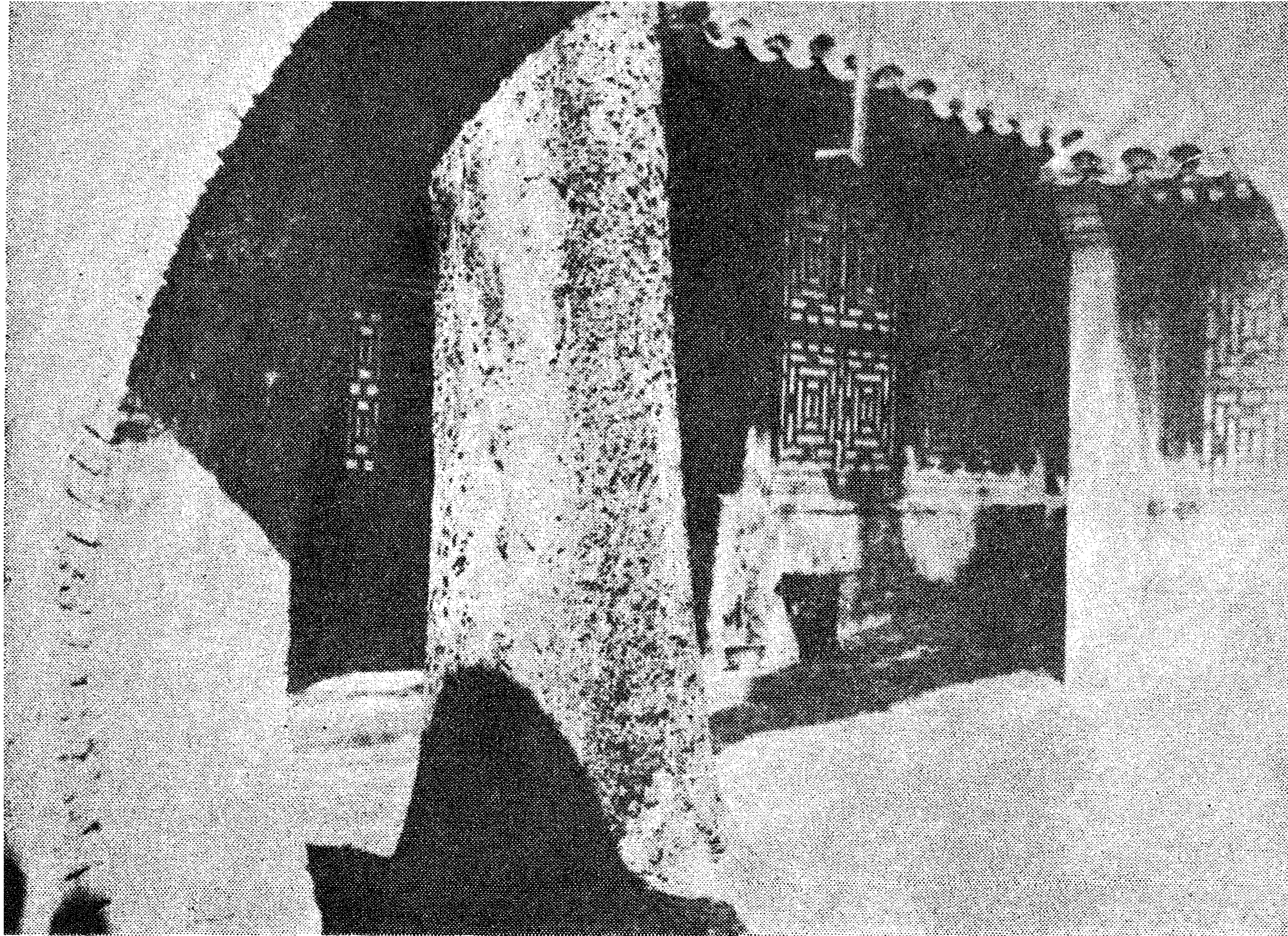
ness with which he depicts a thing, often in a minimum of words. With a few strokes he brings out a man's chief characteristics. Lu Xun also expresses ideas by means of concrete images, equally penetrating, vivid and compact. With a few sentences, or just one sentence, he can get to the heart of a matter and convey its innermost meaning. This conciseness and refinement, typical of Lu Xun's language, are precisely the most striking characteristic of traditional Chinese poetry and prose.

Lu Xun's vocabulary is very rich. He paid great attention to language. "After finishing something," he said, "I always read it through twice, and where a passage grated on my ears I would add or cut a few words to make it read smoothly. When I could not find suitable vernacular expressions I used classical ones, hoping some readers would understand. And I seldom used phrases out of my own head which I alone — or not even I — could comprehend." The chief source of his language was the living vernacular of the people, their idioms and colloquialisms, and certain tags from old books and classical allusions; sometimes he also uses expressions translated from foreign words, as well as foreign syntax. Lu Xun's writings enriched the Chinese language and developed such good features as its conciseness, strength, vividness and wittiness.

Lu Xun's satire is simply the most concise delineation and criticism of the dark side of society. "Truth is the life of satire," he said. "Unless you write the truth it cannot be 'satire.'" And he put these ideas into practice. His satire is forceful and irresistible, precisely because it gives a true reflection of reality. His satire, combined with his "dagger and javelin" tactics, his fierceness in attacking the enemy, his boldness in analysing and exposing the forces of evil, becomes even more trenchant and sharp. Whatever disguise the enemy may assume, he cannot escape Lu Xun's javelin or the surgeon's knife with which he calmly dissects a man's heart. Lu Xun's

satire is cool yet full of passion, sharp yet strong. He maintained that satire must be good-intentioned, and at the same time utterly opposed the cynicism which "simply convinces its readers that there is nothing good in the world, nothing worth doing." In Lu Xun's satire we can find the simple humour and mockery common to Chinese peasants and folk literature. We can also recognize in him the successor of the satirists in classical Chinese literature. Lu Xun's genius in this field alone wins him an outstanding place in the history of Chinese literature. He developed the humorous wisdom of the Chinese people, and the satiric tradition of both classical and folk literature.

Finally, as a figure in world literature, Lu Xun is distinguished by his close links with the working people of China, and the profoundly Chinese features of his writing.



The Shaoxing Hostel where Lu Xun stayed
in Beijing from 1912 to 1918

PREFACE TO *CALL TO ARMS**

When I was young I, too, had many dreams. Most of them I later forgot, but I see nothing in this to regret. For although recalling the past may bring happiness, at times it cannot but bring loneliness, and what is the point of clinging in spirit to lonely bygone days? However, my trouble is that I cannot forget completely, and these stories stem from those things which I have been unable to forget.

For more than four years I frequented, almost daily, a pawnshop and pharmacy. I cannot remember how old I was at the time, but the pharmacy counter was exactly my height and that in the pawnshop twice my height. I used to hand clothes and trinkets up to the counter twice my height, then take the money given me with contempt to the counter my own height to buy medicine for my father, a chronic invalid. On my return home I had other things to keep me busy, for our physician was so eminent that he prescribed unusual drugs and adjuncts: aloe roots dug up in winter, sugar-cane that had been three years exposed to frost, original pairs of crickets, and ardisia that had seeded . . . most of which were difficult to come by. But my father's illness went from bad to worse until finally he died.

It is my belief that those who come down in the world will probably learn in the process what society is really like. My eagerness to go to N — and study in

* *Call to Arms*, Lu Xun's earliest collection of short stories, contains fourteen stories written between 1918 and 1922.

the K — Academy* seems to have shown a desire to strike out for myself, escape, and find people of a different kind. My mother had no choice but to raise eight dollars for my travelling expenses and say I might do as I pleased. That she cried was only natural, for at that time the proper thing was to study the classics and take the official examinations. Anyone who studied "foreign subjects" was a social outcast regarded as someone who could find no way out and was forced to sell his soul to foreign devils. Besides, she was sorry to part with me. But in spite of all this, I went to N — and entered the K — Academy, and it was there that I learned of the existence of physics, arithmetic, geography, history, drawing and physical training. They had no physiology course, but we saw woodblock editions of such works as *A New Course on the Human Body* and *Essays on Chemistry and Hygiene*. Recalling the talk and prescriptions of physicians I had known and comparing them with what I now knew, I came to the conclusion that those physicians must be either unwitting or deliberate charlatans; and I began to feel great sympathy for the invalids and families who suffered at their hands. From translated histories I also learned that the Japanese Reformation owed its rise, to a great extent, to the introduction of Western medical science to Japan.

These inklings took me to a medical college in the Japanese countryside**. It was my fine dream that on my return to China I would cure patients like my father who had suffered from the wrong treatment, while if war broke out I would serve as an army doctor, at the same time promoting my countrymen's faith in reform.

I have no idea what improved methods are now used to teach microbiology, but in those days we were shown

* N — refers to Nanjing, and K — to the Kiangnan (Jiangnan) Naval Academy where the author studied in 1898.

** This refers to the Sendai Medical College where Lu Xun studied from 1904 to 1906.

lantern slides of microbes, and if the lecture ended early, the instructor might show slides of natural scenery or news to fill up the time. Since this was during the Russo-Japanese War, there were many war slides, and I had to join in the clapping and cheering in the lecture hall along with the other students. It was a long time since I had seen any compatriots, but one day I saw a news-reel slide of a number of Chinese, one of them bound and the rest standing around him. They were all sturdy fellows but appeared completely apathetic. According to the commentary, the one with his hands bound was a spy working for the Russians who was to be beheaded by the Japanese military as a warning to others, while the Chinese beside him had come to enjoy the spectacle.

Before the term was over I had left for Tokyo, because this slide convinced me that medical science was not so important after all. The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they might be, could only serve to be made examples of or as witnesses of such futile spectacles, and it was not necessarily deplorable if many of them died of illness. The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit, and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I decided to promote a literary movement. There were many Chinese students in Tokyo studying law, political science, physics and chemistry, even police work and engineering, but not one studying literature and art. However, even in this uncongenial atmosphere I was fortunate enough to find some kindred spirits. We gathered the few others we needed and after discussion our first step, of course, was to publish a magazine, the title of which denoted that this was a new birth. As we were then rather classically inclined, we called it *Vita Nova* (*New Life*).

When the time for publication drew near, some of our contributors dropped out and then our funds ran out, until there were only three of us left and we were penniless.

Since we had started our venture at an unlucky hour, there was naturally no one to whom we could complain when we failed, but later even we three were destined to part, and our discussions of a future dream world had to cease. So ended this abortive *Vita Nova*.

Only later did I feel the futility of it all. At that time I had not a clue. Later it seemed to me that if a man's proposals met with approval, that should encourage him to advance; if they met with opposition, that should make him fight back, but the real tragedy was for him to lift up his voice among the living and meet with no response, neither approval nor opposition, just as if he were stranded in a boundless desert completely at a loss. That was when I became conscious of loneliness.

And this sense of loneliness grew from day to day, entwining itself about my soul like some huge poisonous snake.

But in spite of my groundless sadness, I felt no indignation, for this experience had made me reflect and see that I was definitely not the type of hero who could rally multitudes at his call.

However, my loneliness had to be dispelled because it was causing me agony. So I used various means to dull my senses, to immerse myself among my fellow nationals and to turn to the past. Later I experienced or witnessed even greater loneliness and sadness which I am unwilling to recall, preferring that it should perish with my mind in the dust. Still my attempt to deaden my senses was not unsuccessful — I lost the enthusiasm and fervour of my youth.

In S — Hostel was a three-roomed house with a courtyard in which grew a locust tree, and it was said that a woman had hanged herself there. Although the tree had grown so tall that its branches were now out of reach, the rooms remained deserted. For some years I stayed here, copying ancient inscriptions. I had few visi-

tors, the inscriptions raised no political problems or issues, and so the days slipped quietly away, which was all that I desired. On summer nights, when mosquitoes swarmed, I would sit under the locust tree waving my fan and looking at specks of blue sky through chinks in the thick foliage, while belated caterpillars would fall, icy-cold, on to my neck.

The only visitor to drop in occasionally for a talk was my old friend Jin Xinyi. Having put his big portfolio on the rickety table he would take off his long gown and sit down opposite me, looking as if his heart was still beating fast because he was afraid of dogs.

"What's the use of copying these?" One night, while leafing through the inscriptions I had copied, he asked me for enlightenment on this point.

"There isn't any use."

"What's the point, then, of copying them?"

"There isn't any point."

"Why don't you write something? . . ."

I understood. They were bringing out *New Youth*,⁺ but since there did not seem to have been any reaction, favourable or otherwise, no doubt they felt lonely. However I said

"Imagine an iron house having not a single window and virtually indestructible, with all its inmates sound asleep and about to die of suffocation. Dying in their sleep, they won't feel the pain of death. Now if you raise a shout to wake a few of the lighter sleepers, making these unfortunate few suffer the agony of irrevocable death, do you really think you are doing them a good turn?"

"But if a few wake up, you can't say there is no hope of destroying the iron house."

* This magazine played an important part in the May 4th Movement of 1919 by attacking feudalism and spreading Marxist ideas. Jin Xinyi is an alias for Qian Xuantong, one of the editors of *New Youth*.

True, in spite of my own conviction, I could not blot out hope, for hope belongs to the future. I had no negative evidence able to refute his affirmation of faith. So I finally agreed to write, and the result was my first story "A Madman's Diary." And once started I could not give up but would write some sort of short story from time to time to humour my friends, until I had written more than a dozen of them.

As far as I am concerned, I no longer feel any great urge to express myself; yet, perhaps because I have not forgotten the grief of my past loneliness, I sometimes call out to encourage those fighters who are galloping on in loneliness, so that they do not lose heart. Whether my cry is brave or sad, repellent or ridiculous, I do not care. However, since this is a call to arms I must naturally obey my general's orders. This is why I often resort to innuendoes, as when I made a wreath appear from nowhere at the son's grave in "Medicine," while in "Tomorrow" I did not say that Fourth Shan's Wife never dreamed of her little boy. For our chiefs in those days were against pessimism. And I, for my part, did not want to infect with the loneliness which I had found so bitter those young people who were still dreaming pleasant dreams, just as I had done when young.

It is clear, then, that my stories fall far short of being works of art; hence I must at least count myself fortunate that they are still known as stories and are even being brought out in one volume. Although such good fortune makes me uneasy, it still pleases me to think that they have readers in the world of men, for the time being at any rate.

So now that these stories of mine are being reprinted in one collection, for the reasons given above I have chosen to entitle it *Call to Arms*.

Beijing

December 3, 1922

A MADMAN'S DIARY

Two brothers, whose names I need not mention here, were both good friends of mine in high school; but after a separation of many years we gradually lost touch. Some time ago I happened to hear that one of them was seriously ill, and since I was going back to my old home I broke my journey to call on them. I saw only one, however, who told me that the invalid was his younger brother.

"I appreciate your coming such a long way to see us," he said, "but my brother recovered some time ago and has gone elsewhere to take up an official post." Then, laughing, he produced two volumes of his brother's diary, saying that from these the nature of his past illness could be seen and there was no harm in showing them to an old friend. I took the diary away, read it through, and found that he had suffered from a form of persecution complex. The writing was most confused and incoherent, and he had made many wild statements; moreover he had omitted to give any dates, so that only by the colour of the ink and the differences in the writing could one tell that it was not all written at one time. Certain sections, however, were not altogether disconnected, and I have copied out a part to serve as a subject for medical research. I have not altered a single illogicality in the diary and have changed only the names, even though the people referred to are all country folk, unknown to the world and of no consequence. As for the title, it was chosen by the diarist himself after his recovery, and I did not change it.

I

Tonight the moon is very bright

I have not seen it for over thirty years, so today when I saw it I felt in unusually high spirits. I begin to realize that during the past thirty-odd years I have been in the dark, but now I must be extremely careful. Otherwise why should the Zhaos' dog have looked at me twice?

I have reason for my fear

II

Tonight there is no moon at all, I know that this is a bad omen. This morning when I went out cautiously, Mr. Zhao had a strange look in his eyes, as if he were afraid of me, as if he wanted to murder me. There were seven or eight others who discussed me in a whisper. And they were afraid of my seeing them. So, indeed, were all the people I passed. The fiercest among them grinned at me, whereupon I shivered from head to foot, knowing that their preparations were complete.

I was not afraid, however, but continued on my way. A group of children in front were also discussing me, and the look in their eyes was just like that in Mr. Zhao's while their faces too were ghastly pale. I wondered what grudge these children could have against me to make them behave like this. I could not help calling out, "Tell me!" But then they ran away.

I wonder what grudge Mr. Zhao has against me, what grudge the people on the road have against me. I can think of nothing except that twenty years ago I trod on Mr. Gu Jiu's* old ledgers, and Mr. Gu was most displeased. Although Mr. Zhao does not know him, he must have heard talk of this and decided to avenge him, thus

* The characters Gu Jiu means "old." This refers to the age-old history of feudalism in China.

he is conspiring against me with the people on the road. But then what of the children? At that time they were not yet born, so why should they eye me so strangely today, as if they were afraid of me, as if they wanted to murder me? This really frightens me, it is so bewildering and upsetting.

I know. They must have learned this from their parents!

III

I can't sleep at night. Everything requires careful consideration if one is to understand it.

Those people, some of whom have been pilloried by the magistrate, slapped in the face by the local gentry, had their wives taken away by bailiffs or their parents driven to suicide by creditors, never looked as frightened and as fierce then as they did yesterday.

The most extraordinary thing was that woman on the street yesterday who was spanking her son. "Little devil!" she cried. "I'm so angry I could eat you!" Yet all the time it was me she was looking at. I gave a start, unable to hide my alarm. Then all those long-toothed people with livid faces began to hoot with laughter. Old Chen hurried forward and dragged me home.

He dragged me home. The folk at home all pretended not to know me; they had the same look in their eyes as all the others. When I went into the study, they locked me in as if cooping up a chicken or a duck. This incident left me even more bewildered.

A few days ago a tenant of ours from Wolf Cub Village came to report the failure of the crops and told my elder brother that a notorious character in their village had been beaten to death; then some people had taken out his heart and liver, fried them in oil, and eaten them as a means of increasing their courage. When I interrupted,

the tenant and my brother both stared at me. Only today have I realized that they had exactly the same look in their eyes as those people outside.

Just to think of it sets me shivering from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet

They eat human beings, so they may eat me

I see that the woman's "eat you," the laughter of those long-toothed people with livid faces, and the tenant's story the other day are obviously secret signs. I realize all the poison in their speech, all the daggers in their laughter. Their teeth are white and glistening: they use these teeth to eat men

Evidently, although I am not a bad man, ever since I trod on Mr. Gu's ledgers it has been touch-and-go with me. They seem to have secrets which I cannot guess, and once they are angry they will call anyone a bad character. I remember when my elder brother taught me to write compositions, no matter how good a man was, if I produced arguments to the contrary he would mark that passage to show his approval; while if I excused evil-doers he would say, "Good for you, that shows originality." How can I possibly guess their secret thoughts — especially when they are ready to eat people?

Everything requires careful consideration if one is to understand it. In ancient times, as I recollect, people often ate human beings, but I am rather hazy about it. I tried to look this up, but my history has no chronology and scrawled all over each page are the words. "Confucian Virtue and Morality." Since I could not sleep anyway, I read intently half the night until I began to see words between the lines. The whole book was filled with the two words — "Eat people."

All these words written in the book, all the words spoken by our tenant, eye me quizzically with an enigmatic smile.

I too am a man, and they want to eat me!

IV

In the morning I sat quietly for some time. Old Chen brought in lunch. one bowl of vegetables, one bowl of steamed fish. The eyes of the fish were white and hard, and its mouth was open just like those people who want to eat human beings. After a few mouthfuls I could not tell whether the slippery morsels were fish or human flesh, so I brought it all up.

I said, "Old Chen, tell my brother that I feel quite suffocated and want to have a stroll in the garden." Old Chen said nothing but went out, and presently he came back and opened the gate.

I did not move, but watched to see how they would treat me, feeling certain that they would not let me go. Sure enough! My elder brother came slowly out, leading an old man. There was a murderous gleam in his eyes, and fearing that I would see it he lowered his head, stealing side-glances at me from behind his glasses.

"You seem very well today," said my brother.

"Yes," said I.

"I have invited Mr. Ho here today to examine you."

"All right," I replied. Actually I knew quite well that this old man was the executioner in disguise! Feeling my pulse was simply a pretext for him to see how fat I was, for this would entitle him to a share of my flesh. Still I was not afraid. Although I do not eat men my courage is greater than theirs. I held out my two fists to see what he would do. The old man sat down, closed his eyes, fumbled for some time, remained motionless for a while; then opened his shifty eyes and said, "Don't let your imagination run away with you. Rest quietly for a few days, and you will be better."

Don't let your imagination run away with you! Rest quietly for a few days! By fattening me of course they'll have more to eat. But what good will it do me? How can it be "better"? The whole lot of them wanting to

eat people yet stealthily trying to keep up appearances, not daring to do it outright, was really enough to make me die of laughter. I couldn't help it, I nearly split my sides, I was so amused. I knew that this laughter voiced courage and integrity. Both the old man and my brother turned pale, awed by my courage and integrity.

But my courage just makes them all the more eager to eat me, to acquire some of my courage for themselves. The old man went out of the gate, but before he had gone far he said to my brother in a low voice, "To be eaten at once!" My brother nodded. So you are in it too! This stupendous discovery, though it came as a shock, is no more than I might expect: the accomplice in eating me is my elder brother!

The eater of human flesh is my elder brother!

I am the younger brother of an eater of human flesh!

I, who will be eaten by others, am the younger brother of an eater of human flesh!

V

These few days I have been thinking again: suppose that old man were not an executioner in disguise, but a real doctor, he would be none the less an eater of human flesh. That book on herbs by his predecessor Li Shizhen* states explicitly that men's flesh can be boiled and eaten; how then can he still deny that he eats men?

As for my elder brother, I have also good reason to suspect him. When he was teaching me, he told me himself, "People exchange their sons to eat."** And once in

* (1518-93), famous pharmacologist. It is not stated in his *Compendium of Materia Medica* that human flesh could be used as a medicine, this was one of the delusions of the madman.

** The ancient historial record *Zuo Zhuan* states that during a siege in 488 B.C. the besieged were so famished that they "exchanged their sons to eat."

discussing a bad man he said that not only did the fellow deserve to be killed, he should "have his flesh eaten and his hide slept on" I was still young at the time, and for quite a while my heart beat faster. That story our tenant from Wolf Cub Village told the other day about eating a man's heart and liver didn't surprise him at all — he kept nodding his head. He is evidently just as cruel as before. Since it is possible to "exchange sons to eat," then anything can be exchanged, anyone can be eaten. In the past I simply listened to his explanations and let it go at that; now I know that when he gave me these explanations, not only was there human fat at the corner of his lips, but his whole heart was set on eating men.

VI

Pitch dark. I don't know whether it is day or night. The Zhaos' dog has started barking again.

The fierceness of a lion, the timidity of a rabbit, the craftiness of a fox. . . .

VII

I know their way. They are not prepared to kill outright, nor would they dare, for fear of the consequences. Instead they have banded together and set traps everywhere, to force me to kill myself. The behaviour of the men and women in the street a few days ago and my elder brother's attitude these last few days make it quite obvious. What they like best is for a man to take off his belt and hang himself from a beam; for then they can enjoy their hearts' desire without being blamed for murder. Naturally that delights them and sets them roaring with laughter. On the other hand, if a man is

frightened or worried to death, though that makes him rather thin, they still nod in approval

They only eat dead flesh! I remember reading somewhere of a hideous beast with an ugly look in its eye called "hyena," which often eats dead flesh. Even the largest bones it crunches into fragments and swallows; the mere thought of this makes your hair stand on end. Hyenas are related to wolves, wolves belong to the canine species. The other day the Zhaos' dog eyed me several times. It is obviously in the plot too as their accomplice. The old man's eyes were cast down, but that did not deceive me.

The most deplorable is my elder brother. He's a man too, so why isn't he afraid, why is he plotting with others to eat me? Does force of habit blind a man to what's wrong? Or is he so heartless that he will knowingly commit a crime?

In cursing man-eaters, I shall start with my brother. In dissuading man-eaters, I shall start with him too.

VIII

Actually such arguments should have convinced them long ago . . .

Suddenly someone came in. He was only about twenty years old and I did not see his features very clearly. His face was wreathed in smiles, but when he nodded to me his smile didn't seem genuine. I asked him, "Is it right to eat human beings?"

Still smiling, he replied, "When there is no famine how can one eat human beings?"

I realized at once he was one of them; but still I summoned up courage to repeat my question:

"Is it right?"

"What makes you ask such a thing? You really are . . . fond of a joke . . . It is very fine today "

"It is fine, and the moon is very bright But I want to ask you. Is it right?"

He looked disconcerted and muttered, "No. . . ."

"No? Then why do they still do it?"

"What are you talking about?"

"What am I talking about? They are eating men now in Wolf Cub Village, and you can see it written all over the books, in fresh red ink "

His expression changed He grew ghastly pale "It may be so," he said staring at me "That's the way it's always been. . . "

"Does that make it right?"

"I refuse to discuss it with you. Anyway, you shouldn't talk about it. It's wrong for anyone to talk about it "

I leaped up and opened my eyes wide, but the man had vanished. I was soaked with sweat. He was much younger than my elder brother, but even so he was in it. He must have been taught by his parents. And I am afraid he has already taught his son; that is why even the children look at me so fiercely.

IX

Wanting to eat men, at the same time afraid of being eaten themselves, they all eye each other with the deepest suspicion . . .

How comfortable life would be for them if they could rid themselves of such obsessions and go to work, walk, eat and sleep at ease They have only this one step to take. Yet fathers and sons, husbands and wives, brothers, friends, teachers and students, sworn enemies and even strangers, have all joined in this conspiracy, discouraging and preventing each other from taking this step.

X

Early this morning I went to find my elder brother. He was standing outside the hall door looking at the sky when I walked up behind him, standing between him and the door, and addressed him with exceptional poise and politeness.

“Brother, I have something to say to you”

“Go ahead then” He turned quickly towards me, nodding

“It’s nothing much, but I find it hard to say. Brother, probably all primitive people ate a little human flesh to begin with. Later, because their views altered some of them stopped and tried so hard to do what was right that they changed into men, into real men. But some are still eating people — just like reptiles. Some have changed into fish, birds, monkeys, and finally men; but those who make no effort to do what’s right are still reptiles. When those who eat men compare themselves with those who don’t, how ashamed they must be. Probably much more ashamed than the reptiles are before monkeys.

“In ancient times Yi Ya boiled his son for Jie and Zhou* to eat; that is the old story. But actually since the creation of heaven and earth by Pan Gu** men have been eating each other, from the time of Yi Ya’s son to the time of Xu Xilin*** and from the time of Xu Xilin down to the man caught in Wolf Cub Village. Last year they executed a criminal in the city, and a consumptive soaked a piece of bread in his blood and sucked it

* Yi Ya, a favourite of Duke of Huan of Qi in the seventh century B C, was a good cook and sycophant. When the duke remarked that he had never tasted the flesh of children, Yi Ya cooked his own son for him to eat. Jie and Zhou were kings of earlier periods. This misstatement is presented as a sign of mental derangement.

** A mythological figure.

*** A revolutionary executed in 1907 for assassinating a Qing official. His heart and liver were eaten.

“They want to eat me, and of course you can do nothing about it single-handed, but why must you join them? As man-eaters they are capable of anything. If they eat me, they can eat you as well, members of the same group can still eat each other. But if you will just change your ways, change right away, then everyone will have peace. Although this has been going on since time immemorial, today we could make a special effort to do what is right, and say this can't be done! I'm sure you can say that, Brother. The other day when the tenant wanted the rent reduced, you said it couldn't be done.”

At first he only smiled cynically, then a murderous gleam came into his eyes, and when I spoke of their secret he turned pale. Outside the gate quite a crowd had gathered, among them Mr Zhao and his dog, all craning their necks to peer in. I could not see all their faces, some of them seemed to be masked, others were the old lot, long-toothed with livid faces, concealing their laughter. I knew they were one gang, all eaters of human flesh. But I also knew that they did not all think alike by any means. Some of them thought that since it had always been so, men should be eaten. Others knew they shouldn't eat men but still wanted to, and were afraid people might discover their secret; so although what I said made them angry they still smiled their cynical, tight-lipped smiles.

Suddenly my brother's face darkened.

“Clear off, the whole lot of you!” he roared. “What's the point of looking at a madman?”

Then I realized part of their cunning. They would never be willing to change their stand, and their plans were all laid. They had labelled me a madman. In future when I was eaten, not only would there be no trouble but people would probably be grateful to them. When our tenant spoke of the villagers eating a bad character, it was exactly the same device. This is their old trick.

Old Chen came in too in a towering temper. But they could not stop my mouth, I had to warn those people.

“You should change, change from the bottom of your hearts. You must realize that there will be no place for man-eaters in the world in future

“If you don’t change, you may all be eaten by each other. However many of you there are, you will be wiped out by the real men, just as wolves are killed by hunters — just like reptiles!”

Old Chen drove everybody away. My brother had disappeared. Old Chen advised me to go back to my room. It was pitch dark in there. The beams and rafters shook above my head. After shaking for a while they grew bigger and bigger. They piled on top of me.

The weight was so great, I couldn’t move. They meant that I should die. However, knowing that the weight was false I struggled out, dripping with sweat. But I had to warn them.

“You must change at once, change from the bottom of your hearts! You must know that there’ll be no place for man-eaters in future. . . .”

XI

The sun has stopped shining, the door is never opened. Just two meals day after day.

Picking up my chopsticks, I thought of my elder brother. I know now how my little sister died: it was all through him. My sister was only five at the time. I can still remember how sweet she looked, poor thing. Mother wept as if she would never stop, but he begged her not to cry, probably because he had eaten our sister himself and so this weeping made him rather ashamed. If he had any sense of shame . . .

My sister was eaten by my brother, but I don’t know whether Mother realized it or not.

I think Mother must have known, but when she wept she didn't say so outright, probably because she also thought it proper. I remember when I was four or five, sitting in the cool of the hall, my brother told me that if a man's parents were ill he should cut off a piece of his flesh and boil it for them,* if he wanted to be considered a good son, and Mother didn't contradict him. If one piece could be eaten, obviously so could the whole. And yet just to think of the weeping then still makes my heart bleed, that is the extraordinary thing about it!

XII

I can't bear to think of it

It has only just dawned on me that all these years I have been living in a place where for four thousand years human flesh has been eaten. My brother had just taken over the charge of the house when our sister died, and he may well have used her flesh in our food, making us eat it unwittingly.

I may have eaten several pieces of my sister's flesh unwittingly, and now it is my turn.

How can a man like myself, after four thousand years of man-eating history — even though I knew nothing about it at first — ever hope to face real men?

XIII

Perhaps there are still children who haven't eaten men?
Save the children . . .

April 2, 1918

* The doctrine of filial piety used by the feudal ruling class to poison the people preached that a son should, if necessary, cut off his own flesh to feed his parents

KONG YIJI

The layout of Luzhen's taverns is unique. In each, facing you as you enter, is a bar in the shape of a carpenter's square where hot water is kept ready for warming rice wine. When men come off work at midday and in the evening they spend four coppers on a bowl of wine — or so they did twenty years ago; now it costs ten — and drink this warm, standing by the bar, taking it easy. Another copper will buy a plate of salted bamboo shoots or peas flavoured with aniseed to go with the wine, while a dozen will buy a meat dish, but most of the customers here belong to the short-coated class, few of whom can afford this. As for those in long gowns, they go into the inner room to order wine and dishes and sit drinking at their leisure.

At the age of twelve I started work as a pot-boy in Prosperity Tavern at the edge of the town. The boss put me to work in the outer room, saying that I looked too much of a fool to serve long-gowned customers. The short-coated customers there were easier to deal with, it is true, but among them were quite a few pernickety ones who insisted on watching for themselves while the yellow wine was ladled from the keg, looked for water at the bottom of the wine-pot, and personally inspected the pot's immersion into the hot water. Under such strict surveillance, diluting the wine was very hard indeed. Thus it did not take my boss many days to decide that this job too was beyond me. Luckily I had been recommended by somebody influential, so he could not sack

me. Instead I was transferred to the dull task of simply warming wine.

After that I stood all day behind the bar attending to my duties. Although I gave satisfaction at this post, I found it somewhat boring and monotonous. Our boss was a grim-faced man, nor were the customers much pleasanter, which made the atmosphere a gloomy one. The only times when there was any laughter were when Kong Yiji came to the tavern. That is why I remember him.

Kong Yiji was the only long-gowned customer who used to drink his wine standing. A big, pallid man whose wrinkled face often bore scars, he had a large, unkempt and grizzled beard. And although he wore a long gown it was dirty and tattered. It had not by the look of it been washed or mended for ten years or more. He used so many archaisms in his speech that half of it was barely intelligible. And as his surname was Kong, he was given the nickname Kong Yiji from *kong, yi, ji*, the first three characters in the old-fashioned children's copy-book. Whenever he came in, everyone there would look at him and chuckle. And someone was sure to call out

"Kong Yiji! What are those fresh scars on your face?"

Ignoring this, he would lay nine coppers on the bar and order two bowls of heated wine with a dish of aniseed-peas. Then someone else would bawl.

"You must have been stealing again!"

"Why sully a man's good name for no reason at all?" Kong Yiji would ask, raising his eyebrows.

"Good name? Why, the day before yesterday you were trussed up and beaten for stealing books from the Ho family. I saw you!"

At that Kong Yiji would flush, the veins on his forehead standing out as he protested, "Taking books can't be counted as stealing. . . . Taking books . . . for a scholar . . . can't be counted as stealing." Then followed such quotations from the classics as "A gentleman keeps

his integrity even in poverty," together with a spate of archaisms which soon had everybody roaring with laughter, enlivening the whole tavern

From the gossip that I heard, it seemed that Kong Yiji had studied the classics but never passed the official examinations and, not knowing any way to make a living, he had grown steadily poorer until he was almost reduced to beggary. Luckily he was a good calligrapher and could find enough copying work to fill his rice bowl. But unfortunately he had his failings too—laziness and a love of tipping. So after a few days he would disappear, taking with him books, paper, brushes and inkstone. And after this had happened several times, people stopped employing him as a copyist. Then all he could do was resort to occasional pilfering. In our tavern, though, he was a model customer who never failed to pay up. Sometimes, it is true, when he had no ready money, his name would be chalked up on our tally-board; but in less than a month he invariably settled the bill, and the name Kong Yiji would be wiped off the board again.

After Kong Yiji had drunk half a bowl of wine, his flushed cheeks would stop burning. But then someone would ask:

"Kong Yiji, can you really read?"

When he glanced back as if such a question were not worth answering, they would continue, "How is it you never passed even the lowest official examination?"

At once a grey tinge would overspread Kong Yiji's dejected, discomfited face, and he would mumble more of those unintelligible archaisms. Then everyone there would laugh heartily again, enlivening the whole tavern.

At such times I could join in the laughter with no danger of a dressing-down from my boss. In fact he always put such questions to Kong Yiji himself, to raise a laugh. Knowing that it was no use talking to the men, Kong Yiji would chat with us boys. Once he asked me:

“Have you had any schooling?”

When I nodded curtly he said, “Well then, I’ll test you. How do you write the *hur*¹ in aniseed-peas?”

Who did this beggar think he was, testing me! I turned away and ignored him. After waiting for some time he said earnestly.

“You can’t write it, eh? I’ll show you. Mind you remember. You ought to remember such characters, because you’ll need them to write up your accounts when you have a shop of your own.”

It seemed to me that I was still very far from having a shop of my own; in addition to which, our boss never entered aniseed-peas in his account-book. Half amused and half exasperated, I drawled, “I don’t need you to show me. Isn’t it the *hur* written with the element for grass?”

Kong Yiji’s face lit up. Tapping two long finger-nails on the bar, he nodded. “Quite correct!” he said. “There are four different ways of writing *hur*. Do you know them?”

But my patience exhausted, I scowled and moved away. Kong Yiji had dipped his finger in wine to trace the characters on the bar. When he saw my utter indifference his face fell and he sighed.

Sometimes children in the neighbourhood, hearing laughter, came in to join in the fun and surrounded Kong Yiji. Then he would give them aniseed-peas, one apiece. After eating the peas the children would still hang round, their eyes fixed on the dish. Growing flustered, he would cover it with his hand and bending forward from the waist would say, “There aren’t many left, not many at all.” Straightening up to look at the peas again, he would shake his head and reiterate, “Not many, I do assure you. Not many, nay, not many at all.” Then the children would scamper off, shouting with laughter.

* A Chinese character meaning “aniseed.”

That was how Kong Yiji contributed to our enjoyment, but we got along all right without him too

One day, shortly before the Mid-Autumn Festival I think it was, my boss who was slowly making out his accounts took down the tally-board "Kong Yiji hasn't shown up for a long time," he remarked suddenly "He still owes nineteen coppers" That made me realize how long it was since we had seen him.

"How could he?" rejoined one of the customers "His legs were broken in that last beating up."

"Ah!" said my boss

"He'd been stealing again This time he was fool enough to steal from Mr. Ding, the provincial-grade scholar As if anybody could get away with that!"

"So what happened?"

"What happened? First he wrote a confession, then he was beaten The beating lasted nearly all night, and they broke both his legs "

"And then?"

"Well, his legs were broken."

"Yes, but after?"

"After? . . . Who knows? He may be dead "

My boss asked no further questions but went on slowly making up his accounts.

After the Mid-Autumn Festival the wind grew daily colder as winter approached, and even though I spent all my time by the stove I had to wear a padded jacket One afternoon, when the tavern was deserted, as I sat with my eyes closed I heard the words:

"Warm a bowl of wine "

It was said in a low but familiar voice I opened my eyes. There was no one to be seen. I stood up to look out There below the bar, facing the door, sat Kong Yiji. His face was thin and grimy — he looked a wreck He had on a ragged lined jacket and was squatting cross-legged on a mat which was attached to his shoulders by a straw rope. When he saw me he repeated:

“Warm a bowl of wine ”

At this point my boss leaned over the bar to ask, “Is that Kong Yiji? You still owe nineteen coppers ”

“That . . . I’ll settle next time ” He looked up dejectedly “Here’s cash Give me some good wine ”

My boss, just as in the past, chuckled and said:

“Kong Yiji, you’ve been stealing again!”

But instead of a stout denial, the answer simply was.

“Don’t joke with me.”

“Joke? How did your legs get broken if you hadn’t been stealing?”

“I fell,” whispered Kong Yiji “Broke them in a fall ” His eyes pleaded with the boss to let the matter drop. By now several people had gathered round, and they all laughed with the boss I warmed the wine, carried it over, and set it on the threshold He produced four coppers from his ragged coat pocket, and as he placed them in my hand I saw that his own hands were covered with mud — he must have crawled there on them Presently he finished the wine and, to the accompaniment of taunts and laughter, slowly pushed himself off with his hands

A long time went by after that without our seeing Kong Yiji again At the end of the year, when the boss took down the tally-board he said, “Kong Yiji still owes nineteen coppers ” At the Dragon-Boat Festival the next year he said the same thing again. But when the Mid-Autumn Festival arrived he was silent on the subject, and another New Year came round without our seeing any more of Kong Yiji.

Nor have I ever seen him since — no doubt Kong Yiji really is dead.

March 1919

MEDICINE

I

It was autumn, in the small hours of the morning. The moon had gone down, but the sun had not yet risen, and the sky appeared a sheet of darkling blue. Apart from night-prowlers, all was asleep. Old Shuan suddenly sat up in bed. He struck a match and lit the grease-covered oil-lamp, which shed a ghostly light over the two rooms of the teahouse.

"Are you going, now, Dad?" queried an old woman's voice. And from the small inner room a fit of coughing was heard.

"H'm."

Old Shuan listened as he fastened his clothes, then stretching out his hand said, "Let's have it."

After some fumbling under the pillow his wife produced a packet of silver dollars which she handed over. Old Shuan pocketed it nervously, patted his pocket twice, then lighting a paper lantern and blowing out the lamp went into the inner room. A rustling was heard, and then more coughing. When all was quiet again, Old Shuan called softly, "Son! . . . Don't you get up! . . . Your mother will see to the shop."

Receiving no answer, Old Shuan assumed his son must be sound asleep again; so he went out into the street. In the darkness nothing could be seen but the grey roadway. The lantern light fell on his pacing feet. Here and there he came across dogs, but none of them barked. It was

much colder than indoors, yet Old Shuan's spirits rose, as if he had grown suddenly younger and possessed some miraculous life-giving power. He had lengthened his stride. And the road became increasingly clear, the sky increasingly bright.

Absorbed in his walking, Old Shuan was startled when he saw the crossroad lying distinctly ahead of him. He walked back a few steps to stand under the eaves of a shop, in front of its closed door. After some time he began to feel chilly.

"Uh, an old chap."

"Seems rather cheerful. "

Old Shuan started again and, opening his eyes, saw several men passing. One of them even turned back to look at him, and although he could not see him clearly, the man's eyes shone with a lustful light, like a famished person's at the sight of food. Looking at his lantern, Old Shuan saw it had gone out. He patted his pocket — the hard packet was still there. Then he looked round and saw many strange people, in twos and threes, wandering about like lost souls. However, when he gazed steadily at them, he could not see anything else strange about them.

Presently he saw some soldiers strolling around. The large white circles on their uniforms, both in front and behind, were clear even at a distance; and as they drew nearer, the dark red border could be seen too. The next second, with a trampling of feet, a crowd rushed past. Thereupon the small groups which had arrived earlier suddenly converged and surged forward. Just before the crossroad, they came to a sudden stop and grouped themselves in a semi-circle.

Old Shuan looked in that direction too, but could only see people's backs. Craning their necks as far as they would go, they looked like so many ducks, held and lifted by some invisible hand. For a moment all was still; then a sound was heard, and a stir swept through the onlook-

ers There was a rumble as they pushed back, sweeping past Old Shuan and nearly knocking him down.

“Hey! Give me the cash, and I’ll give you the goods!” A man clad entirely in black stood before him, his eyes like daggers, making Old Shuan shrink to half his normal size This man was thrusting one huge extended hand towards him, while in the other he held a roll of steamed bread, from which crimson drops were dripping to the ground

Hurriedly Old Shuan fumbled for his dollars, and trembling he was about to hand them over, but he dared not take the object The other grew impatient, and shouted, “What are you afraid of? Why not take it?” When Old Shuan still hesitated, the man in black snatched his lantern and tore off its paper shade to wrap up the roll This package he thrust into Old Shuan’s hand, at the same time seizing the silver and giving it a cursory feel Then he turned away, muttering, “Old fool . . .”

“Whose sickness is this for?” Old Shuan seemed to hear someone ask; but he made no reply His whole mind was on the package, which he carried as carefully as if it were the sole heir to an ancient house Nothing else mattered now He was about to transplant this new life to his own home, and reap much happiness The sun too had risen, lighting up the broad highway before him, which led straight home, and the worn tablet behind him at the crossroad with its faded gold inscription “Ancient Pavilion.”

II

When Old Shuan reached home, the shop had been cleaned, and the rows of tea-tables were shining brightly, but no customers had arrived Only his son was sitting at a table by the wall, eating. Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead, his lined jacket was sticking to his spine,

and his shoulder blades stuck out so sharply, an inverted V seemed stamped there. At this sight, Old Shuan's brow, which had been clear, contracted again. His wife hurried in from the kitchen, with expectant eyes and a tremor to her lips.

"Get it?"

"Yes."

They went together into the kitchen, and conferred for a time. Then the old woman went out, to return shortly with a dried lotus leaf which she spread on the table. Old Shuan unwrapped the crimson-stained roll from the lantern paper and transferred it to the lotus leaf. Little Shuan had finished his meal, but his mother exclaimed hastily:

"Sit still, Little Shuan! Don't come over here."

Mending the fire in the stove, Old Shuan put the green package and the red and white lantern paper into the stove together. A red-black flame flared up, and a strange odour permeated the shop.

"Smells good! What are you eating?" The hunchback had arrived. He was one of those who spend all their time in teahouses, the first to come in the morning and the last to leave. Now he had just stumbled to a corner table facing the street, and sat down. But no one answered his question.

"Puffed rice gruel?"

Still no reply. Old Shuan hurried out to brew tea for him.

"Come here, Little Shuan!" His mother called him into the inner room, set a stool in the middle, and sat the child down. Then, bringing him a round black object on a plate, she said gently:

"Eat it up . . . then you'll be better."

Little Shuan picked up the black object and looked at it. He had the oddest feeling, as if he were holding his own life in his hands. Presently he split it carefully open. From within the charred crust a jet of white

vapour escaped, then scattered, leaving only two halves of a white flour steamed roll. Soon it was all eaten, the flavour completely forgotten, only the empty plate left. His father and mother were standing one on each side of him, their eyes apparently pouring something into him and at the same time extracting something. His small heart began to beat faster, and, putting his hands to his chest, he began to cough again.

"Have a sleep; then you'll be all right," said his mother.

Obediently, Little Shuan coughed himself to sleep. The woman waited till his breathing was regular, then covered him lightly with a much patched quilt.

III

The shop was crowded, and Old Shuan was busy, carrying a big copper kettle to make tea for one customer after another. But there were dark circles under his eyes.

"Aren't you well, Old Shuan? . . . What's wrong with you?" asked one greybeard.

"Nothing."

"Nothing? . . . No, I suppose from your smile, there couldn't be," the old man corrected himself.

"It's just that Old Shuan's busy," said the hunchback. "If his son. . . ." But before he could finish, a heavy-jowled man burst in. He had over his shoulders a dark brown shirt, unbuttoned and fastened carelessly by a broad dark brown girdle at his waist. As soon as he entered, he shouted to Old Shuan.

"Has he taken it? Any better? Luck's with you, Old Shuan. What luck! If not for my hearing of things so quickly. . . ."

Holding the kettle in one hand, the other straight by his side in an attitude of respect, Old Shuan listened with a smile. In fact, all present were listening respectfully.

The old woman, dark circles under her eyes too, came out smiling with a bowl containing tea-leaves and an added olive, over which Old Shuan poured boiling water for the newcomer

“This is a guaranteed cure! Not like other things!” declared the heavy-jowled man. “Just think, brought back warm, and eaten warm!”

“Yes indeed, we couldn’t have managed it without Uncle Kang’s help” The old woman thanked him very warmly.

“A guaranteed cure! Eaten warm like this A roll dipped in human blood like this can cure any consumption!”

The old woman seemed a little disconcerted by the word “consumption,” and turned a shade paler; however, she forced a smile again at once and found some pretext to leave. Meanwhile the man in brown was indiscreet enough to go on talking at the top of his voice until the child in the inner room was woken and started coughing

“So you’ve had such a stroke of luck for your Little Shuan! Of course his sickness will be cured completely. No wonder Old Shuan keeps smiling” As he spoke, the greybeard walked up to the man in brown, and lowered his voice to ask

“Mr. Kang, I heard the criminal executed today came from the Xia family Who was it? And why was he executed?”

“Who? Son of Widow Xia, of course! Young rascal!”

Seeing how they were all hanging on his words, Mr Kang’s spirits rose even higher. His jowls quivered, and he made his voice as loud as he could

“The rogue didn’t want to live, simply didn’t want to! There was nothing in it for me this time. Even the clothes stripped from him were taken by Red-eye, the jailer. Our Old Shuan was luckiest, and after him Third Uncle Xia. He pocketed the whole reward — twenty-five taels of bright silver — and didn’t have to spend a cent!”

Little Shuan walked slowly out of the inner room, his hands to his chest, coughing repeatedly. He went to the kitchen, filled a bowl with cold rice, added hot water to it, and sitting down started to eat. His mother, hovering over him, asked softly.

"Do you feel better, son? Still as hungry as ever?"

"A guaranteed cure!" Kang glanced at the child, then turned back to address the company. "Third Uncle Xia is really smart. If he hadn't informed, even *his* family would have been executed, and their property confiscated. But instead? Silver! That young rogue was a real scoundrel! He even tried to incite the jailer to revolt!"

"No! The idea of it!" A man in his twenties, sitting in the back row, expressed indignation.

"You know, Red-eye went to sound him out, but he started chatting with him. He said the great Qing empire belongs to us. Just think. Is that kind of talk rational? Red-eye knew he had only an old mother at home, but had never imagined he was so poor. He couldn't squeeze anything out of him, he was already good and angry, and then the young fool would 'scratch the tiger's head,' so he gave him a couple of slaps."

"Red-eye is a good boxer. Those slaps must have hurt!" The hunchback in the corner by the wall exulted.

"The rotter was not afraid of being beaten. He even said how sorry he was."

"Nothing to be sorry about in beating a wretch like that," said Greybeard.

Kang looked at him superciliously and said disdainfully, "You misunderstood. The way he said it, he was sorry for Red-eye."

His listeners' eyes took on a glazed look, and no one spoke. Little Shuan had finished his rice and was perspiring profusely, his head steaming.

"Sorry for Red-eye — crazy! He must have been crazy!" said Greybeard, as if suddenly he saw light.

"He must have been crazy!" echoed the man in his twenties

Once more the customers began to show animation, and conversation was resumed. Under cover of the noise, the child was seized by a paroxysm of coughing. Kang went up to him, clapped him on the shoulder, and said:

"A guaranteed cure! Don't cough like that, Little Shuan! A guaranteed cure!"

"Crazy!" agreed the hunchback, nodding his head.

IV

Originally, the land adjacent to the city wall outside the West Gate had been public land. The zigzag path slanting across it, trodden out by passers-by seeking a short cut, had become a natural boundary line. Left of the path, executed criminals or those who had died of neglect in prison were buried. Right of the path were paupers' graves. The serried ranks of grave mounds on both sides looked like the rolls laid out for a rich man's birthday.

The Qing Ming Festival that year was unusually cold. Willows were only beginning to put forth shoots no larger than grains. Shortly after daybreak, Old Shuan's wife brought four dishes and a bowl of rice to set before a new grave in the right section, and wailed before it. When she had burned paper money she sat on the ground in a stupor as if waiting for something, but for what, she herself did not know. A breeze sprang up and stirred her short hair, which was certainly whiter than in the previous year.

Another woman came down the path, grey-haired and in rags. She was carrying an old, round, red-lacquered basket, with a string of paper money hanging from it; and she walked haltingly. When she saw Old Shuan's wife sitting on the ground watching her, she hesitated,

and a flush of shame spread over her pale face. However, she summoned up courage to cross over to a grave in the left section, where she set down her basket

That grave was directly opposite Little Shuan's, separated only by the path. As Old Shuan's wife watched the other woman set out four dishes and a bowl of rice, then stand up to wail and burn paper money, she thought, "It must be her son in that grave too." The older woman took a few aimless steps and stared vacantly around, then suddenly she began to tremble and stagger backward. She felt giddy.

Fearing sorrow might send her out of her mind, Old Shuan's wife got up and stepped across the path, to say quietly, "Don't grieve, let's go home."

The other nodded, but her eyes were still fixed, and she muttered, "Look! What's that?"

Looking where she pointed, Old Shuan's wife saw that the grave in front had not yet been overgrown with grass. Ugly patches of soil still showed. But when she looked carefully, she was surprised to see at the top of the mound a wreath of red and white flowers.

Both of them suffered from failing eyesight, yet they could see these red and white flowers clearly. There were not many, but they were placed in a circle, and although not very fresh, were neatly set out. Little Shuan's mother looked round and found her own son's grave, like most of the rest, dotted with only a few little, pale flowers shivering in the cold. Suddenly she had a sense of futility and stopped feeling curious about the wreath.

Meantime the old woman had gone up to the grave to look more closely. "They have no roots," she said to herself. "They can't have grown here. Who could have been here? Children don't come here to play, and none of our relatives have ever been. What could have happened?" She puzzled over it, until suddenly her tears began to fall, and she cried aloud:

“Son, they all wronged you, and you do not forget. Is your grief still so great that today you worked this wonder to let me know?”

She looked all around, but could see only a crow perched on a leafless bough. “I know,” she continued. “They murdered you. But a day of reckoning will come, Heaven will see to it. Close your eyes in peace. . . . If you are really here, and can hear me, make that crow fly on to your grave as a sign.”

The breeze had long since dropped, and the dry grass stood stiff and straight as copper wires. A faint, tremulous sound vibrated in the air, then faded and died away. All around was deathly still. They stood in the dry grass, looking up at the crow; and the crow, on the rigid bough of the tree, its head drawn in, stood immobile as iron.

Time passed. More people, young and old, came to visit the graves.

Old Shuan's wife felt somehow as if a load had been lifted from her mind and, wanting to leave, she urged the other.

“Let's go.”

The old woman sighed, and listlessly picked up the rice and dishes. After a moment's hesitation she started slowly off, still muttering to herself:

“What could it mean?”

They had not gone thirty paces when they heard a loud caw behind them. Startled, they looked round and saw the crow stretch its wings, brace itself to take off, then fly like an arrow towards the far horizon.

April 1919

TOMORROW

“Not a sound — what’s wrong with the kid?”

A bowl of yellow wine in his hands, Red-nosed Gong jerked his head towards the next house as he spoke. Blue-skinned Awu set down his own bowl and punched the other hard in the back.

“Bah . . .” he growled thickly. “Going sentimental again!”

Being so out-of-the-way, Luzhen was rather old-fashioned. Folk closed their doors and went to bed before the first watch sounded. By midnight there were only two households awake. Prosperity Tavern where a few gluttons guzzled merrily round the bar, and the house next door where Fourth Shan’s Wife lived. For, left a widow two years earlier, she had nothing but the cotton-yarn she spun to support herself and her three-year-old boy; this is why she also slept late.

It was a fact that for several days now there had been no sound of spinning. But since there were only two households awake at midnight, Old Gong and the others were naturally the only ones who could notice if there was any sound from Fourth Shan’s Wife’s house, and the only ones to notice if there was no sound.

After being punched, Old Gong — looking quite at his ease — took a great swig at his wine and piped up a folk tune.

Meanwhile Fourth Shan’s Wife was sitting on the edge of her bed, Bao’er — her treasure — in her arms, while her loom stood silent on the floor. The murky

lamplight fell on Bao'er's face, which showed livid beneath a feverish flush.

"I've drawn lots before the shrine," she was thinking. "I've made a vow to the gods, he's taken the guaranteed cure. If he still doesn't get better, what can I do? I shall have to take him to Dr Ho Xiaoxian. But maybe Bao'er's only bad at night, when the sun comes out tomorrow his fever may go and he may breathe more easily again. A lot of illnesses are like that."

* Fourth Shan's Wife was a simple woman, who did not know what a fearful word "but" is. Thanks to this "but," many bad things turn out well, many good things turn out badly. A summer night is short. Soon after Old Gong and the others stopped singing the sky grew bright in the east, and presently through the cracks in the window filtered the silvery light of dawn.

Waiting for the dawn was not such a simple matter for Fourth Shan's Wife as for other people. The time dragged terribly slowly. Each breath Bao'er took seemed to last at least a year. But now at last it was bright. Clear daylight swallowed up the lamplight. Bao'er's nostrils quivered as he gasped for breath.

Fourth Shan's Wife smothered a cry, for she knew that this boded ill. But what could she do? she wondered. Her only hope was to take him to Dr Ho. She might be a simple woman, but she had a will of her own. She stood up, went to the cupboard, and took out her entire savings — thirteen small silver dollars and a hundred and eighty coppers in all. Having put the whole lot in her pocket, she locked the door and carried Bao'er as fast as she could to Dr Ho's house.

Early as it was, there were already four patients sitting there. She produced forty silver cents for a registration slip, and Bao'er was the fifth to be seen. Dr. Ho stretched out two fingers to feel the child's pulses. His nails were a good four inches long, and Fourth Shan's Wife marvelled inwardly, thinking, "Surely my Bao'er must be

fated to live!" She could not help feeling anxious all the same, and could not stop herself asking nervously.

"What's wrong with my Bao'er, doctor?"

"An obstruction of the digestive tract"

"Is it serious? Will he . . . ?"

"Take these two prescriptions to start with"

"He can't breathe, his nostrils are twitching"

"The element of fire overpowers that of metal. . . ."*

Leaving this sentence unfinished, Dr Ho closed his eyes; and Fourth Shan's Wife did not like to say any more. Opposite the doctor sat a man in his thirties, who had now finished making out the prescription.

"The first is Infant Preserver Pills," he told her, pointing to the characters in one corner of the paper "You can get those only at the Jia family's Salvation Shop."

Fourth Shan's Wife took the paper, and walked out thinking as she went. She might be a simple woman, but she knew Dr Ho's house, Salvation Shop and her own home formed a triangle; so of course it would be simpler to buy the medicine first before going back. She hurried as fast as she could to Salvation Shop. The assistant raised his long finger-nails too as he slowly read the prescription, then slowly wrapped up the medicine. With Bao'er in her arms, Fourth Shan's Wife waited. Suddenly Bao'er stretched up a little hand and tugged at his loose tuft of hair. He had never done this before, and his mother was terrified.

The sun was fairly high now. With the child in her arms and the package of medicine to carry, the further she walked the heavier she found her load. The child kept struggling too, which made the way seem even longer. She had to sit down on the doorstep of a big

* The ancient Chinese believed that there were five elements. fire, wood, earth, metal and water. Fire could conquer metal. The traditional Chinese doctors also considered that the heart, lungs, liver, spleen and kidney corresponded to the five elements. Here, Dr Ho is saying that heart trouble had affected the lungs.

house by the roadside to rest for a while, and presently her clothes lay so clammy against her skin that she realized she had been sweating. But Bao'er seemed fast asleep. When she stood up again to walk slowly on, she still found him too heavy. A voice beside her said:

"Let me take him for you, Fourth Shan's Wife!" It sounded like Blue-skinned Awu.

When she looked up, sure enough it was Awu, who was following her with eyes still heavy from sleep.

Though Fourth Shan's Wife had been longing for an angel to come to her rescue, she had not wanted her champion to be Awu. But there was something of the gallant about Awu, for he absolutely insisted on helping her; and at last, after several refusals, she gave way. As he stretched his arm between her breast and the child, then thrust it down to take over Bao'er, she felt a wave of heat along her breast. She flushed right up to her ears.

They walked along, two and a half feet apart. Awu made some remarks, most of which were left unanswered by Fourth Shan's Wife. They had not gone far when he gave the child back to her, saying he had arranged yesterday to have a meal at this time with a friend. Fourth Shan's Wife took Bao'er back. Luckily it wasn't far now: already she could see Ninth Aunt Wang sitting at the side of the street, calling out to her:

"Fourth Shan's Wife, how's the child? . . . Did you get to see the doctor?"

"We saw him. . . . Ninth Aunt Wang, you're old and you've seen a lot. Will you look him over for me, and say what you think?"

"Um."

"Well . . . ?"

"Ummm. . . ."

When Ninth Aunt Wang had examined Bao'er, she nodded her head twice, then shook it twice.

By the time Bao'er had taken his medicine it was after noon. Fourth Shan's Wife watched him closely, and he did seem a good deal quieter. In the afternoon he suddenly opened his eyes and called, "Ma!" Then he closed his eyes again and seemed to be sleeping. He had not slept long before his forehead and the tip of his nose were beaded with sweat, which, when his mother felt it, stuck to her fingers like glue. In a panic she felt his chest, then burst out sobbing.

After quieting down, his breathing had stopped completely. After sobbing, she started wailing. Soon groups of people gathered inside the room. Ninth Aunt Wang, Blue-skinned Awu and the like, outside others like the landlord of Prosperity Tavern and Red-nosed Gong. Ninth Aunt Wang decreed that a string of paper coins should be burnt, then, taking two stools and five articles of clothing as security, she borrowed two dollars for Fourth Shan's Wife to prepare a meal for all those who were helping.

The first problem was the coffin. Fourth Shan's Wife still had a pair of silver earrings and a silver hairpin plated with gold, which she gave to the landlord of Prosperity Tavern so that he would go surety for her and buy a coffin half for cash, half on credit. Blue-skinned Awu raised his hand to volunteer to help, but Ninth Aunt Wang would not hear of it. All she would let him do was carry the coffin the next day. "Old bitch!" he cursed, and stood there grumpily pursing his lips. The landlord left, coming back that evening to report that the coffin would have to be specially made, and would not be ready till nearly morning.

By the time the landlord came back the other helpers had finished their meal. And Luzhen being rather old-fashioned, they all went home to sleep before the first watch. Only Awu leant on the bar of Prosperity Tavern drinking, while Old Gong croaked a song.

Meanwhile Fourth Shan's Wife was sitting on the edge of the bed crying, Bao'er lay on the bed, and the loom stood silent on the floor. After a long time, when Fourth Shan's Wife had no more tears to shed, she opened wide her eyes, and looked around in amazement. All this was impossible! "This is only a dream," she thought. "It's all a dream. I shall wake up tomorrow lying snug in bed, with Bao'er sleeping snugly beside me. Then he'll wake and call, 'Ma!' and jump down like a young tiger to play."

Old Gong had long since stopped singing, and the light had gone out in Prosperity Tavern. Fourth Shan's Wife sat staring, but could not believe all that had happened. A cock crew, the sky grew bright in the east, and through the cracks in the window filtered the silvery light of dawn.

By degrees the silvery light of dawn turned copper, and the sun shone on the roof. Fourth Shan's Wife sat there staring till someone knocked, when she gave a start and ran to open the door. A stranger was there with something on his back, and behind him stood Ninth Aunt Wang.

Oh, it was the coffin he'd brought!

Not till that afternoon was the lid of the coffin put on, because Fourth Shan's Wife would keep crying, then taking a look, and could not bear to have the lid closed down. Luckily, Ninth Aunt Wang grew tired of waiting, hurried indignantly forward and pulled her aside. Then they hastily closed it up.

Fourth Shan's Wife had really done all she could for her Bao'er — nothing had been forgotten. The previous day she had burned a string of paper coins, this morning she had burned the forty-nine books of the *Incantation of Great Mercy*,* and before putting him in the coffin

* This was a Buddhist chant, believed to help the soul of the deceased to reach heaven.

she had dressed him in his newest clothes and set by his pillow all the toys he liked best — a little clay figure, two small wooden bowls, two glass bottles. Though Ninth Aunt Wang reckoned carefully on her fingers, even then she could not think of anything they had forgotten.

Since Blue-skinned Awu did not turn up all day, the landlord of Prosperity Tavern hired two porters for Fourth Shan's Wife at 210 large coppers each, who carried the coffin to the public graveyard and dug a grave. Ninth Aunt Wang helped her prepare a meal to which everyone who had lifted a finger or opened his mouth was invited. Soon the sun made it clear that it was about to set, and the guests unwittingly made it clear that they were about to leave — home they all went.

Fourth Shan's Wife felt dizzy at first, but after a little rest she quietened down. At once, though, she had the impression that things were rather strange. Something which had never happened to her before, and which she had thought never could happen, *had* happened. The more she thought, the more surprised she felt, and another thing that struck her as rather strange was the fact that the room had suddenly grown too silent.

She stood up and lit the lamp, and the room seemed even more silent. She groped her way over to close the door, came back and sat on the bed, while the loom stood silent on the floor. She pulled herself together and looked around, feeling unable either to sit or stand. The room was not only too silent, it was far too big as well, and the things in it were far too empty. This over-large room hemmed her in, and the emptiness all around her bore hard on her, till she could hardly breathe.

She knew now her Bao'er was really dead; and, not wanting to see this room, she blew out the light and lay down to cry and think. She remembered how Bao'er had sat by her side when she spun, eating peas flavoured with aniseed. He had watched her hard with his small black eyes and thought. "Ma!" he suddenly said. "Dad

sold *hun dun*.^{*} When I'm big I'll sell *hun dun* too, and make lots and lots of money — and I'll give it all to you ”

At such times even every inch of yarn she spun seemed worthwhile and alive. But what now? Fourth Shan's Wife had not considered the present at all — as I have said, she was only a simple woman. What solution could she think of? All she knew was that this room was too silent, too large, too empty.

But even though Fourth Shan's Wife was a simple woman, she knew the dead cannot come to life again, and she would never see her Bao'er any more. She sighed and said, “Bao'er, you must still be here. Let me see you in my dreams.” Then she closed her eyes, hoping to fall asleep at once, so that she could see Bao'er. She heard her hard breathing clearly through the silence, the vastness and emptiness.

At last Fourth Shan's Wife dozed off, and the whole room was very still. Red-nosed Gong's folk song had long since ended, and he had staggered out of Prosperity Tavern to sing in a falsetto:

“*I pity you — my darling — all alone. . .* ”

Blue-skinned Awu grabbed Old Gong's shoulder, and laughing tipsily they reeled away together.

Fourth Shan's Wife was asleep, Old Gong and the others had gone, the door of Prosperity Tavern was closed. Luzhen was sunk in utter silence. Only the night, eager to change into the morrow, was journeying on in the silence; and, hidden in the darkness, a few dogs were barking.

June 1920

* Dumplings stuffed with meat and boiled in soup

A SMALL INCIDENT

Six years have slipped by since I came from the country to the capital. During that time the number of so-called affairs of state I have witnessed or heard about is far from small, but none of them made much impression. If asked to define their influence on me, I can only say they made my bad temper worse. Frankly speaking, they taught me to take a poorer view of people every day.

One small incident, however, which struck me as significant and jolted me out of my irritability, remains fixed even now in my memory.

It was the winter of 1917, a strong north wind was blustering, but the exigencies of earning my living forced me to be up and out early. I met scarcely a soul on the road, but eventually managed to hire a rickshaw to take me to S — Gate. Presently the wind dropped a little, having blown away the drifts of dust on the road to leave a clean broad highway, and the rickshaw man quickened his pace. We were just approaching S — Gate when we knocked into someone who slowly toppled over.

It was a grey-haired woman in ragged clothes. She had stepped out abruptly from the roadside in front of us, and although the rickshaw man had swerved, her tattered padded waistcoat, unbuttoned and billowing in the wind, had caught on the shaft. Luckily the rickshaw man had slowed down, otherwise she would certainly have had a bad fall and it might have been a serious accident.

She huddled there on the ground, and the rickshaw man stopped. As I did not believe the old woman was hurt and as no one else had seen us, I thought this halt of

his uncalled for, liable to land him in trouble and hold me up

“It’s all right,” I said “Go on ”

He paid no attention — he may not have heard — but set down the shafts, took the old woman’s arm and gently helped her up

“Are you all right?” he asked

“I hurt myself falling ”

I thought: I saw how slowly you fell, how could you be hurt? Putting on an act like this is simply disgusting. The rickshaw man asked for trouble, and now he’s got it. He’ll have to find his own way out

But the rickshaw man did not hesitate for a minute after hearing the old woman’s answer. Still holding her arm, he helped her slowly forward. Rather puzzled by this I looked ahead and saw a police-station. Because of the high wind, there was no one outside. It was there that the rickshaw man was taking the old woman.

Suddenly I had the strange sensation that his dusty retreating figure had in that instant grown larger. Indeed, the further he walked the larger he loomed, until I had to look up to him. At the same time he seemed gradually to be exerting a pressure on me which threatened to overpower the small self hidden under my fur-lined gown.

Almost paralysed at that juncture I sat there motionless, my mind a blank, until a policeman came out. Then I got down from the rickshaw.

The policeman came up to me and said, “Get another rickshaw. He can’t take you any further.”

On the spur of the moment I pulled a handful of coppers from my coat pocket and handed them to the policeman. “Please give him this,” I said.

The wind had dropped completely, but the road was still quiet. As I walked along thinking, I hardly dared to think about myself. Quite apart from what had happened earlier, what had I meant by that handful of cop-

pers? Was it a reward? Who was I to judge the rickshaw man? I could give myself no answer

Even now, this incident keeps coming back to me. It keeps distressing me and makes me try to think about myself. The politics and the fighting of those years have slipped my mind as completely as the classics I read as a child. Yet this small incident keeps coming back to me, often more vivid than in actual life, teaching me shame, spurring me on to reform, and imbuing me with fresh courage and fresh hope

July 1920

STORM IN A TEACUP

On the mud flat by the river, the sun's bright yellow rays were gradually fading. The parched leaves of the tallow trees beside the river were at last able to take breath, while below them a few striped mosquitoes danced and droned. The smoke from the peasants' kitchen chimneys along the riverside dwindled, as the women and children sprinkled the ground before their doors with water and set out little tables and low stools. Everyone knew it was time for the evening meal.

The old folk and the men sat on the low stools, fanning themselves with plantain-leaf fans as they chatted. The children raced about or squatted under the tallow trees playing with pebbles. The women brought out steamed black dried rape and yellow rice, piping hot. Some literati passing in a pleasure-boat waxed quite lyrical at the sight.

"Such carefree tranquillity!" they exclaimed. "How idyllic!"

However, these literati were wide of the mark, not having heard what Old Mrs. Ninepounder was saying. Old Mrs. Ninepounder was in a towering temper, whacking the legs of her stool with a tattered plantain fan.

"Seventy-nine years I've lived, that's enough," she declared. "I'm sick of watching this family go to the dogs . . . Better die and be done with it. Just one minute to supper time, yet still eating roast beans — do you want to eat us out of house and home?"

Her great-granddaughter Sixpounder was just running towards her with a handful of beans, but seeing the sit-

uation she flew straight to the river bank and hid herself behind a tallow tree. Sticking out her small head with its twin tufts, she hooted, "Old Won't-die!"

Old Mrs Ninepounder for all her great age was not deaf. She did not, however, catch what the child had called and went on muttering to herself, "Yes, indeed Each generation is worse than the last."

It was the somewhat unusual custom in this village for mothers to weigh their children at birth and to call them the number of pounds they happened to weigh. Since Old Mrs Ninepounder's celebration of her fiftieth birthday she had gradually become a fault-finder, for ever complaining that in her young days the summer had not been so hot nor the beans so tough as now. In a word, there was something wrong with the present-day world. Why else had Sixpounder weighed three pounds less than her great-grandfather and one pound less than her father, Sevenpounder? Surely this was irrefutable evidence. So she reiterated emphatically, "Yes, indeed Each generation is worse than the last."

Her granddaughter-in-law, Mrs Sevenpounder, had just brought out a basket of rice. Plonking this down on the table, she said crossly, "There you go again, granny! Sixpounder weighed six pounds five ounces at birth, didn't she? Your family scales weigh light. eighteen ounces to the pound. With proper sixteen-ounce scales, Sixpounder would have weighed over seven pounds. I don't believe grandfather and father really weighed a full nine or eight pounds either. I daresay they were weighed with fourteen-ounce scales. . . ."

"Each generation is worse than the last"

Before Mrs. Sevenpounder could answer, she saw her husband emerge from the top of the lane and rounded on him instead.

"Why so late back, you zombie? I thought you must be dead, keeping us waiting all this time for supper!"

Although a villager, Sevenpounder had always wanted to better himself. For three generations — grandfather, father and son — not a man in his family had handled a hoe. Like his father before him he worked on a boat which left Luzhen every morning for the town, returning to Luzhen in the evening. As a result he knew pretty well all that was going on: where, for instance, the thunder god had blasted a centipede spirit, or where a virgin had given birth to a demon. In the village he was quite a personage. Still he stuck to the country custom of not lighting a lamp for supper in the summer, so if he came home late he rated a scolding.

In one hand Sevenpounder held a speckled bamboo pipe over six feet long with an ivory mouthpiece and a pewter bowl. He walked slowly over, his head bent, and sat on one of the low stools. Sixpounder seized this chance to slip out and sit down beside him, calling "Dad!" But her father made no answer.

"Each generation is worse than the last," repeated Old Mrs. Ninepounder.

Sevenpounder slowly raised his head and sighed "There's an emperor again on the Dragon Throne."

Mrs. Sevenpounder looked blank for a moment. Suddenly taking in the news she cried, "Good! That means another general amnesty, doesn't it?"

Sevenpounder sighed again. "I've no queue."

"Does the emperor insist on queues?"

"He does."

"How do you know?" she demanded in dismay.

"Everybody in Prosperity Tavern says so."

At that Mrs. Sevenpounder realized instinctively that things were in a bad way, because Prosperity Tavern was a place where you could pick up all the news. She threw a glance at Sevenpounder's shaved head, unable to hold back her anger, blaming him, hating him, resenting him. Then, abruptly reduced to despair, she filled a bowl with

rice and slapped it down before him "Hurry up and eat. Pulling a long face won't grow a queue for you, will it?"

The sun had withdrawn its last rays, the darkling water was cooling off again. From the mud flat rose a clatter of bowls and chopsticks, and the backs of all the diners were beaded with sweat. Mrs. Sevenpounder had finished three bowls of rice when she happened to look up. At once her heart started pounding. Through the tallow leaves she could see the short plump figure of Seventh Master Zhao approaching from the one-plank bridge. And he was wearing his long sapphire-blue glazed cotton gown.

Seventh Master Zhao was the owner of Abundance Tavern in the next village, the only notable within a radius of thirty li who also had some learning. And because of this learning there was about him a whiff of the musty odour of a departed age. He owned a dozen volumes of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms** annotated by Jin Shengtan,** which he would sit poring over character by character. Not only could he tell you the names of the Five Tiger Generals,** he even knew that Huang Zhong was also known as Hansheng, and Ma Chao as Mengqi. After the Revolution† he had coiled his queue on the top of his head like a Taoist priest, and he often remarked with a sigh that if only Zhao Yun were still alive the empire would not be in such a bad way.††

* A long historical novel by Luo Guanzhong of the fourteenth century based on the official history of the Three Kingdoms Period (A D 220-280)

** A seventeenth-century scholar

*** During the Three Kingdoms Period there were five famous generals in the Kingdom of Shu (A D 221-263), Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, Zhao Yun, Huang Zhong and Ma Chao, who figure in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

† The Revolution of 1911 which overthrew the Qing Dynasty

†† Zhao Yun had rescued his king's son in a battle, and hence was considered by some a hero who could save the empire

Mrs. Sevenpounder's eyesight was good. She had noticed at once that Seventh Master Zhao no longer looked like a Taoist. He had shaved the front of his head and let his queue down. From this she knew beyond a doubt that an emperor had ascended the throne, that queues were required again, and that Sevenpounder must be in great danger. For Seventh Master Zhao did not wear his long glazed cotton gown for nothing. During the last three years he had only worn it twice: once when his enemy Pock-marked Asi fell ill, once when First Master Lu who had wrecked his wineshop died. This was the third time, and it undoubtedly meant that something had happened to rejoice his heart and bode ill for his enemies.

Two years ago, Mrs. Sevenpounder remembered, her husband in a fit of drunkenness had cursed Seventh Master Zhao as a "bastard." Hence she at once realized instinctively the danger her husband was in, and her heart started pounding.

As Seventh Master Zhao passed them, all those sitting eating stood up and, pointing their chopsticks at their rice bowls, invited him to join them. He nodded greetings to them all, urging them to go on with their meal, while he made straight for Sevenpounder's table. Sevenpounder's family got up at once to greet him. Seventh Master Zhao urged them with a smile, "Go on with your meal, please!" At the same time he took a good look at the food on the table.

"That dried rape smells good — have you heard the news?" Seventh Master Zhao was standing behind Sevenpounder opposite Mrs. Sevenpounder.

"There's an emperor again on the Dragon Throne," said Sevenpounder.

Watching Seventh Master's expression, Mrs. Sevenpounder forced a smile. "Now that there's an emperor on the throne, when will there be a general amnesty?" she asked.

“A general amnesty? . . . All in good time” Suddenly Seventh Master spoke more sternly, “But what about Sevenpounder’s queue, eh? That’s the important thing. You know how it was in the time of the Long Hairs: keep your hair and lose your head; keep your head and lose your hair.”⁴

Sevenpounder and his wife had never read any books, so this classical lore was lost on them; but this statement from a learned man like Seventh Master convinced them that the situation must be desperate, past saving. It was as if they had received their death sentence. Their ears buzzed, and they were unable to utter another word.

“Each generation is worse than the last.” Old Mrs. Ninepounder, feeling put out, seized this chance to speak to Seventh Master Zhao. “The Long Hairs nowadays just cut off men’s queues, leaving them looking neither Buddhist nor Taoist. The old Long Hairs never did that. Seventy-nine years I’ve lived and that’s enough. The old Long Hairs wore red satin turbans with one end hanging down, right down to their heels. The prince wore a yellow satin turban with one end hanging down . . . yellow satin. Red satin, yellow satin . . . I’ve lived long enough seventy-nine.”

“What’s to be done?” muttered Mrs. Sevenpounder, standing up. “Such a big family, old and young, and all dependent on him. . . .”

“There’s nothing you can do.” Seventh Master Zhao shook his head. “The punishment for having no queue

* Long Hairs refers to participants of the Taiping Revolution (1851-64). The Qing Dynasty forced men to shave the hair over their temples and wear queues. The Taiping rebels who opposed feudal rule and national oppression refused to do this and let their hair hang to their shoulders, hence the name Long Hairs. “Keep your hair and lose your head” originally referred to the Qing rulers’ decree on shaved temples at the beginning of the dynasty. Lu Xun made Seventh Master Zhao attribute this saying to the Taipings to ridicule his “learning.”

is written down clearly in a book, sentence by sentence
The size of a man's family makes no difference "

When Mrs Sevenpounder heard that it was written in a book, she really gave way to despair. Beside herself with anxiety, she felt a sudden fresh hatred for Sevenpounder. Pointing her chopsticks at the tip of his nose, she cried, "You've made your bed, now you can lie in it! Didn't I say at the time of the revolt. Don't go out with the boat, don't go to town. But go he would. Off he rolled, and in town they cut off his queue, his glossy black queue. Now he looks neither Buddhist nor Taoist. He's made his own bed, he'll have to lie in it. But what right has the wretch to drag us into it? Jail-bird zombie "

Seventh Master Zhao's arrival in the village made all the villagers finish their supper quickly and gather round Sevenpounder's table. Sevenpounder knew how unseemly it was for a prominent citizen to be cursed in public like this by his wife. So he raised his head to retort slowly.

"You've plenty to say today, but at the time "

"Jail-bird zombie! . . ."

Widow Ba Yi had the kindest heart of all the onlookers there. Carrying her two-year-old, born after her husband's death, she was watching the fun at Mrs Sevenpounder's side. Now she felt things had gone too far and hurriedly tried to make peace.

"Never mind, Mrs Sevenpounder. People aren't spirits — who can foretell the future? Didn't you yourself say at the time there was nothing to be ashamed of in having no queue? Besides, no order's come down yet from the big mandarin in the yamen "

Before she had finished, Mrs. Sevenpounder's ears were scarlet. She turned her chopsticks to point at the widow's nose. "Aiya, what a thing to say, Mrs. Ba Yi! I'm still a human being, ain't I — how could I have said anything so ridiculous? Why, at the time I cried for three

whole days. Ask anyone you like. Even this little devil Sixpounder cried . . .” Sixpounder had just finished a big bowl of rice and was holding out her empty bowl clamouring to have it refilled. Mrs. Sevenpounder, being in a temper, smacked her chopsticks down between the twin tufts on the child’s head. “Who wants you to barge in?” she yelled. “Little slut!”

Crack! The empty bowl in Sixpounder’s hand thudded to the ground striking the corner of a brick so that a big piece broke off. Sevenpounder jumped to his feet and picked up the broken bowl. Having fitted the pieces together he examined it, swearing, “Mother’s!” He gave Sixpounder a slap that knocked her over. Sixpounder lay there crying until Old Mrs. Ninepounder took her hand and led her away repeating, “Each generation is worse than the last.”

Now it was Widow Ba Yi’s turn to be angry. “How can you hit out at random like that, Mrs. Sevenpounder!” she shouted.

Seventh Master Zhao had been looking on with a smile, but after Widow Ba Yi’s statement that no order had come down from “the big mandarin in the yamen” he began to lose his temper. Coming right up to the table, he declared, “Hitting out at random doesn’t matter. The Imperial Army will be here any time now. I’d have you know the new Protector is General Zhang,* who’s descended from Zhang Fei of the former State of Yan. With his huge lance eighteen feet long, he dares take on ten thousand men. Who can stand against him?” Raising both hands as if grasping a huge invisible lance, he took

* Zhang Xun, a reactionary officer of the Qing Dynasty. After the 1911 Revolution he kept his queue and ordered his soldiers to retain theirs as well, to show their loyalty to the overthrown dynasty. On July 1, 1917, he and some others tried to restore the deposed emperor Pu Yi to the throne, but after only a fortnight their attempt failed. “There’s an emperor again on the Dragon Throne” refers to this abortive restoration.

a few swift paces towards Widow Ba Yi "Are you a match for him?"

Widow Ba Yi was trembling with rage as she held her child. But the sudden sight of Seventh Master Zhao bearing down on her with glaring eyes, his whole face oozing sweat, gave her the fright of her life. Not daring to say more, she turned and fled. Then Seventh Master Zhao left too. The villagers as they made way for him deplored Widow Ba Yi's interference, while a few men who had cut their queues and started growing them again hid hastily behind the rest for fear Seventh Master should see them. However, without making a careful inspection Seventh Master passed through the group, dived behind the tallow trees and with a parting "Think you're a match for him!" strode on to the one-plank bridge and swaggered off.

The villagers stood there blankly, turning things over in their minds. All felt they were indeed no match for Zhang Fei, hence Sevenpounder's life was as good as lost. And since Sevenpounder had broken the imperial law he should not, they felt, have adopted that lordly air, smoking that long pipe of his, when he told them the news from town. So the thought that he had broken the law gave them a certain pleasure. They would have liked to air their views, but did not know what to say. Buzzing mosquitoes, brushing past their bare arms, zoomed back to swarm beneath the tallow trees; and the villagers too slowly scattered to their homes, shut their doors and went to bed. Grumbling to herself, Mrs Sevenpounder also cleared away the dishes and took in the table and stools, then closed the door and went to bed.

Sevenpounder took the broken bowl inside, then sat on the doorstep smoking. He was so worried, however, that he forgot to inhale, and the light in the pewter bowl of his six-foot speckled bamboo pipe with the ivory mouth-piece gradually turned black. It struck him that matters had reached a most dangerous pass, and he tried to think

of a way out, some plan of action. But his thoughts were in too much of a whirl for him to straighten them out. "Queues, eh, queues? An eighteen-foot lance. Each generation is worse than the last! An emperor is on the Dragon Throne. The broken bowl will have to be taken to town to be riveted. Who's a match for him? It's written in a book. Mother's! . . ."

Early the next day, as usual, Sevenpounder went with the boat to town, coming back to Luzhen towards evening with his six-foot speckled bamboo pipe and the rice bowl. At supper he told Old Mrs. Ninepounder that he had had the bowl riveted in town. Because it was such a large break, sixteen copper clamps had been needed, each costing three cash, making the total cost forty-eight cash.

"Each generation is worse than the last," said Old Mrs. Ninepounder crossly. "I've lived long enough. Three cash for a clamp. Clamps didn't cost so much in the old days. The clamps we had . . . Seventy-nine years I've lived. . ."

After this, though Sevenpounder continued making his daily trip to town, his house seemed to be under a cloud. Most of the villagers kept out of his way, no longer coming to ask him the news from town. Mrs. Sevenpounder was in a bad temper too, constantly addressing him as "Jail-bird."

A fortnight or so later, on his return from town Sevenpounder found his wife in a rare good humour. "Heard anything in town?" she asked him.

"No, nothing."

"Is there an emperor on the Dragon Throne?"

"They didn't say."

"Did no one in Prosperity Tavern say anything?"

"No, nothing."

"I don't believe there's an emperor again. I passed Seventh Master Zhao's wineshop today and he was sitting

there reading, with his queue coiled on top of his head again. He wasn't wearing his long gown either."

" . . . "

"Do you think there's no emperor after all?"

"I think probably not."

Today Sevenpounder is once more respected and well treated by his wife and the villagers. In the summer his family still have their meals on the mud flat outside their door, and everyone greets them with smiles. Old Mrs. Ninepounder celebrated her eightieth birthday some time ago and is as full of complaints, as hale and hearty as ever. Sixpounder's twin tufts of hair have changed into a thick braid. Although recently they started binding her feet, she can still help Mrs. Sevenpounder with odd jobs. She hobbles to and fro on the mud flat carrying the rice bowl with sixteen copper rivets.

October 1920

MY OLD HOME

Braving the bitter cold, I travelled more than two thousand li back to the old home I had left over twenty years ago

It was late winter. As we drew near my former home the day became overcast and a cold wind blew into the cabin of our boat, while all one could see through the chinks in our bamboo awning were a few desolate villages, void of any sign of life, scattered far and near under the sombre yellow sky. I could not help feeling depressed.

Ah! Surely this was not the old home I had been remembering for the past twenty years?

The old home I remembered was not in the least like this. My old home was much better. But if you asked me to recall its peculiar charm or describe its beauties, I had no clear impression, no words to describe it. And now it seemed this was all there was to it. Then I rationalized the matter to myself, saying: Home was always like this, and although it has not improved, still it is not so depressing as I imagine; it is only my mood that has changed, because I am coming back to the country this time with no illusions.

This time I had come with the sole object of saying goodbye. The old house our clan had lived in for so many years had already been sold to another family, and was to change hands before the end of the year. I had to hurry there before New Year's Day to say goodbye for ever to the familiar old house, and to move my family

to another place where I was working, far from my old home town

At dawn on the second day I reached the gateway of my home. Broken stems of withered grass on the roof, trembling in the wind, made very clear the reason why this old house could not avoid changing hands. Several branches of our clan had probably already moved away, so it was unusually quiet. By the time I reached the house my mother was already at the door to welcome me, and my eight-year-old nephew, Hong'er, rushed out after her.

Though Mother was delighted, she was also trying to hide a certain feeling of sadness. She told me to sit down and rest and have some tea, letting the removal wait for the time being. Hong'er, who had never seen me before, stood watching me at a distance.

But finally we had to talk about the removal. I said that rooms had already been rented elsewhere, and I had bought a little furniture; in addition it would be necessary to sell all the furniture in the house in order to buy more things. Mother agreed, saying that the luggage was nearly all packed, and about half the furniture that could not be easily moved had already been sold. Only it was difficult to get people to pay up.

"You can rest for a day or two, and call on our relatives, and then we can go," said Mother.

"Yes."

"Then there is Runtu. Each time he comes here he always asks after you, and wants very much to see you again. I told him the probable date of your return home, and he may be coming any time."

At this point a strange picture suddenly flashed into my mind: a golden moon suspended in a deep blue sky and beneath it the seashore, planted as far as the eye could see with jade-green watermelons, while in their midst a boy of eleven or twelve, wearing a silver necklet and grasping a steel pitchfork in his hand, was thrusting

with all his might at a *zha* which dodged the blow and escaped through his legs

This boy was Runtu. When I first met him he was little more than ten — that was thirty years ago, and at that time my father was still alive and the family well off, so I was really a spoilt child. That year it was our family's turn to take charge of a big ancestral sacrifice, which came round only once in thirty years, and hence was an important one. In the first month the ancestral images were presented and offerings made, and since the sacrificial vessels were very fine and there was such a crowd of worshippers, it was necessary to guard against theft. Our family had only one part-time servant. (In our district we divide servants into three classes: those who work all the year for one family are called full-timers, those who are hired by the day are called dailies; and those who farm their own land and only work for one family at New Year, during festivals or when rents are being collected are called part-timers.) And since there was so much to be done, he told my father that he would send for his son Runtu to look after the sacrificial vessels.

When my father gave his consent I was overjoyed, because I had long since heard of Runtu and knew that he was about my own age, born in the intercalary month,* and when his horoscope was told it was found that of the five elements that of earth was lacking, so his father called him Runtu (Intercalary Earth). He could set traps and catch small birds.

I looked forward every day to New Year, for New Year would bring Runtu. At last the end of the year came, and one day Mother told me that Runtu had come, and I flew to see him. He was standing in the kitchen. He had a round, crimson face and wore a small felt cap on his head and a gleaming silver necklet on his neck, show-

* The Chinese lunar calendar reckons 360 days to a year, and each month comprises 29 or 30 days, never 31. Hence every few years a 13th, or intercalary, month is inserted in the calendar.

ing that his father doted on him and, fearing he might die, had made a pledge with the gods and buddhas, using the necklet as a talisman. He was very shy, and I was the only person he was not afraid of. When there was no one else there, he would talk with me, so in a few hours we were fast friends.

I don't know what we talked of then, but I remember that Runtu was in high spirits, saying that since he had come to town he had seen many new things.

The next day I wanted him to catch birds.

"Can't be done," he said. "It's only possible after a heavy snowfall. On our sands, after it snows, I sweep clear a patch of ground, prop up a big threshing basket with a short stick, and scatter husks of grain beneath; then when I see the birds coming to eat, from a distance I give a tug to the string tied to the stick, and the birds are caught in the basket. There are all kinds. wild pheasants, woodcocks, woodpigeons, bluebacks . . ."

Accordingly I looked forward very eagerly to snow.

"Just now it is too cold," said Runtu another time, "but you must come to our place in summer. In the daytime we will go to the seashore to look for shells, there are green ones and red ones, besides 'scare-devil' shells and 'buddha's hands.' In the evening when Dad and I go to see to the watermelons, you shall come too."

"Is it to look out for thieves?"

"No. If passers-by are thirsty and pick a watermelon, folk down our way don't consider it as stealing. What we have to look out for are badgers, hedgehogs and *zha*. When you hear a crunching sound under the moonlight, made by the *zha* biting the melons, then you take your pitchfork and creep stealthily over. . . ."

I had no idea then what this thing called *zha* was — and I am not much clearer now, for that matter — but somehow I felt it was something like a small dog, and very fierce.

"Don't they bite people?"

"You have a pitchfork. You go across, and when you see it you strike. It's a very cunning creature and will rush towards you and get away between your legs. Its fur is as slippery as oil. . . ."

I had never known that all these strange things existed. at the seashore were shells all the colours of the rainbow, watermelons had such a dangerous history, yet all I had known of them before was that they were sold in the greengrocer's

"On our shore, when the tide comes in, there are lots of jumping fish, each with two legs like a frog. . . ."

Runtu's mind was a treasure-house of such strange lore, all of it outside the ken of my former friends. They were ignorant of all these things and, while Runtu lived by the sea, they like me could see only the four corners of the sky above the high courtyard wall

Unfortunately, a month after New Year Runtu had to go home. I burst into tears and he took refuge in the kitchen, crying and refusing to come out, until finally he was carried off by his father. Later he sent me by his father a packet of shells and a few very beautiful feathers, and I sent him presents once or twice, but we never saw each other again.

Now that my mother mentioned him, this childhood memory sprang into life like a flash of lightning, and I seemed to see my beautiful old home. So I answered:

"Fine! And he — how is he?"

"He? . . . He's not at all well off either," said Mother. And then, looking out of the door: "Here come those people again. They say they want to buy our furniture; but actually they just want to see what they can pick up. I must go and watch them."

Mother stood up and went out. Several women's voices could be heard outside. I called Hong'er to me and started talking to him, asking him whether he could write, and whether he was glad to be leaving.

"Shall we be going by train?"

“Yes, we shall go by train ”

“And boat?”

“We shall take a boat first ”

“Oh! Like this! With such a long moustache!” a strange shrill voice suddenly rang out

I looked up with a start, and saw a woman of about fifty with prominent cheekbones and thin lips standing in front of me, her hands on her hips, not wearing a skirt but with trousered legs apart, just like the compass in a box of geometrical instruments.

I was flabbergasted

“Don’t you know me? And I have held you in my arms!”

I felt even more flabbergasted. Fortunately my mother came in just then and said, “He has been away so long, you must excuse him for forgetting ”

“You should remember,” she said to me, “this is Mrs. Yang from across the road . . . She has a beancurd shop ”

Then, to be sure, I remembered. When I was a child there was a Mrs. Yang who used to sit nearly all day long in the beancurd shop across the road, and everybody used to call her Beancurd Beauty. But she used to powder herself, and her cheekbones were not so prominent then nor her lips so thin; moreover she remained seated all the time, so that I had never noticed this resemblance to a compass. In those days people said that, thanks to her, that beancurd shop did very good business. But, probably on account of my age, she had made no impression on me, so that later I forgot her entirely. However, the Compass was extremely indignant and looked at me most contemptuously, just as one might look at a Frenchman who had never heard of Napoleon or an American who had never heard of Washington, and smiling sarcastically she said:

“You had forgotten? But naturally I must be beneath your notice. . . .”

"Certainly not . . . I . . ." I answered nervously, getting to my feet

"Then you listen to me, Master Xun. You have grown rich, and they are too heavy to move, so you can't possibly want these old pieces of furniture any more. You had better let me take them away. Poor people like us can do with them."

"I haven't grown rich. I must sell these in order to buy . . ."

"Oh, come now, you have been made the intendant of a circuit, and do you still say you're not rich? You have three concubines now, and whenever you go out it is in a big sedan-chair with eight bearers, and do you still say you're not rich? Hah! You can't hide anything from me."

Knowing there was nothing I could say, I remained silent . . .

"Come now, really, the more money people have the more miserly they get, and the more miserly they are the more money they get," said the Compass, turning indignantly away and walking slowly off, casually picking up a pair of Mother's gloves and stuffing them into her pocket as she went out.

After this a number of relatives in the neighbourhood came to call. In the intervals between entertaining them I did some packing, and so three or four days passed.

One very cold afternoon, I was sitting drinking tea after lunch when I was aware of someone coming in, and turned my head to see who it was. At the first glance I gave an involuntary start, and hastily stood up and went over to welcome him.

The newcomer was Runtu. But although I knew at a glance that this was Runtu, it was not the Runtu I remembered. He had grown to twice his former size. His round face, crimson before, had become sallow and acquired deep lines and wrinkles, his eyes too had become

like his father's with rims swollen and red, a feature common to most of the peasants who work by the sea and are exposed all day to the wind from the ocean. He wore a shabby felt cap and just one very thin padded jacket, with the result that he was shivering from head to foot. He was carrying a paper package and a long pipe, nor was his hand the plump red hand I remembered, but coarse and clumsy and chapped, like the bark of a pine tree.

Delighted as I was, I did not know how to express myself, and could only say:

"Oh! Runtu — so it's you? . . ."

After this there were so many things I wanted to talk about, they should have poured out like a string of beads: woodcocks, jumping fish, shells, *zha* . . . But I was tongue-tied, unable to put all I was thinking into words.

He stood there, mixed joy and sadness showing on his face. His lips moved, but not a sound did he utter. Finally, assuming a respectful attitude, he said clearly:

"Master! . . ."

I felt a shiver run through me; for I knew then what a lamentably thick wall had grown up between us. Yet I could not say anything.

He turned his head to call:

"Shuisheng, bow to the master." Then he pulled forward a boy who had been hiding behind his back, and this was just the Runtu of twenty years before, only a little paler and thinner, and he had no silver necklet on his neck.

"This is my fifth," he said. "He has not seen any society, so he is shy and awkward."

Mother came downstairs with Hong'er, probably after hearing our voices.

"I got the letter some time ago, madam," said Runtu. "I was really so pleased to know that the master was coming back. . . ."

"Now, why ever are you so polite? Weren't you playmates together in the past?" said Mother gaily. "You had better still call him Brother Xun as before"

"Oh, you are really too. . . . What bad manners that would be I was a child then and didn't understand." As he was speaking Runtu motioned Shuisheng to come and bow, but the child was shy, and only stood stock-still behind his father

"So he is Shuisheng? Your fifth?" asked Mother. "We are all strangers, you can't blame him for feeling shy. Hong'er had better take him out to play"

When Hong'er heard this he went over to Shuisheng, and Shuisheng went out with him, entirely at his ease. Mother asked Runtu to sit down, and after a little hesitation he did so, then leaning his long pipe against the table he handed over the paper package, saying:

"In winter there is nothing worth bringing; but these few beans we dried ourselves there, if you will excuse the liberty, sir."

When I asked him how things were with him, he just shook his head.

"In a very bad way Even my sixth can do a little work, but still we haven't enough to eat . . . and then there is no security . . . all sorts of people want money, and there is no fixed rule . . . and the harvests are bad. You grow things, and when you take them to sell you always have to pay several taxes and lose money, while if you don't try to sell, the things may go bad. . . "

He kept shaking his head; yet, although his face was lined with wrinkles, not one of them moved, just as if he were a stone statue. No doubt he felt intensely bitter, but could not express himself. After a pause he took up his pipe and began to smoke in silence.

From her chat with him, Mother learned that he was busy at home and had to go back the next day; and since he had had no lunch, she told him to go to the kitchen and fry some rice for himself.

After he had gone out, Mother and I both shook our heads over his hard life: many children, famines, taxes, soldiers, bandits, officials and landed gentry, all had squeezed him as dry as a mummy. Mother said that we should offer him all the things we were not going to take away, letting him choose for himself.

That afternoon he picked out a number of things: two long tables, four chairs, an incense-burner and candlesticks, and one balance. He also asked for all the ashes from the stove (in our part we cook over straw, and the ashes can be used to fertilize sandy soil), saying that when we left he would come to take them away by boat.

That night we talked again, but not of anything serious, and the next morning he went away with Shuisheng.

After another nine days it was time for us to leave. Runtu came in the morning. Shuisheng had not come with him — he had just brought a little girl of five to watch the boat. We were very busy all day, and had no time to talk. We also had quite a number of visitors, some to see us off, some to fetch things, and some to do both. It was nearly evening when we got on the boat, and by that time everything in the house, however old or shabby, large or small, fine or coarse, had been cleared away.

As we set off, the green mountains on either side of the river became deep blue in the dusk, receding towards the stern of the boat.

Hong'er and I, leaning against the cabin window, were looking out together at the indistinct scene outside, when suddenly he asked.

“Uncle, when shall we go back?”

“Go back? Do you mean that before you've left you want to go back?”

“Well, Shuisheng has invited me to his home. . .” He opened wide his black eyes in anxious thought.

Mother and I both felt rather sad, and so Runtu's name came up again. Mother said that ever since our family

started packing up, Mrs Yang from the beancurd shop had come over every day, and the day before in the ash-heap she had unearthed a dozen bowls and plates, which after some discussion she insisted must have been buried there by Runtu, so that when he came to remove the ashes he could take them home at the same time. After making this discovery Mrs Yang was very pleased with herself, and flew off taking the dog-teaser with her. (The dog-teaser is used by poultry keepers in our part. It is a wooden cage inside which food is put, so that hens can stretch their necks in to eat but dogs can only look on furiously.) And it was a marvel, considering the size of her feet, how fast she could run.

I was leaving the old house farther and farther behind, while the hills and rivers of my old home were also receding gradually ever farther in the distance. But I felt no regret. I only felt that all round me was an invisible high wall, cutting me off from my fellows, and this depressed me thoroughly. The vision of that small hero with the silver necklet among the watermelons had formerly been as clear as day, but now it had suddenly blurred, adding to my depression.

Mother and Hong'er fell asleep

I lay down, listening to the water rippling beneath the boat, and knew that I was going my way. I thought, although there is such a barrier between Runtu and myself, our children still have much in common, for wasn't Hong'er thinking of Shuisheng just now? I hope they will not be like us, that they will not allow a barrier to grow up between them. But again I would not like them, because they want to be one, to have a treadmill existence like mine, nor to suffer like Runtu until they become stupefied, nor yet, like others, to devote all their energies to dissipation. They should have a new life, a life we have never experienced.

The access of hope made me suddenly afraid. When Runtu had asked for the incense burner and candlesticks

I had laughed up my sleeve at him, to think that he was still worshipping idols and would never put them out of his mind. Yet what I now called hope was no more than an idol I had created myself. The only difference was that what he desired was close at hand, while what I desired was less easily realized.

As I dozed, a stretch of jade-green seashore spread itself before my eyes, and above a round golden moon hung from a deep blue sky. I thought hope cannot be said to exist, nor can it be said not to exist. It is just like roads across the earth. For actually the earth had no roads to begin with, but when many men pass one way, a road is made.

January 1921

THE TRUE STORY OF AH Q

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

For several years now I have been meaning to write the true story of Ah Q. But while wanting to write I was in some trepidation too, which goes to show that I am not one of those who achieve glory by writing; for an immortal pen has always been required to record the deeds of an immortal man, the man becoming known to posterity through the writing and the writing known to posterity through the man — until finally it is not clear who is making whom known. But in the end, as though possessed by some fiend, I always came back to the idea of writing the story of Ah Q.

And yet no sooner had I taken up my pen than I became conscious of tremendous difficulties in writing this far-from-immortal work. The first was the question of what to call it. Confucius said, "If the name is not correct, the words will not ring true"; and this axiom should be most scrupulously observed. There are many types of biography. official biographies, autobiographies, unauthorized biographies, legends, supplementary biographies, family histories, sketches . . . but unfortunately none of these suited my purpose. "Official biography"? This account will obviously not be included with those of many eminent people in some authentic history. "Autobiography"? But I am obviously not Ah Q. If I were

to call this an "unauthorized biography," then where is his "authenticated biography"? The use of "legend" is impossible because Ah Q was no legendary figure "Supplementary biography"? But no president has ever ordered the National Historical Institute to write a "standard life" of Ah Q. It is true that although there are no "lives of gamblers" in authentic English history, the well-known author Conan Doyle nevertheless wrote *Rodney Stone*,* but while this is permissible for a well-known author it is not permissible for such as I. Then there is "family history", but I do not know whether I belong to the same family as Ah Q or not, nor have his children or grandchildren ever entrusted me with such a task. If I were to use "sketch," it might be objected that Ah Q has no "complete account" In short, this is really a "life," but since I write in vulgar vein using the language of hucksters and pedlars, I dare not presume to give it so high-sounding a title. So I will take as my title the last two words of a stock phrase of the novelists, who are not reckoned among the Three Cults and Nine Schools.** "Enough of this digression, and back to the *true story*"; and if this is reminiscent of the *True Story of Calligraphy**** of the ancients, it cannot be helped.

The second difficulty confronting me was that a biography of this type should start off something like this: "So-and-so, whose other name was so-and-so, was a native of such-and-such a place"; but I don't really know what Ah Q's surname was. Once, he seemed to be named Zhao, but the next day there was some confusion about the matter again. This was after Mr. Zhao's son had passed the county examination and, to the sound of gongs,

* In Chinese this title was translated as *Supplementary Biographies of the Gamblers*

** The Three Cults were Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. The Nine Schools included the Confucian, Taoist, Legalist, Mohist and other schools

*** A book by Feng Wu of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

his success was announced in the village. Ah Q, who had just drunk two bowls of yellow wine, began to prance about declaring that this reflected credit on him too, since he belonged to the same clan as Mr Zhao and by an exact reckoning was three generations senior to the successful candidate. At the time several bystanders even began to stand slightly in awe of Ah Q. But the next day the bailiff summoned him to Mr Zhao's house. When the old gentleman set eyes on him his face turned crimson with fury and he roared:

“Ah Q, you miserable wretch! Did you say I belonged to the same clan as you?”

Ah Q made no reply.

The more he looked at him the angrier Mr Zhao became. Advancing menacingly a few steps he said, “How dare you talk such nonsense! How could I have such a relative as you? Is your surname Zhao?”

Ah Q made no reply and was planning a retreat, when Mr. Zhao darted forward and gave him a slap on the face.

“How could *you* be named Zhao? Are you worthy of the name Zhao?”

Ah Q made no attempt to defend his right to the name Zhao but rubbing his left cheek went out with the bailiff from whom, once outside, he had to listen to another torrent of abuse. He then by way of atonement paid him two hundred cash. All who heard this said Ah Q was a great fool to ask for a beating like that. Even if his surname *were* Zhao — which wasn't likely — he should have known better than to boast like that when there was a Mr. Zhao living in the village. After this no further mention was made of Ah Q's ancestry, thus I still have no idea what his surname really was.

The third difficulty I encountered in writing this work was that I don't know how Ah Q's personal name should be written either. During his lifetime everybody called him Ah Gui, but after his death not a soul mentioned Ah Gui again; for he was obviously not one of those

whose name is "preserved on bamboo tablets and silk."* If there is any question of preserving his name, this essay must be the first attempt at doing so. Hence I am confronted with this difficulty at the outset. I have given the question careful thought. Ah Gui — would that be the "Gui" meaning fragrant osmanthus or the "Gui" meaning nobility? If his other name had been Moon Pavilion, or if he had celebrated his birthday in the month of the Moon Festival, then it would certainly be the "Gui" for fragrant osmanthus.** But since he had no other name — or if he had, no one knew it — and since he never sent out invitations on his birthday to secure complimentary verses, it would be arbitrary to write Ah Gui (fragrant osmanthus). Again, if he had had an elder or younger brother called Ah Fu (prosperity), then he would certainly be called Ah Gui (nobility). But he was all on his own, thus there is no justification for writing Ah Gui (nobility). All the other, unusual characters with the sound *gui* are even less suitable. I once put this question to Mr. Zhao's son, the successful county candidate, but even such a learned man as he was baffled by it. According to him, however, the reason why this name could not be traced was that Chen Duxiu*** had brought out the magazine *New Youth* advocating the use of the Western alphabet, hence the national culture was going to the dogs. As a last resort, I asked someone from my district to go and look up the legal documents recording Ah Q's case, but after eight months he sent me a letter saying that there was no name anything like Ah Gui in those records. Although uncertain whether this was the

* A phrase used before paper was invented when bamboo and silk served as writing material in China

** The fragrant osmanthus blooms in the month of the Moon Festival. And according to Chinese folklore, the shadow on the moon is an osmanthus tree.

*** Chen Duxiu (1880-1942) was then chief editor of *New Youth*, the magazine which gave the lead in the movement for a new culture

truth or whether my friend had simply done nothing, after failing to trace the name this way I could think of no other means of finding it. Since I am afraid the new system of phonetics has not yet come into common use, there is nothing for it but to use the Western alphabet, writing the name according to the English spelling as Ah Gui and abbreviating it to Ah Q. This approximates to blindly following *New Youth*, and I am thoroughly ashamed of myself; but since even such a learned man as Mr. Zhao's son could not solve my problem, what else can I do?

My fourth difficulty was with Ah Q's place of origin. If his surname were Zhao, then according to the old custom which still prevails of classifying people by their district, one might look up the commentary in *The Hundred Surnames** and find "Native of Tianshui in Gansu." But unfortunately this surname is open to question, with the result that Ah Q's place of origin must also remain uncertain. Although he lived for the most part in Weizhuang, he often stayed in other places, so that it would be wrong to call him a native of Weizhuang. It would, in fact, amount to a distortion of history.

The only thing that consoles me is the fact that the character "Ah" is absolutely correct. This is definitely not the result of false analogy, and is well able to stand the test of scholarly criticism. As for the other problems, it is not for such unlearned people as myself to solve them, and I can only hope that disciples of Dr. Hu Shi, who has such "a passion for history and research," may be able in future to throw new light on them. I am afraid, however, that by that time my "True Story of Ah Q" will have long since passed into oblivion.

The foregoing may be considered as an introduction.

* A school primer in which surnames were written into verse.

CHAPTER 2

A Brief Account of Ah Q's Victories

In addition to the uncertainty regarding Ah Q's surname, personal name, and place of origin, there is even some uncertainty regarding his "background." This is because the people of Weizhuang only made use of his services or treated him as a laughing-stock, without ever paying the slightest attention to his "background." Ah Q himself remained silent on this subject, except that when quarrelling with someone he might glare at him and say, "We used to be much better off than you! Who do you think you are?"

Ah Q had no family but lived in the Tutelary God's Temple at Weizhuang. He had no regular work either, being simply an odd-job man for others: when there was wheat to be cut he would cut it, when there was rice to be hulled he would hull it, when there was a boat to be punted he would punt it. If the work lasted for any length of time he might stay in the house of his temporary employer, but as soon as it was finished he would leave. Thus whenever people had work to be done they would remember Ah Q, but what they remembered was his service and not his "background." By the time the job was done even Ah Q himself was forgotten, to say nothing of his "background." Once indeed an old man remarked, "What a worker Ah Q is!" Ah Q, bare-backed scrawny sluggard, was standing before him at the time, and others could not tell whether the remark was serious or derisive, but Ah Q was overjoyed.

Ah Q, again, had a very high opinion of himself. He looked down on all the inhabitants of Weizhuang, thinking even the two young "scholars" not worth a smile, though most young scholars were likely to pass the offi-

cial examinations Mr. Zhao and Mr. Qian were held in great respect by the villagers, for in addition to being rich they were both the fathers of young scholars. Ah Q alone showed them no exceptional deference, thinking to himself, "My sons may be much greater."

Moreover, after Ah Q had been to town several times he naturally became even more conceited, although at the same time he had the greatest contempt for townspeople. For instance, a bench made of a wooden plank three feet by three inches the Weizhuang villagers called a "long bench." Ah Q called it a "long bench" too; but the townspeople called it a "straight bench," and he thought, "This is wrong. Ridiculous!" Again, when they fried large-headed fish in oil the Weizhuang villagers all added shallots sliced half an inch thick, whereas the townspeople added finely shredded shallots, and he thought, "This is wrong too. Ridiculous!" But the Weizhuang villagers were really ignorant rustics who had never seen fish fried in town.

Ah Q who "used to be much better off," who was a man of the world and a "worker," would have been almost the perfect man had it not been for a few unfortunate physical blemishes. The most annoying were some patches on his scalp where at some uncertain date shiny ringworm scars had appeared. Although these were on his own head, apparently Ah Q did not consider them as altogether honourable, for he refrained from using the word "ringworm" or any words that sounded anything like it. Later he improved on this, making "bright" and "light" forbidden words, while later still even "lamp" and "candle" were taboo. Whenever this taboo was disregarded, whether intentionally or not, Ah Q would fly into a rage, his ringworm scars turning scarlet. He would look over the offender, and if it were someone weak in repartee he would curse him, while if it were a poor fighter he would hit him. Yet, curiously enough, it was

usually Ah Q who was worsted in these encounters, until finally he adopted new tactics, contenting himself in general with a furious glare.

It so happened, however, that after Ah Q had taken to using this furious glare, the idlers in Weizhuang grew even more fond of making jokes at his expense. As soon as they saw him they would pretend to give a start and say:

“Look! It’s lighting up.”

Ah Q rising to the bait as usual would glare in fury

“So there is a paraffin lamp here,” they would continue, unafraid

Ah Q could do nothing but rack his brains for some retort. “You don’t even deserve. . . ” At this juncture it seemed as if the bald patches on his scalp were noble and honourable, not just ordinary ringworm scars. However, as we said above, Ah Q was a man of the world—he knew at once that he had nearly broken the “taboo” and refrained from saying any more.

If the idlers were still not satisfied but continued to pester him, they would in the end come to blows. Then only after Ah Q had to all appearances been defeated, had his brownish queue pulled and his head bumped against the wall four or five times, would the idlers walk away, satisfied at having won. And Ah Q would stand there for a second thinking to himself, “It’s as if I were beaten by my son. What the world is coming to nowadays! . . .” Thereupon he too would walk away, satisfied at having won.

Whatever Ah Q thought he was sure to tell people later; thus almost all who made fun of Ah Q knew that he had this means of winning a psychological victory. So after this anyone who pulled or twisted his brown queue would forestall him by saying, “Ah Q, this is not a son beating his father, it is a man beating a beast. Let’s hear you say it: A man beating a beast!”

Then Ah Q, clutching at the root of his queue, his head on one side, would say, "Beating an insect — how about that? I am an insect — now will you let me go?"

But although he was an insect the idlers would not let him go until they had knocked his head five or six times against something nearby, according to their custom, after which they would walk away satisfied that they had won, confident that this time Ah Q was done for. In less than ten seconds, however, Ah Q would walk away also satisfied that he had won, thinking that he was the "Number One self-belittler," and that after subtracting "self-belittler" what remained was "Number One." Was not the highest successful candidate in the official examination also "Number One"? "And who do you think *you* are?"

After employing such cunning devices to get even with his enemies, Ah Q would make his way cheerfully to the tavern to drink a few bowls of wine, joke with the others again, quarrel with them again, come off victorious again, and return cheerfully to the Tutelary God's Temple, there to fall asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow. If he had money he would gamble. A group of men would squat on the ground, Ah Q sandwiched in their midst, his face streaming with sweat; and his voice would shout the loudest: "Four hundred on the Green Dragon!"

"Hey — open there!"

The stake-holder, his face streaming with sweat too, would open the box and chant: "Heavenly Gate! — Nothing for the Corner! . . . No stakes on Popularity Passage! Pass over Ah Q's coppers!"

"The Passage — one hundred — one hundred and fifty."

To the tune of this chanting, Ah Q's money would gradually vanish into the pockets of other sweating players. Finally he would be forced to squeeze his way out of the crowd and watch from the back, taking a vicarious

interest in the game until it broke up, when he would return reluctantly to the Tutelary God's Temple. The next day he would go to work with swollen eyes.

However, the truth of the proverb "Misfortune may prove a blessing in disguise" was shown when Ah Q was unfortunate enough to win and almost suffered defeat in the end.

This was the evening of the Festival of the Gods in Weizhuang. According to custom there was an opera; and close to the stage, also according to custom, were numerous gambling tables. The drums and gongs of the opera sounded miles away to Ah Q who had ears only for the stake-holder's chant. He staked successfully again and again, his coppers turning into silver coins, his silver coins into dollars, and his dollars mounting up. In his excitement he cried out, "Two dollars on Heavenly Gate!"

He never knew who started the fight, nor for what reason. Curses, blows and footsteps formed a confused medley of sound in his head, and by the time he clambered to his feet the gambling tables had vanished and so had the gamblers. Several parts of his body seemed to be aching as if he had been kicked and knocked about, while a number of people were looking at him in astonishment. Feeling as if something were amiss he walked back to the Tutelary God's Temple, and by the time he had calmed down again he realized that his pile of dollars had gone. Since most of the people who ran gambling tables at the Festival were not natives of Weizhuang, where could he look for the culprits?

So white and glittering a pile of silver! All of it his . . . but now it had disappeared. Even to consider this tantamount to being robbed by his son did not comfort him. To consider himself as an insect did not comfort him either. This time he really tasted something of the bitterness of defeat.

But presently he changed defeat into victory. Raising his right hand he slapped his own face hard, twice, so

that it tingled with pain. After this slapping his heart felt lighter, for it seemed as if the one who had given the slap was himself, the one slapped some other self, and soon it was just as if he had beaten someone else — in spite of the fact that his face was still tingling. He lay down satisfied that he had gained the victory

Soon he was asleep

CHAPTER 3

A Further Account of Ah Q's Victories

Although Ah Q was always gaining victories, it was only after he was favoured with a slap in the face by Mr Zhao that he became famous

After paying the bailiff two hundred cash he lay down angrily. Then he said to himself, "What is the world coming to nowadays, with sons beating their fathers!" And then the thought of the prestige of Mr Zhao, who was now his son, gradually raised his spirits. He scrambled up and made his way to the tavern singing *The Young Widow at Her Husband's Grave** At that time he did feel that Mr. Zhao was a cut above most people

After this incident, strange to relate, it was true that everybody seemed to pay him unusual respect. He probably attributed this to the fact that he was Mr. Zhao's father, but actually such was not the case. In Weizhuang, as a rule, if the seventh child hit the eighth child or Li So-and-so hit Zhang So-and-so, it was not taken seriously. A beating had to be connected with some important personage like Mr. Zhao before the villagers thought it worth talking about. But once they thought it worth talking about, since the beater was famous the one beaten

* A local opera popular in Shaoxing

enjoyed some of his reflected fame. As for the fault being Ah Q's, that was naturally taken for granted, the reason being that Mr. Zhao could do no wrong. But if Ah Q were wrong, why did everybody seem to treat him with unusual respect? This is difficult to explain. We may put forward the hypothesis that it was because Ah Q had said he belonged to the same family as Mr. Zhao; thus, although he had been beaten, people were still afraid there might be some truth in his assertion and therefore thought it safer to treat him more respectfully. Or, alternatively, it may have been like the case of the sacrificial beef in the Confucian temple: although the beef was in the same category as the pork and mutton, being of animal origin just as they were, later Confucians did not dare touch it since the sage had enjoyed it.

After this Ah Q prospered for several years.

One spring, when he was walking along in a state of happy intoxication, he saw Whiskers Wang sitting stripped to the waist in the sunlight at the foot of a wall, catching lice; and at this sight his own body began to itch. Since Whiskers Wang was scabby and bewhiskered, everybody called him "Ringworm Whiskers Wang." Although Ah Q omitted the word "Ringworm," he had the greatest contempt for the man. To Ah Q, while scabs were nothing to take exception to, such hairy cheeks were really too outlandish and could excite nothing but scorn. So Ah Q sat down by his side. Had it been any other idler, Ah Q would never have dared sit down so casually, but what had he to fear by the side of Whiskers Wang? In fact, his willingness to sit down was doing the fellow an honour.

Ah Q took off his tattered lined jacket and turned it inside out; but either because he had washed it recently or because he was too clumsy, a long search yielded only three or four lice. He saw that Whiskers Wang, on the other hand, was catching first one and then another in

swift succession, cracking them between his teeth with a popping sound.

Ah Q felt first disappointed, then resentful the despicable Whiskers Wang had so many, he himself so few — what a great loss of face! He longed to find one or two big ones, but there were none, and when at last he managed to catch a middle-sized one, stuffed it fiercely between his thick lips and bit hard, the resultant pop was again inferior to the noise made by Whiskers Wang

All Ah Q's ringworm patches turned scarlet. He flung his jacket on the ground, spat, and swore, "Hairy worm!"

"Mangy dog, who are you calling names?" Whiskers Wang looked up contemptuously.

Although the relative respect accorded him in recent years had increased Ah Q's pride, he was still rather timid when confronted by those loafers accustomed to fighting. But today he was feeling exceptionally pugnacious. How dare a hairy-cheeked creature like this insult him?

"If the cap fits wear it," he retorted, standing up and putting his hands on his hips.

"Are your bones itching?" demanded Whiskers Wang, standing up too and draping his jacket over his shoulders

Thinking that the fellow meant to run away, Ah Q lunged forward to punch him. But before his fist reached the target, his opponent seized him and gave him a tug which sent him staggering. Then Whiskers Wang seized his queue and started dragging him towards the wall to knock his head in the time-honoured manner

"'A gentleman uses his tongue but not his hands!'" protested Ah Q, his head on one side

Apparently Whiskers Wang was no gentleman, for without paying the slightest attention to what Ah Q said he knocked his head against the wall five times in succession, then with a great push shoved him two yards away, after which he walked off in triumph.

As far as Ah Q could remember, this was the first humiliation of his life, because he had always scoffed at Whiskers Wang on account of his ugly bewhiskered cheeks, but had never been scoffed at, much less beaten by him. And now, contrary to all expectations, Whiskers Wang had beaten him. Could it really be true, as they said in the market-place "The Emperor has abolished the official examinations, so that scholars who have passed them are no longer in demand"? This must have undermined the Zhao family's prestige. Was this why people were treating him contemptuously too?

Ah Q stood there irresolutely.

From the distance approached another of Ah Q's enemies. This was Mr. Qian's eldest son whom Ah Q thoroughly despised. After studying in a foreign-style school in the city, it seemed he had gone to Japan. When he came home half a year later his legs were straight* and his queue had disappeared. His mother wept bitterly a dozen times, and his wife tried three times to jump into the well. Later his mother told everyone, "His queue was cut off by some scoundrel when he was drunk. By rights he ought to be a big official, but now he'll have to wait till it's grown again." Ah Q, however, did not believe this, and insisted on calling him a "Bogus Foreign Devil" or "Traitor in Foreign Pay." At sight of him he would start cursing under his breath.

What Ah Q despised and detested most in him was his false queue. When it came to having a false queue, a man could scarcely be considered human; and the fact that his wife had not attempted to jump into the well a fourth time showed that she was not a good woman either.

Now this "Bogus Foreign Devil" was approaching.

"Baldhead! Ass . . ." In the past Ah Q had just

* The stiff-legged stride of many foreigners led some Chinese to believe that their knees had no joints.

cursed under his breath, inaudibly, but today, because he was in a rage and itching for revenge, the words slipped out involuntarily

Unfortunately this Baldhead was carrying a shiny brown cane which looked to Ah Q like the "staff carried by a mourner" With great strides he bore down on Ah Q who, guessing at once that a beating was in the offing, hastily flexed his muscles and hunched his shoulders in anticipation. Sure enough, *Thwack!* something struck him on the head

"I meant him!" explained Ah Q, pointing to a nearby child.

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!

As far as Ah Q could remember, this was the second humiliation of his life. Fortunately after the thwacking stopped it seemed to him that the matter was closed, and he even felt somewhat relieved. Moreover, the precious "ability to forget" handed down by his ancestors stood him in good stead. He walked slowly away and by the time he approached the tavern door he was quite cheerful again.

Just then, however, a little nun from the Convent of Quiet Self-Improvement came walking towards him. The sight of a nun always made Ah Q swear; how much more so, then, after these humiliations? When he recalled what had happened, his anger flared up again.

"I couldn't think what made my luck so bad today — so it's meeting you that did it!" he fumed to himself.

Going towards her he spat noisily. "Ugh! . . . Pah!"

The little nun paid not the least attention but walked on with lowered head. Ah Q stepped up to her and shot out a hand to rub her newly shaved scalp, then with a guffaw cried, "Baldhead! Go back quick, your monk's waiting for you. . . ."

"Who are you pawing?. . ." demanded the nun, flushing all over her face as she quickened her pace.

The men in the tavern roared with laughter. This appreciation of his feat added to Ah Q's elation.

"If the monk paws you, why can't I?" He pinched her cheek.

Again the men in the tavern roared with laughter. More bucked than ever, and eager to please his admirers, Ah Q pinched her hard again before letting her go.

This encounter had made him forget Whiskers Wang and the Bogus Foreign Devil, as if all the day's bad luck had been avenged. And strange to relate, even more completely relaxed than after the thwacking, he felt as light as if he were walking on air.

"Ah, Q, may you die sonless!" wailed the little nun already some distance away.

Ah Q roared with delighted laughter.

The men in the tavern joined in, with only a shade less gusto in their laughter.

CHAPTER 4

The Tragedy of Love

There are said to be some victors who take no pleasure in a victory unless their opponents are as fierce as tigers or eagles: in the case of foes as timid as sheep or chickens they find their triumph empty. There are other victors who, having carried all before them, with the enemy slain or surrendered, utterly cowed, realize that now no foe, no rival, no friend is left — none but themselves, supreme, lonely, lost, and forlorn. Then they find their triumph a tragedy. But not so our hero: he was always exultant. This may be a proof of the moral supremacy of China over the rest of the world.

Look at Ah Q, elated as if he were walking on air!

This victory was not without strange consequences, though. For after walking on air for quite a time he floated into the Tutelary God's Temple, where he would normally have started snoring as soon as he lay down. This evening, however, he found it very hard to close his eyes, being struck by something odd about his thumb and first finger, which seemed to be smoother than usual. It is impossible to say whether something soft and smooth on the little nun's face had stuck to his fingers, or whether his fingers had been rubbed smooth against her cheek.

"Ah Q, may you die sonless!"

These words sounded again in Ah Q's ears, and he thought, "Quite right, I should take a wife, for if a man dies sonless he has no one to sacrifice a bowl of rice to his spirit. . . I ought to have a wife." As the saying goes, "There are three forms of unfilial conduct, of which the worst is to have no descendants,"* and it is one of the tragedies of life that "spirits without descendants go hungry"**. Thus his view was absolutely in accordance with the teachings of the saints and sages, and it is indeed a pity that later he should have run amok.

"Woman, woman! . . ." he thought.

". . . The monk paws. . . . Woman, woman! . . . Woman!" he thought again.

We shall never know when Ah Q finally fell asleep that evening. After this, however, he probably always found his fingers rather soft and smooth, and always remained a little light-headed. "Woman . . ." he kept thinking.

From this we can see that woman is a menace to mankind.

The majority of Chinese men could become saints and sages, were it not for the unfortunate fact that they are ruined by women. The Shang Dynasty was destroyed by Da Ji, the Zhou Dynasty was undermined by Bao Si;

* A quotation from Mencius (372-289 B C)

** A quotation from the old classic *Zuo Zhuan*.

as for the Qin Dynasty, although there is no historical evidence to that effect, if we assume that it fell on account of some woman we shall probably not be far wrong. And it is a fact that Dong Zhuo's death was caused by Diao Chan *

Ah Q, too, was a man of strict morals to begin with. Although we do not know whether he was guided by some good teacher, he had always shown himself most scrupulous in observing "strict segregation of the sexes," and was righteous enough to denounce such heretics as the little nun and the Bogus Foreign Devil. His view was, "All nuns must carry on in secret with monks. If a woman walks alone on the street, she must want to seduce bad men. When a man and a woman talk together, it must be to arrange to meet." In order to correct such people, he would glare furiously, pass loud, cutting remarks, or, if the place were deserted, throw a small stone from behind.

Who could tell that close on thirty, when a man should "stand firm,"** he would lose his head like this over a little nun? Such light-headedness, according to the classical canons, is most reprehensible; thus women certainly are hateful creatures. For if the little nun's face had not been soft and smooth, Ah Q would not have been bewitched by her; nor would this have happened if the little nun's face had been covered by a cloth. Five or six years before, when watching an open-air opera, he had pinched the leg of a woman in the audience; but because it was separated from him by the cloth of her trousers he had not had this light-headed feeling afterwards. The little

* Da Ji, in the twelfth century B C, was the concubine of the last king of the Shang Dynasty. Bao Si, in the eighth century B C, was the concubine of the last king of the Western Zhou Dynasty. Diao Chan was the concubine of Dong Zhuo, a powerful warlord at the end of the Han Dynasty.

** Confucius said that at thirty he "stood firm." The phrase was later used to indicate that a man was thirty years old.

nun had not covered her face, however, and this is another proof of the odiousness of the heretic.

"Woman . . ." thought Ah Q.

He kept a close watch on those women who he believed must "want to seduce men," but they did not smile at him. He listened very carefully to those women who talked to him, but not one of them mentioned anything relevant to a secret rendezvous. Ah! This was simply another example of the odiousness of women: they all assumed a false modesty.

One day when Ah Q was grinding rice in Mr Zhao's house, he sat down in the kitchen after supper to smoke a pipe. If it had been anyone else's house, he could have gone home after supper, but they dined early in the Zhao family. Although it was the rule that you must not light a lamp but go to bed after eating, there were occasional exceptions to the rule. Before Mr Zhao's son passed the county examination he was allowed to light a lamp to study the examination essays, and when Ah Q went to do odd jobs he was allowed to light a lamp to grind rice. Because of this latter exception to the rule, Ah Q still sat in the kitchen smoking before going on with his work.

When Amah Wu, the only maidservant in the Zhao household, had finished washing the dishes, she sat down on the long bench too and started chatting to Ah Q.

"Our mistress hasn't eaten anything for two days, because the master wants to get a concubine . . ."

"Woman . . . Amah Wu . . . this little widow," thought Ah Q.

"Our young mistress is going to have a baby in the eighth moon. . . ."

"Woman . . ." thought Ah Q.

He put down his pipe and stood up.

"Our young mistress —" Amah Wu chattered on.

"Sleep with me!" Ah Q suddenly rushed forward and threw himself at her feet.

There was a moment of absolute silence.

"*Aiya!*" Dumbfounded for an instant, Amah Wu suddenly began to tremble, then rushed out shrieking and could soon be heard sobbing

Ah Q kneeling opposite the wall was dumbfounded too. He grasped the empty bench with both hands and stood up slowly, dimly aware that something was wrong. In fact, by this time he was in rather a nervous state himself. In a flurry, he stuck his pipe into his belt and decided to go back to grind rice. But — *Bang!* — a heavy blow landed on his head, and he spun round to see the successful county candidate standing before him brandishing a big bamboo pole.

"How dare you . . . you. . . ."

The big bamboo pole came down across Ah Q's shoulders. When he put up both hands to protect his head, the blow landed on his knuckles, causing him considerable pain. As he escaped through the kitchen door it seemed as if his back also received a blow.

"Turtle's egg!" shouted the successful candidate, cursing him in mandarin from behind.

Ah Q fled to the hulling-floor where he stood alone, his knuckles still aching and still remembering that "Turtle's egg!" because it was an expression never used by the Weizhuang villagers but only by the rich who had seen something of official life. This made it the more alarming, the more impressive. By now, however, all thought of "Woman . . ." had flown. After this cursing and beating it seemed as if something were done with, and quite light-heartedly he began to grind rice again. Soon this made him hot, and he stopped to take off his shirt.

While taking off his shirt he heard an uproar outside, and since Ah Q was all for excitement he went out in search of the sound. Step by step he traced it into Mr. Zhao's inner courtyard. Although it was dusk he could see many people there: all the Zhao family including the mistress who had not eaten for two days. In addition,

their neighbour Mrs Zou was there, as well as their relatives Zhao Baiyan and Zhao Sichen.

The young mistress was leading Amah Wu out of the servants' quarters, saying as she did so

"Come outside . . . don't stay brooding in your own room."

"Everybody knows you are a good woman," put in Mrs Zou from the side. "You mustn't think of committing suicide."

Amah Wu merely wailed, muttering something inaudible.

"This is interesting," thought Ah Q "What mischief can this little widow be up to?" Wanting to find out, he was approaching Zhao Sichen when suddenly he caught sight of Mr Zhao's eldest son rushing towards him with, what was worse, the big bamboo pole in his hand. The sight of this big bamboo pole reminded him that he had been beaten by it, and he realized that apparently he was connected in some way with all this excitement. He turned and ran, hoping to escape to the hulling-floor, not foreseeing that the bamboo pole would cut off his retreat. When it did, he turned and ran in the other direction, leaving without further ado by the back gate. Soon he was back in the Tutelary God's Temple.

After Ah Q had been sitting down for a time, he broke out in goose-flesh and felt cold, because although it was spring the nights were still chilly and not suited to bare backs. He remembered that he had left his shirt in the Zhaos' house but was afraid that if he went to fetch it he might get another taste of the successful candidate's bamboo pole.

Then the bailiff came in.

"Curse you, Ah Q!" said the bailiff "So you can't even keep your hands off the Zhao family servants, you rebel! You've made me lose my sleep, damn it! . . ."

Under this torrent of abuse Ah Q naturally had nothing to say. Finally, since it was night-time, he had to pay

the bailiff double four hundred cash. Because he happened to have no ready money by him, he gave his felt hat as security, and agreed to the following five terms

1. The next morning Ah Q must take a pair of red candles, weighing one pound each, and a bundle of incense sticks to the Zhao family to atone for his misdeeds

2. Ah Q must pay for the Taoist priests whom the Zhao family had called to exorcize evil spirits

3. Ah Q must never again set foot in the Zhao household.

4. If anything unfortunate should happen to Amah Wu, Ah Q must be held responsible

5. Ah Q must not go back for his wages or shirt

Ah Q naturally agreed to everything, but unfortunately he had no ready money. Luckily it was already spring, so it was possible to do without his padded quilt which he pawned for two thousand cash to comply with the terms stipulated. After kowtowing with bare back he still had a few cash left, but instead of using these to redeem his felt hat from the bailiff, he spent them all on drink.

Actually, the Zhao family burned neither the incense nor the candles, because these could be used when the mistress worshipped Buddha and were put aside for that purpose. Most of the ragged shirt was made into diapers for the baby which was born to the young mistress in the eighth moon, while the tattered remainder was used by Amah Wu to make shoe-soles.

CHAPTER 5

The Problem of Making a Living

After Ah Q had kowtowed and complied with the Zhao family's terms, he went back as usual to the Tutelary

God's Temple The sun had gone down, and he began to feel that something was wrong. Careful thought led him to the conclusion that this was probably because his back was bare. Remembering that he still had a ragged lined jacket, he put it on and lay down, and when he opened his eyes again the sun was already shining on the top of the west wall. He sat up, saying, "Curse it!"

After getting up he loafed about the streets as usual, until he began to feel that something else was wrong, though this was not to be compared to the physical discomfort of a bare back. Apparently, from that day onwards all the women in Weizhuang fought shy of Ah Q: whenever they saw him coming they took refuge indoors. In fact, even Mrs. Zou who was nearing fifty retreated in confusion with the rest, calling her eleven-year-old daughter to go inside. This struck Ah Q as very strange. "The bitches!" he thought. "All of a sudden they're behaving like young ladies. . . ."

A good many days later, however, he felt even more forcibly that something was wrong. First, the tavern refused him credit, secondly, the old man in charge of the Tutelary God's Temple made some uncalled-for remarks, as if he wanted Ah Q to leave; and thirdly, for many days — how many exactly he could not remember — not a soul had come to hire him. To be refused credit in the tavern he could put up with, if the old man kept urging him to leave, he could just ignore his complaints; but when no one came to hire him he had to go hungry, and this was really a "cursed" state to be in.

When Ah Q could stand it no longer he went to his former employers' homes to find out what was the matter — it was only Mr. Zhao's threshold that he was not allowed to cross. But he met with a strange reception. The one to appear was always a man looking thoroughly annoyed who waved him away as if he were a beggar, saying:

"There's nothing for you, get out!"

Ah Q found it more and more extraordinary "These people always needed help in the past," he thought. "They can't suddenly have nothing to be done. This looks fishy." After making careful inquiries he found out that when they had any odd jobs they all called in Young D. Now this Young D was a thin and weakly pauper, even lower in Ah Q's eyes than Whiskers Wang. Who could have thought that this low fellow would steal his living from him? So this time Ah Q's indignation was greater than usual, and going on his way, fuming, he suddenly raised his arm and sang:

*"Steel mace in hand I shall trounce you. . . ."**

A few days later he did indeed meet Young D in front of Mr Qian's house. "When two foes meet, there is no mistaking each other." As Ah Q advanced upon him, Young D stood his ground.

"Beast!" spluttered Ah Q, glaring.

"I'm an insect — will that do?" rejoined Young D.

Such modesty only enraged Ah Q even more, but since he had no steel mace in his hand all he could do was rush forward to grab at Young D's queue. Young D, protecting his own queue with one hand, grabbed at Ah Q's with the other, whereupon Ah Q also used his free hand to protect his own queue. In the past Ah Q had never considered Young D worth taking seriously, but owing to his recent privations he was now as thin and weak as his opponent, so that they presented a spectacle of evenly matched antagonists, four hands clutching at two heads, both men bending at the waist, casting a blue, rainbow-shaped shadow on the Qian family's white wall for over half an hour.

"All right! All right!" exclaimed some of the onlookers, probably by way of mediation.

* A line from *The Battle of the Dragon and the Tiger*, an opera popular in Shaoxing.

“Good, good!” exclaimed others, but whether to mediate, applaud the fighters, or spur them on to further efforts, is not certain.

The two combatants turned deaf ears to them all, however. If Ah Q advanced three paces, Young D would recoil three paces, and there they would stand. If Young D advanced three paces, Ah Q would recoil three paces, and there they would stand again. After about half an hour — Weizhuang had few clocks, so it is difficult to tell the time, it may have been twenty minutes — when steam was rising from their heads and sweat pouring down their cheeks, Ah Q let fall his hands, and in the same second Young D’s hands fell too. They straightened up simultaneously and stepped back simultaneously, pushing their way out through the crowd.

“Just you wait, curse you!” called Ah Q over his shoulder.

“Curse you! Just you wait . . .” echoed Young D, also over his shoulder.

This epic struggle had apparently ended in neither victory nor defeat, and it is not known whether the spectators were satisfied or not, for none of them expressed any opinion. But still not a soul came to hire Ah Q for odd jobs.

One warm day, when a balmy breeze seemed to give some foretaste of summer, Ah Q actually felt cold; but he could put up with this — his greatest worry was an empty stomach. His cotton quilt, felt hat, and shirt had long since disappeared, and after that he had sold his padded jacket. Now nothing was left but his trousers, and these of course he could not take off. He had a ragged lined jacket, it is true; but this was certainly worthless, unless he gave it away to be made into shoe-soles. He had long been dreaming of finding some money on the road, but hitherto he had not come across any; he had also been hoping he might suddenly discover some money in his tumble-down room, and had frantically ransacked

it, but the room was quite, quite empty. Then he made up his mind to go out in search of food.

As he walked along the road "in search of food" he saw the familiar tavern and the familiar steamed bread, but he passed them by without pausing for a second, without even hankering after them. It was not these he was looking for, although what exactly he was looking for he did not know himself.

Since Weizhuang was not a big place, he soon left it behind. Most of the country outside the village consisted of paddy fields, green as far as the eye could see with the tender shoots of young rice, dotted here and there with round black, moving objects — peasants cultivating their fields. But blind to the delights of country life, Ah Q simply went on his way, for he knew instinctively that this was far removed from his "search for food." Finally, however, he came to the walls of the Convent of Quiet Self-Improvement.

The convent too was surrounded by paddy fields, its white walls standing out sharply in the fresh green, and inside the low earthen wall at the back was a vegetable garden. Ah Q hesitated for a time, looking around him. Since there was no one in sight he scrambled on to the low wall, holding on to some milkwort. The mud wall started crumbling, and Ah Q shook with fear; however, by clutching at the branch of a mulberry tree he managed to jump over it. Within was a wild profusion of vegetation, but no sign of yellow wine, steamed bread, or anything edible. A clump of bamboos by the west wall had put forth many young shoots, but unfortunately these were not cooked. There was also rape which had long since gone to seed, mustard already about to flower, and some tough old cabbages.

Resentful as a scholar who has failed the examinations, Ah Q walked slowly towards the gate of the garden. Suddenly, however, he gave a start of joy, for what did he see there but a patch of turnips! He knelt down and

had just begun pulling when a round head appeared from behind the gate, only to be promptly withdrawn. This was no other than the little nun. Now though Ah Q had always had the greatest contempt for such people as little nuns, there are times when "Discretion is the better part of valour." He hastily pulled up four turnips, tore off the leaves, and stuffed them under his jacket. By this time an old nun had already come out.

"May Buddha preserve us, Ah Q! How dare you climb into our garden to steal turnips! . . . Mercy on us, what a wicked thing to do! *Aiya*, Buddha preserve us!"

"When did I ever climb into your garden and steal turnips?" retorted Ah Q as he started off, keeping his eyes on her.

"Now — aren't you?" The old nun pointed at the bulge in his jacket.

"Are these yours? Will they come when you call? You . . ."

Leaving his sentence unfinished, Ah Q took to his heels as fast as he could, followed by a huge fat black dog. Originally this dog had been at the front gate, and how it reached the back garden was a mystery. With a snarl the black dog gave chase and was just about to bite Ah Q's leg when most opportunely a turnip fell from his jacket, and the dog, taken by surprise, stopped for a second. During this time Ah Q scrambled up the mulberry tree, scaled the mud wall, and fell, turnips and all, outside the convent. He left the black dog still barking by the mulberry tree, and the old nun saying her prayers.

Fearing that the nun would let the black dog out again, Ah Q gathered together his turnips and ran, picking up a few small stones as he went. But the black dog did not reappear. Ah Q threw away the stones and walked on, eating as he went, thinking to himself, "There is nothing to be had here: better go to town. . . ."

By the time the third turnip was finished he had made up his mind to go to town.

CHAPTER 6

From Resurgence to Decline

Weizhuang did not see Ah Q again till just after the Moon Festival that year. Everybody was surprised to hear of his return, and this made them think back and wonder where he had been all that time. In the past Ah Q had usually taken great pleasure in announcing his few visits to town; but since he had not done so this time, his going had passed unnoticed. He may have told the old man in charge of the Tutelary God's Temple, but according to the custom of Weizhuang only a trip to town by Mr. Zhao, Mr. Qian, or the successful county candidate counted as important. Even the Bogus Foreign Devil's going was not talked about, much less Ah Q's. This would explain why the old man had not spread the news for him, with the result that the villagers remained in the dark.

Ah Q's return this time was very different from before, and in fact quite enough to occasion astonishment. The day was growing dark when he showed up, bleary-eyed, at the tavern door, walked up to the counter, and tossed down on it a handful of silver and coppers produced from his belt. "Cash!" he announced. "Bring the wine!" He was wearing a new lined jacket and at his waist hung a large purse, the great weight of which caused his belt to sag in a sharp curve.

It was the custom in Weizhuang that anyone in any way unusual should be treated with respect rather than disregarded, and now, although they knew quite well that this was Ah Q, still he was very different from the Ah Q of the ragged coat. The ancients say, "A scholar who has been away three days must be looked at with new eyes." So the waiter, tavern-keeper, customers and passers-by all quite naturally expressed a kind of sus-

pción mingled with respect. The tavern-keeper started off by nodding, following this up with the words:

“So you’re back, Ah Q!”

“Yes, I’m back”

“Made a pretty packet, eh? . . . Where . . . ?”

“I’ve been in town.”

By the next day this piece of news had spread through Weizhuang. And since everybody wanted to hear the success story of this Ah Q of the ready money and the new lined jacket, in the tavern, teahouse, and under the temple eaves, the villagers gradually ferreted out the news. The result was that they began to treat Ah Q with a new deference.

According to Ah Q, he had been a servant in the house of a successful provincial candidate. This part of the story filled all who heard it with awe. This successful provincial candidate was named Bai, but because he was the only successful provincial candidate in the whole town there was no need to use his surname: whenever anyone spoke of the successful provincial candidate, it meant him. And this was so not only in Weizhuang, for almost everyone within a radius of a hundred li imagined his name to be Mr. Successful Provincial Candidate. To have worked in the household of such a man naturally called for respect; but according to Ah Q’s further statements, he was unwilling to go on working there because this successful candidate was really too much of a “turtle’s egg.” This part of the story made all who heard it sigh, but with a sense of pleasure, because it showed that Ah Q was unworthy to work in the household of such a man, yet not to work there was a pity.

According to Ah Q, his return was also due to his dissatisfaction with the townspeople because they called a long bench a straight bench, used shredded shallots to fry fish, and — a defect he had recently discovered — the women did not sway in a very satisfactory manner as they walked. However, the town had its good points

too, for instance, in Weizhuang everyone played with thirty-two bamboo counters and only the Bogus Foreign Devil could play mahjong, but in town even the street urchins excelled at mahjong. You had only to place the Bogus Foreign Devil in the hands of these young rascals in their teens for him straightway to become like "a small devil before the King of Hell." This part of the story made all who heard it blush.

"Have you seen an execution?" asked Ah Q. "Ah, that's a fine sight. . . . When they execute the revolutionaries . . . Ah, that's a fine sight, a fine sight. . . ." He shook his head, sending his spittle flying on to the face of Zhao Sichen who was standing opposite him. This part of the story made all who heard it tremble. Then with a glance around, he suddenly raised his right hand and dropped it on the neck of Whiskers Wang who, craning forward, was listening with rapt attention.

"Off with his head!" shouted Ah Q.

Whiskers Wang gave a start, and jerked back his head as fast as lightning or a spark struck from a flint, while the bystanders shivered with pleasurable apprehension. After this, Whiskers Wang went about in a daze for many days and dared not go near Ah Q, nor did the others.

Although we cannot say that in the eyes of the inhabitants of Weizhuang Ah Q's status at this time was superior to that of Mr. Zhao, we can at least affirm without any danger of inaccuracy that it was approximately equivalent.

Not long after, Ah Q's fame suddenly spread into the women's apartments of Weizhuang too. Although the only two families of any pretensions in Weizhuang were those of Qian and Zhao, and nine-tenths of the rest were poor, still women's apartments are women's apartments, and the way Ah Q's fame spread into them was quite miraculous. When the womenfolk met they would say to each other, "Mrs. Zou bought a blue silk skirt from Ah Q. Although it was old, it only cost ninety cents.

And Zhao Baiyan's mother (this has yet to be verified, because some say it was Zhao Sichen's mother) bought a child's costume of crimson foreign calico which was nearly new for only three hundred cash, less eight per cent discount."

Then those who had no silk skirt or needed foreign calico were most anxious to see Ah Q in order to buy from him. Far from avoiding him now, they sometimes followed him when he passed, calling to him to stop.

"Ah Q, have you any more silk skirts?" they would ask. "No? We want foreign calico too. Do you have any?"

This news later spread from the poor households to the rich ones, because Mrs Zou was so pleased with her silk skirt that she took it to Mrs Zhao for her approval, and Mrs. Zhao told Mr. Zhao, speaking very highly of it.

Mr Zhao discussed the matter that evening at dinner with his son the successful county candidate, suggesting that there was certainly something strange about Ah Q and that they should be more careful about their doors and windows. They did not know, though, what if anything Ah Q had left — he might still have something good. Since Mrs. Zhao happened to want a good cheap fur jacket, after a family council it was decided to ask Mrs. Zou to find Ah Q for them at once. For this a third exception was made to the rule, special permission being given that evening for a lamp to be lit.

A considerable amount of oil had been burned, but still there was no sign of Ah Q. The whole Zhao household was yawning with impatience, some of them resenting Ah Q's casualness, others blaming Mrs. Zou for not making a greater effort. Mrs. Zhao was afraid that Ah Q dared not come because of the terms agreed upon that spring, but Mr. Zhao did not think this anything to worry about because, as he said, "This time I sent for him." Sure enough, Mr. Zhao proved himself a man of insight, for Ah Q finally arrived with Mrs. Zou.

"He keeps saying he has nothing left," panted Mrs Zou as she came in "When I told him to come and tell you so himself he kept talking back I told him . . ."

"Sir!" cried Ah Q with an attempt at a smile, coming to a halt under the eaves.

"I hear you did well for yourself in town, Ah Q," said Mr. Zhao, going up to him and looking him over carefully. "Very good Now . . . they say you have some old things . . . Bring them all here for us to look at. This is simply because I happen to want . . ."

"I told Mrs. Zou — there's nothing left"

"Nothing left?" Mrs Zhao could not help sounding disappointed. "How could they go so quickly?"

"They belonged to a friend, and there wasn't much to begin with People bought some . . ."

"There must be something left"

"Only a door curtain."

"Then bring the door curtain for us to see," said Mrs Zhao hurriedly.

"Well, tomorrow will do," said Mr. Zhao without much enthusiasm "When you have anything in future, Ah Q, you must bring it to us first . . ."

"We certainly won't pay less than other people!" said the successful county candidate. His wife shot a hasty glance at Ah Q to see his reaction.

"I need a fur jacket," said Mrs Zhao.

Although Ah Q agreed, he slouched out so carelessly that they did not know whether he had taken their instructions to heart or not. This so disappointed, annoyed and worried Mr Zhao that he even stopped yawning. The successful candidate was also far from satisfied with Ah Q's attitude. "People should be on their guard against such a turtle's egg," he said. "It might be best to order the bailiff to forbid him to live in Weizhuang"

Mr Zhao did not agree, saying that then Ah Q might bear a grudge, and that in a business like this it was probably a case of "the eagle does not prey on its own nest":

his own village need not worry so long as they were a little more watchful at night. The successful candidate, much impressed by this parental instruction, immediately withdrew his proposal for banishing Ah Q but cautioned Mrs Zou on no account to repeat what had been said.

The next day, however, when Mrs Zou took her blue skirt to be dyed black she repeated these insinuations about Ah Q, although not actually mentioning what the successful candidate had said about driving him away. Even so, it was most damaging to Ah Q. In the first place, the bailiff appeared at his door and took away the door curtain. Although Ah Q protested that Mrs Zhao wanted to see it, the bailiff would not give it back and even demanded monthly hush money. In the second place, the villagers' respect for Ah Q suddenly changed. Although they still dared not take liberties, they avoided him as much as possible. While this differed from their previous fear of his "Off with his head!" it closely resembled the attitude of the ancients to spirits: they kept a respectful distance.

Some idlers who wanted to get to the bottom of the business went to question Ah Q carefully. And with no attempt at concealment Ah Q told them proudly of his experiences. They learned that he had merely been a petty thief, not only unable to climb walls but even unable to go through openings. He simply stood outside an opening to receive the stolen goods.

One night he had just received a package and his chief had gone in again, when he heard a great uproar inside and took to his heels as fast as he could. He fled from the town that same night, back to Weizhuang, and after this he dared not return to do any more thieving. This story, however, was even more damaging to Ah Q, since the villagers had been keeping a respectful distance because they did not want to incur his enmity; for who could have guessed that he was only a thief who dared

not steal again? Now they knew he was really too low to inspire fear.

CHAPTER 7

The Revolution

On the fourteenth day of the ninth moon of the third year in the reign of Emperor Xuan Tong* — the day on which Ah Q sold his purse to Zhao Baiyan — at midnight, after the fourth stroke of the third watch, a large boat with a big black awning arrived at the Zhao family's landing-place. This boat floated up in the darkness while the villagers were sound asleep, so that they knew nothing about it; but it left again about dawn, when quite a number of people saw it. Investigation revealed that this boat actually belonged to the successful provincial candidate!

This incident caused great uneasiness in Weizhuang, and before midday the hearts of all the villagers were beating faster. The Zhao family kept very quiet about the errand of the boat, but according to gossip in the teahouse and tavern, the revolutionaries were going to enter the town and the successful provincial candidate had come to the country to take refuge. Mrs. Zou alone thought otherwise, maintaining that the successful candidate merely wanted to deposit a few battered cases in Weizhuang, but that Mr. Zhao had sent them back. Actually the successful provincial candidate and the successful county candidate in the Zhao family were not on good terms, so that it was scarcely logical to expect them to prove friends in adversity; moreover, since Mrs.

* November 4, 1911, the day on which Shaoxing was freed in the 1911 Revolution.

Zou was a neighbour of the Zhao family and had a better idea of what was going on, she ought to have known

Then a rumour spread to the effect that although the scholar had not come in person, he had sent a long letter tracing some distant relationship with the Zhao family, and since Mr Zhao after thinking it over had decided it could after all do him no harm to keep the cases, they were now stowed under his wife's bed. As for the revolutionaries, some people said they had entered the town that night in white helmets and white armour — in mourning for Emperor Chong Zhen *

Ah Q had long since known of revolutionaries and this year with his own eyes had seen revolutionaries decapitated. But since it had occurred to him that the revolutionaries were rebels and that a rebellion would make things difficult for him, he had always detested and kept away from them. Who could have guessed that they could strike such fear into a successful provincial candidate renowned for a hundred li around? In consequence, Ah Q could not help feeling rather fascinated, the terror of all the villagers only adding to his delight.

“Revolution is not a bad thing,” thought Ah Q. “Finish off the whole lot of them . . . curse them! . . . I'd like to go over to the revolutionaries myself.”

Ah Q had been hard up recently, which no doubt made him rather dissatisfied; moreover he had drunk two bowls of wine at noon on an empty stomach. Consequently he became drunk very quickly; and as he walked along thinking to himself, he seemed again to be treading on air. Suddenly, in some curious way, he felt as if he were a revolutionary and all the people in Weichuang were his captives. Unable to contain himself for joy, he shouted at the top of his voice:

“Rebellion! Rebellion!”

* Chong Zhen, the last emperor of the Ming Dynasty, reigned from 1628 to 1644. He hanged himself before the insurgent peasant army under Li Zicheng entered Beijing.

All the villagers stared at him in consternation. Ah Q had never seen such pitiful looks before, they refreshed him as much as a drink of iced water in summer. So he walked on even more happily, shouting:

"Fine! I shall take what I want! I shall like whom I please!"

"Tra la tra la!"

Alas, in my cups I have slain my sworn brother Zheng.

Alas, ya-ya-ya . . .

Tra la, tra la, tum ti tum tum!

Steel mace in hand I shall trounce you."

Mr Zhao and his son were standing at their gate with two relatives discussing the revolution. Ah Q did not see them as he passed with his head thrown back, singing, "*Tra la la, tum ti tum!*"

"Q, old fellow!" called Mr. Zhao timidly in a low voice.

"*Tra la,*" sang Ah Q, unable to imagine that his name could be linked with those words "old fellow." Sure that he had heard wrongly and was in no way concerned, he simply went on singing, "*Tra la la, tum ti tum!*"

"Q, old fellow!"

"Alas, in my cups. . ."

"Ah Q!" The successful candidate had no choice but to name him outright.

Only then did Ah Q come to a stop. "Well?" he asked with his head on one side.

"Q, old fellow . . . now. . . ." But Mr Zhao was at a loss for words again. "Are you well off now?"

"Well off? Of course. I get what I want. . . ."

"Ah Q, old man, poor friends of yours like us are of no consequence . . ." faltered Zhao Baiyan, as if sounding out the revolutionaries' attitude.

"Poor friends? You're richer anyway than I am." With this Ah Q walked away.

This left them in speechless dismay. Back home that evening Mr. Zhao and his son discussed the question

until it was time to light the lamps. And Zhao Baiyan once home took the purse from his waist and gave it to his wife to hide for him at the bottom of a chest.

For a while Ah Q walked upon air, but by the time he reached the Tutelary God's Temple he had come down to earth again. That evening the old man in charge of the temple was also unexpectedly friendly and offered him tea. Then Ah Q asked him for two flat cakes, and after eating these demanded a four-ounce candle that had been lighted once and a candlestick. He lit the candle and lay down alone in his little room feeling inexpressibly refreshed and happy, while the candlelight leaped and flickered as if this were the Lantern Festival and his imagination soared with it.

"Revolt? It would be fine . . . A troop of revolutionaries would come, all in white helmets and white armour, with swords, steel maces, bombs, foreign guns, sharp-pointed double-edged knives, and spears with hooks. When they passed this temple they would call out, 'Ah Q! Come along with us!' And then I would go with them . . .

"Then the fun would start. All the villagers, the whole lousy lot, would kneel down and plead, 'Ah Q, spare us!' But who would listen to them! The first to die would be Young D and Mr. Zhao, then the successful county candidate and the Bogus Foreign Devil . . . But perhaps I would spare a few. I would once have spared Whiskers Wang, but now I don't even want him . . .

"Things . . . I would go straight in and open the cases: silver ingots, foreign coins, foreign calico jackets. . . . First I would move the Ningbo bed of the successful county candidate's wife to the temple, as well as the Qian family tables and chairs — or else just use the Zhao family's. I wouldn't lift a finger myself, but order Young D to move the things for me, and to look smart about it if he didn't want his face slapped. . . .

“Zhao Sichen’s younger sister is very ugly. In a few years Mrs. Zou’s daughter might be worth considering. The Bogus Foreign Devil’s wife is willing to sleep with a man without a queue, hah! She can’t be a good woman! The successful county candidate’s wife has scars on her eyelids . . . I haven’t seen Amah Wu for a long time and don’t know where she is — what a pity her feet are so big.”

Before Ah Q had reached a satisfactory conclusion, there was a sound of snoring. The four-ounce candle had burned down only half an inch, and its flickering red light lit up his open mouth.

“Ho, ho!” shouted Ah Q suddenly, raising his head and looking wildly around. But at sight of the four-ounce candle, he lay back and fell asleep again.

The next morning he got up very late, and when he went out into the street everything was the same as usual. He was still hungry, but though he racked his brains he did not seem able to think of anything. All of a sudden, however, an idea struck him and he walked slowly off until, either by design or accident, he reached the Convent of Quiet Self-Improvement.

The convent was as peaceful as it had been that spring, with its white wall and shining black gate. After a moment’s reflection he knocked at the gate, whereupon a dog on the other side started barking. He hastily picked up some broken bricks, then went back again to knock more heavily, knocking until the black gate was pitted with pock-marks. At last he heard someone coming to open up.

Clutching a brick, Ah Q straddled there prepared to do battle with the black dog. The convent gate opened a crack, but no black dog rushed out. When he looked in all he could see was the old nun.

“What are you here for again?” she asked with a start.

“There’s a revolution . . . didn’t you know?” said Ah Q vaguely.

“Revolution, revolution . . . we’ve already had one”
The old nun’s eyes were red “What more do you want to do to us?”

“What?” demanded Ah Q, dumbfounded

“Didn’t you know? The revolutionaries have already been here!”

“Who?” demanded Ah Q, still more dumbfounded

“The successful county candidate and the Foreign Devil”

This completely took the wind out of Ah Q’s sails. When the old nun saw there was no fight left in him she promptly shut the gate, so that when Ah Q pushed it again he could not budge it, and when he knocked again there was no answer.

It had happened that morning. The successful county candidate in the Zhao family was quick to learn the news. As soon as he heard that the revolutionaries had entered the town that night, he wound his queue up on his head and went out first thing to call on the Bogus Foreign Devil in the Qian family, with whom he had never been on very good terms. Because this was a time for all to work for reforms, they had a most satisfactory talk and on the spot became comrades who saw eye to eye and pledged themselves to make revolution.

After racking their brains for some time, they remembered that in the Convent of Quiet Self-Improvement there was an imperial tablet inscribed “Long live the Emperor” which ought to be done away with immediately. Thereupon they lost no time in going to the convent to carry out their revolutionary activities. Because the old nun tried to stop them and passed a few remarks, they considered her as the Qing government and gave her quite a few knocks on the head with a stick and with their knuckles. The nun, pulling herself together after they had gone, made an inspection. Naturally the imperial tablet had been smashed into fragments on the

ground and the valuable Xuan De censor* before the shrine of Guanyin, the goddess of mercy, had also disappeared

Ah Q only learned this later. He deeply regretted having been asleep at the time, and resented the fact that they had not come to call him. Then he said to himself, "Maybe they still don't know I have joined the revolutionaries."

CHAPTER 8

Barred from the Revolution

The people of Weizhuang felt easier in their minds with each passing day. From the news brought they knew that although the revolutionaries had entered the town their coming had not made a great deal of difference. The magistrate was still the highest official, it was only his title that had changed; and the successful provincial candidate also had some post — the Weizhuang villagers could not remember these names clearly — some kind of official post; while the head of the military was still the same old captain. The only cause for alarm was that, the day after their arrival, some bad revolutionaries made trouble by cutting off people's queues. It was said that the boatman Sevenpounder from the next village had fallen into their clutches, and that he no longer looked presentable. Still, the danger of this was not great, because the Weizhuang villagers seldom went to town to begin with, and those who had been considering a trip there at once changed their minds in order to avoid this risk. Ah Q had been thinking of going to town to look

* Highly decorative bronze censers were made during the Xuan De period (1426-35) of the Ming Dynasty.

up his old friends, but as soon as he heard the news he gave up the idea

It would be wrong, however, to say that there were no reforms in Weizhuang. During the next few days the number of people who coiled their queues on their heads gradually increased and, as has already been said, the first to do so was naturally the successful county candidate, the next were Zhao Sichen and Zhao Baiyan, and after them Ah Q. If it had been summer it would not have been considered strange if everybody had coiled their queues on their heads or tied them in knots; but this was late autumn, so that this autumn observance of a summer practice on the part of those who coiled their queues could be considered nothing short of a heroic decision, and as far as Weizhuang was concerned it could not be said to have had no connection with the reforms.

When Zhao Sichen approached with the nape of his neck bare, people who saw him remarked, "Ah! Here comes a revolutionary!"

When Ah Q heard this he was greatly impressed. Although he had long since heard how the successful county candidate had coiled his queue on his head, it had never occurred to him to do the same. Only now when he saw that Zhao Sichen had followed suit was he struck with the idea of doing the same himself. He made up his mind to copy them. He used a bamboo chopstick to twist his queue up on his head, and after some hesitation eventually summoned up the courage to go out.

As he walked along the street people looked at him, but without any comment. Ah Q, disgruntled at first, soon waxed indignant. Recently he had been losing his temper very easily. As a matter of fact he was no worse off than before the revolution, people treated him politely, and the shops no longer demanded payment in cash, yet Ah Q still felt dissatisfied. A revolution, he thought, should mean more than this. When he saw Young D, his anger boiled over.

Young D had also coiled his queue up on his head and, what was more, had actually used a bamboo chopstick to do so too. Ah Q had never imagined that Young D would also have the courage to do this, he certainly could not tolerate such a thing! Who was Young D anyway? He was greatly tempted to seize him then and there, break his bamboo chopstick, let down his queue and slap his face several times into the bargain to punish him for forgetting his place and for his presumption in becoming a revolutionary. But in the end he let him off, simply fixing him with a furious glare, spitting, and exclaiming, "Pah!"

These last few days the only one to go to town was the Bogus Foreign Devil. The successful county candidate in the Zhao family had thought of using the deposited cases as a pretext to call on the successful provincial candidate, but the danger that he might have his queue cut off had made him defer his visit. He had written an extremely formal letter, and asked the Bogus Foreign Devil to take it to town; he had also asked the latter to introduce him to the Freedom Party. When the Bogus Foreign Devil came back he collected four dollars from the successful county candidate, after which the latter wore a silver peach on his chest. All the Weizhuang villagers were overawed, and said that this was the badge of the Persimmon Oil Party,* equivalent to the rank of a Han Lin.** As a result, Mr Zhao's prestige suddenly increased, far more so in fact than when his son first passed the official examination; consequently he started looking down on everyone else and when he saw Ah Q tended to ignore him a little.

Ah Q, disgruntled at finding himself cold-shouldered all the time, realized as soon as he heard of this silver

* The Freedom Party was called Z₁ You Dang. The villagers, not understanding the word "freedom," turned Z₁ You into Shi You, which means persimmon oil.

** Member of the Imperial Academy in the Qing Dynasty.

peach why he was left out in the cold. Simply to say that you had gone over was not enough to make anyone a revolutionary, nor was it enough merely to wind your queue up on your head; the most important thing was to get into touch with the revolutionary party. In all his life he had known only two revolutionaries, one of whom had already lost his head in town, leaving only the Bogus Foreign Devil. His only course was to go at once to talk things over with the Bogus Foreign Devil.

The front gate of the Qian house happened to be open, and Ah Q crept timidly in. Once inside he gave a start, for there was the Bogus Foreign Devil standing in the middle of the courtyard dressed entirely in black, no doubt in foreign dress, and also wearing a silver peach. In his hand he held the stick with which Ah Q was already acquainted to his cost, while the foot-long queue which he had grown again had been combed out to hang loosely over his shoulders, giving him a resemblance to the immortal Liu Hai*. Standing respectfully before him were Zhao Baiyan and three others, all of them listening with the utmost deference to what the Bogus Foreign Devil was saying.

Ah Q tiptoed inside and stood behind Zhao Baiyan, eager to pronounce some greeting, but not knowing what to say. Obviously he could not call the man "Bogus Foreign Devil," and neither "Foreigner" nor "Revolutionary" seemed quite the thing. Perhaps the best form of address would be "Mr. Foreigner."

But Mr. Foreigner had not seen him, because with eyes upraised he was holding forth with great gusto:

"I am so impetuous that when we met I kept urging, 'Old Hong, let's get down to business!' But he always answered '*Nein!*' — that's a foreign word which you wouldn't understand. Otherwise we should have succeeded long ago. This just goes to show how cautious he

* A figure in Chinese folk legend, portrayed with flowing hair.

is Time and again he asked me to go to Hubei, but I've not yet agreed. Who wants to work in a small district town? . . ."

"Er — well —" Ah Q waited for him to pause, then screwed up his courage to speak. But for some reason or other he still did not call him Mr. Foreigner.

The four men who had been listening gave a start and turned to stare at Ah Q. Mr. Foreigner too caught sight of him for the first time.

"What is it?"

"I . . ."

"Clear out!"

"I want to join . . ."

"Get out!" Mr. Foreigner raised the "mourner's stick."

Thereupon Zhao Baiyan and the others shouted, "Mr. Qian tells you to get out, don't you hear!"

Ah Q put up his hands to protect his head, and without knowing what he was doing fled through the gate, but this time Mr. Foreigner did not give chase. After running more than sixty steps Ah Q slowed down, and now his heart filled with dismay, because if Mr. Foreigner would not allow him to be a revolutionary, there was no other way open to him. In future he could never hope to have men in white helmets and white armour come to call him. All his ambitions, aims, hope and future had been blasted at one fell swoop. The fact that gossips might spread the news and make him a laughing-stock for the likes of Young D and Whiskers Wang was only a secondary consideration.

Never before had he felt so flat. Even coiling his queue on his head now struck him as pointless and ridiculous. As a form of revenge he was very tempted to let his queue down at once, but he did not do so. He wandered about till evening, when after drinking two bowls of wine on credit he began to feel in better spirits, and in his

mind's eye saw fragmentary visions of white helmets and white armour once more

One day he loafed about until late at night. Only when the tavern was about to close did he start to stroll back to the Tutelary God's Temple.

Crash-bang!

He suddenly heard an unusual sound, which could not have been firecrackers. Ah Q, always fond of excitement and of poking his nose into other people's business, headed straight for the noise in the darkness. He thought he heard footsteps ahead, and was listening carefully when a man fled past from the opposite direction. Ah Q instantly wheeled round to follow him. When that man turned, Ah Q turned too, and when having turned a corner that man stopped, Ah Q followed suit. He saw that there was no one after them and that the man was Young D.

"What's up?" demanded Ah Q resentfully.

"The Zhao . . . Zhao family has been robbed," panted Young D.

Ah Q's heart went pit-a-pat. After saying this, Young D went off. But Ah Q kept on running by fits and starts. However, having been in the business himself made him unusually bold. Rounding the corner of a lane, he listened carefully and thought he heard shouting; while by straining his eyes he thought he could see a troop of men in white helmets and white armour carrying off cases, carrying off furniture, even carrying off the Ningbo bed of the successful county candidate's wife. He could not, however, see them very clearly. He wanted to go nearer, but his feet were rooted to the ground.

There was no moon that night, and Weizhuang was very still in the pitch darkness, as quiet as in the peaceful days of Emperor Fu Xi.* Ah Q stood there until his patience ran out, yet there seemed no end to the business,

* One of the earliest legendary monarchs in China.

distant figures kept moving to and fro, carrying off cases, carrying off furniture, carrying off the Ningbo bed of the successful county candidate's wife carrying until he could hardly believe his own eyes. But he decided not to go any closer, and went back to the temple

It was even darker in the Tutelary God's Temple. When he had closed the big gate he groped his way into his room, and only after he had been lying down for some time did he calm down sufficiently to begin thinking how this affected him. The men in white helmets and white armour had evidently arrived, but they had not come to call him; they had taken away fine things, but there was no share for him — this was all the fault of the Bogus Foreign Devil, who had barred him from the rebellion. Otherwise how could he have failed to have a share this time?

The more Ah Q thought of it the angrier he grew, until he was in a towering rage. "So no rebellion for me, only for you, eh?" he fumed, nodding furiously. "Curse you, you Bogus Foreign Devil — all right, be a rebel! That's a crime for which you get your head chopped off. I'll turn informer, then see you dragged off to town to have your head cut off — your whole family executed. . . To hell with you!"

CHAPTER 9

The Grand Finale

After the Zhao family was robbed most of the people in Weizhuang felt pleased yet fearful, and Ah Q was no exception. But four days later Ah Q was suddenly dragged into town in the middle of the night. It happened to be a dark night. A squad of soldiers, a squad

of militia, a squad of police, and five secret servicemen made their way quietly to Weizhuang and, after posting a machine-gun opposite the entrance, under cover of darkness surrounded the Tutelary God's Temple. But Ah Q did not bolt for it. For a long time nothing stirred till the captain, losing patience, offered a reward of twenty thousand cash. Only then did two militiamen summon up courage to jump over the wall and enter. With their co-operation, the others rushed in and dragged Ah Q out. But not until he had been carried out of the temple to somewhere near the machine-gun did he begin to wake up to what was happening.

It was already midday by the time they reached town, and Ah Q found himself carried to a dilapidated yamen where, after taking five or six turnings, he was pushed into a small room. No sooner had he stumbled inside than the door, in the form of a wooden grille, was slammed on his heels. The rest of the cell consisted of three blank walls, and when he looked carefully he saw two other men in a corner.

Although Ah Q was feeling rather uneasy, he was by no means depressed, because the room where he slept in the Tutelary God's Temple was in no way superior to this. The two other men also seemed to be villagers. They gradually fell into conversation with him, and one of them told him that the successful provincial candidate wanted to dun him for the rent owed by his grandfather; the other did not know why he was there. When they questioned Ah Q he answered quite frankly, "Because I wanted to revolt."

That afternoon he was dragged out through the grille and taken to a big hall, at the far end of which sat an old man with a cleanly shaven head. Ah Q took him for a monk at first, but when he saw soldiers standing guard and a dozen men in long coats on both sides, some with their heads clean-shaven like this old man and some with a foot or so of hair hanging over their shoulders

like the Bogus Foreign Devil, all glaring furiously at him with grim faces, he knew that this man must be someone important. At once his knee-joints relaxed of their own accord, and he sank to his knees.

"Stand up to speak! Don't kneel!" shouted all the men in the long coats.

Although Ah Q understood, he felt quite incapable of standing up. He had involuntarily started squatting, improving on this finally to kneel down.

"Slave!" exclaimed the long-coated men contemptuously. They did not insist on his getting up, however.

"Tell the truth and you will receive a lighter sentence," said the old man with the shaven head in a low but clear voice, fixing his eyes on Ah Q. "We know everything already. When you have confessed, we will let you go."

"Confess!" repeated the long-coated men loudly.

"The fact is I wanted . . . to join . . ." muttered Ah Q disjointedly after a moment's confused thinking.

"In that case, why didn't you?" asked the old man gently.

"The Bogus Foreign Devil wouldn't let me."

"Nonsense. It's too late to talk now. Where are your accomplices?"

"What? . . ."

"The gang who robbed the Zhao family that night."

"They didn't come to call me. They moved the things away themselves." Mention of this made Ah Q indignant.

"Where are they now? When you have told me I will let you go," repeated the old man even more gently.

"I don't know. . . . They didn't come to call me. . . ."

Then, at a sign from the old man, Ah Q was dragged back through the grille. The following morning he was dragged out once more.

Everything was unchanged in the big hall. The old man with the clean-shaven head was still sitting there, and Ah Q knelt down again as before.

“Have you anything else to say?” asked the old man gently

Ah Q thought, and decided there was nothing to say, so he answered, “Nothing”

Then a man in a long coat brought a sheet of paper and held a brush in front of Ah Q, which he wanted to thrust into his hand. Ah Q was now nearly frightened out of his wits, because this was the first time in his life that his hand had ever come into contact with a writing-brush. He was just wondering how to hold it when the man pointed out a place on the paper and told him to sign his name.

“I — I — can’t write,” said Ah Q, shamefaced, nervously holding the brush.

“In that case, to make it easy for you, draw a circle!”

Ah Q tried to draw a circle, but the hand with which he grasped the brush trembled, so the man spread the paper on the ground for him. Ah Q bent down and, as painstakingly as if his life depended on it, drew a circle. Afraid people would laugh at him, he determined to make the circle round; however, not only was that wretched brush very heavy, but it would not do his bidding. Instead it wobbled from side to side, and just as the line was about to close it swerved out again, making a shape like a melon-seed.

While Ah Q was still feeling mortified by his failure to draw a circle, the man took back the paper and brush without any comment. A number of people then dragged him back for the third time through the grille.

By now he felt not too upset. He supposed that in this world it was the fate of everybody at some time to be dragged in and out of prison and to have to draw circles on paper; it was only his circle not being round that he felt a blot on his escutcheon. Presently, however, he regained composure by thinking, “Only idiots can make perfect circles.” And with this thought he fell asleep.

That night, however, the successful provincial candidate was unable to sleep, because he had quarrelled with the captain. The successful provincial candidate had insisted that the main thing was to recover the stolen goods, while the captain said the main thing was to make a public example. Recently the captain had come to treat the successful provincial candidate quite disdainfully. So banging his fist on the table he said, "Punish one to awe one hundred! See now, I have been a member of the revolutionary party for less than twenty days, but there have been a dozen cases of robbery, none of them yet solved; think how badly that reflects on me. Now this one has been solved, you come and haggle. It won't do. This is my affair."

The successful provincial candidate, most put out, insisted that if the stolen goods were not recovered he would resign immediately from his post as assistant civil administrator.

"As you please," said the captain.

In consequence the successful provincial candidate did not sleep that night; but happily he did not hand in his resignation the next day after all.

The third time that Ah Q was dragged out of the grille-door was the morning following the night on which the successful provincial candidate had been unable to sleep. When he reached the hall, the old man with the clean-shaven head was sitting there as usual. And Ah Q knelt down as usual.

Very gently the old man questioned him, "Have you anything more to say?"

Ah Q thought, and decided there was nothing to say, so he answered, "Nothing."

A number of men in long coats and short jackets put on him a white vest of foreign cloth with some black characters on it. Ah Q felt most disconcerted, because this was very like mourning dress and to wear mourning was unlucky. At the same time his hands were bound

behind his back, and he was dragged out of the yamen.

Ah Q was lifted on to an uncovered cart, and several men in short jackets sat down beside him. The cart started off at once. In front were a number of soldiers and militiamen shouldering foreign rifles, and on both sides were crowds of gaping spectators, while what was behind Ah Q could not see. Suddenly it occurred to him — “Can I be going to have my head cut off?” Panic seized him and everything turned dark before his eyes, while there was a humming in his ears as if he had fainted. But he did not really faint. Although he felt frightened some of the time, the rest of the time he was quite calm. It seemed to him that in this world probably it was the fate of everybody at some time to have his head cut off.

He still recognized the road and felt rather surprised: Why were they not going to the execution ground? He did not know that he was being paraded round the streets as a public example. But if he had known, it would have been the same — he would only have thought that in this world probably it was the fate of everybody at some time to be made a public example of.

Then he realized that they were making a detour to the execution ground, so after all he must be going to have his head cut off. He looked round him regretfully at the people swarming after him like ants, and unexpectedly in the crowd by the roadside he caught sight of Amah Wu. So that was why he had not seen her for so long — she was working in town.

Ah Q suddenly became ashamed of his lack of spirit, because he had not sung any lines from an opera. His thoughts revolved like a whirlwind. *The Young Widow at Her Husband's Grave* was not heroic enough. The passage “Alas, in my cups” in *The Battle of the Dragon and the Tiger* was too feeble. “Steel mace in hand I shall trounce you” was still the best. But when he wanted to raise his hands, he remembered that they were

bound together, so he did not sing "Steel mace in hand" either

"In twenty years I shall be another " In his agitation Ah Q uttered half a saying which he had picked up for himself but never used before "Good!!!" The roar of the crowd sounded like the growl of a wolf.

The cart moved steadily forward. During the shouting Ah Q's eyes turned in search of Amah Wu, but she did not seem to have seen him for she was looking intently at the foreign rifles carried by the soldiers.

So Ah Q took another look at the shouting crowd.

At that instant his thoughts revolved again like a whirlwind. Four years before, at the foot of the mountain, he had met a hungry wolf which had followed him at a set distance, wanting to eat him. He had nearly died of fright, but luckily he happened to have a knife in his hand which gave him the courage to get back to Weizhuang. He had never forgotten that wolf's eyes, fierce yet cowardly, gleaming like two will-o'-the-wisps, as if boring into him from a distance. Now he saw eyes more terrible even than the wolf's: dull yet penetrating eyes that having devoured his words still seemed eager to devour something beyond his flesh and blood. And these eyes kept following him at a set distance.

These eyes seemed to have merged into one, biting into his soul.

"Help, help!"

But Ah Q never uttered these words. All had turned black before his eyes, there was a buzzing in his ears, and he felt as if his whole body were being scattered like so much light dust.

As for the after-effects of the robbery, the most affected was the successful provincial candidate, because the

* "In twenty years I shall be another stout young fellow" was a phrase often used by criminals before execution to show their scorn of death. Believing in transmigration, they thought that after death their souls would enter other living bodies.

stolen goods were never recovered. All his family lamented bitterly. Next came the Zhao household, for when the successful county candidate went into town to report the robbery, not only did he have his queue cut off by bad revolutionaries, but he had to pay a reward of twenty thousand cash into the bargain, so all the Zhao family lamented bitterly too. From that day forward they gradually assumed the air of the survivors of a fallen dynasty.

As for any discussion of the event, no question was raised in Weizhuang. Naturally all agreed that Ah Q had been a bad man, the proof being that he had been shot; for if he had not been bad, how could he have been shot? But the consensus of opinion in town was unfavourable. Most people were dissatisfied, because a shooting was not such a fine spectacle as a decapitation; and what a ridiculous culprit he had been too, to pass through so many streets without singing a single line from an opera. They had followed him for nothing.

December 1921

VILLAGE OPERA

In the past twenty years only twice have I been to see Chinese opera. During the first ten years I saw none, lacking both the wish and the opportunity. The two occasions on which I went were in the last ten years, but each time I left without seeing anything in it.

The first time was in 1912 when I was new to Beijing. A friend told me Beijing had the best opera and that seeing it was an experience not to be missed. I thought it might be interesting to see an opera, especially in Beijing, and hurried in high spirits to some theatre, the name of which escapes me. The performance had already started. Even outside I could hear the beat of the drums. As we squeezed in, gaudy colours flashed into view, then I saw many heads in the auditorium; but when I collected myself to look around there were still a few empty seats in the middle. As I squeezed my way in to sit down, someone addressed me. Already there was such a buzzing in my ears that I had to listen hard to catch what he was saying — “Sorry, these seats are taken!”

We withdrew to the back, but then a man with a glossy queue led us to one side and indicated an unoccupied place. This was a bench only a quarter the width of my thighs, but with legs two-thirds longer than mine. To begin with I hadn't the courage to get up there. Then, being reminded of some instrument of torture, with an involuntary shudder I fled.

I had gone some way when suddenly I heard my friend's voice asking, “Well, what's the matter?” Looking over my shoulder I saw he had followed me out. “Why are

you marching along without a word?" he inquired in great surprise

"I'm sorry," I told him "There's such a ding-dong skirling in my ears, I didn't hear you"

Whenever I thought back to this it struck me as most strange, and I supposed that the opera had been a very poor one — or else a theatre was no place for me

I forget in what year I made the second venture, but funds were being raised for flood victims in Hubei and Tan Xinpei* was still alive By paying two dollars for a ticket, you contributed money and could go to the Number One Theatre to see an opera with a cast made up for the most part of famous actors, one being Tan Xinpei himself. I bought a ticket primarily to satisfy the collector, but then some busybody seized the chance to tell me why Tan Xinpei simply had to be seen At that, I forgot the disastrous ding-dong skirling of a few years before and went to the theatre — probably half because that precious ticket had cost so much that I would feel uncomfortable unless I used it I learned that Tan Xinpei made his appearance late in the evening, and the Number One Theatre was a modern one where you did not have to fight for your seat. That reassured me, and I waited till nine o'clock before setting out. To my surprise, just as before, it was full. There was hardly any standing-room and I had to squeeze into the crowd at the rear to watch an actor singing an old woman's part He had a paper spill burning at each corner of his mouth and there was a devil-soldier beside him. After racking my brains I guessed that this might be Maudgalyayana's** mother, because the next to come on was a monk. Not recognizing the actor, I asked a fat gentleman squeezed

* A famous Beijing opera actor

** Maudgalyayana was a disciple of Buddha. Legend has it that his mother went to hell for her sins and he rescued her

in on my left who he was. "Gong Yunfu!" he said, throwing me a withering sidelong glance. My face burned with shame over my ignorant blunder, and I mentally resolved at all costs to ask no more questions. Then I watched a heroine and her maid sing, next an old man and some other characters I could not identify. After that, I watched a whole group fight a free-for-all, and after that two or three people fighting together — from after nine till ten, from ten till eleven, from eleven till eleven-thirty, from eleven-thirty till twelve — but still there was no sign of Tan Xinpei.

Never in my life have I waited so patiently for anything. But the wheezes of the fat gentleman next to me, the ding-dong skirling, gonging and drumming on the stage, the whirling of gaudy colours, combined with the lateness of the hour, suddenly made me realize that this was no place for me. Mechanically turning round, I tried with might and main to shove my way out and felt the place behind me fill up at once — no doubt the elastic fat gentleman had expanded his right side into the space I vacated. With my retreat cut off, naturally there was nothing to do but push and push till at last I was out of the door. Apart from the rickshaws waiting for playgoers, there were practically no pedestrians in the street; but there were still a dozen or so people by the gate looking up at the programme, and another group not looking at anything who must, I thought, be waiting to watch the women come out after the show ended. And still no sign of Tan Xinpei. . . .

But the night air was so crisp, it really "seeped into my heart." This seemed to be the first time I had known such good air in Beijing.

I said goodbye to Chinese opera that night, never thinking about it again, and if by any chance I passed

* Well-known Beijing opera actor who played old women's roles

a theatre it meant nothing to me for in spirit we were long since poles apart

A few days ago, however, I happened to read a Japanese book — unfortunately I have forgotten the title and author, but it was about Chinese opera. One chapter made the point that Chinese opera is so full of gongs and cymbals, shouting and leaping, that it makes the spectators' heads swim and is quite unsuited for a theatre, but if performed in the open and watched from a distance, it has its charm. I felt that this put into words what had remained unformulated in my mind, because as a matter of fact I clearly remembered seeing a really good opera in the country and it was under its influence, perhaps, that after coming to Beijing I went twice to the theatre. It is a pity that, somehow or other, the name of that book escapes me.

As to when I saw that good opera, it was really "long, long ago," when I could not have been much more than eleven or twelve. It was the custom in Luzhen where we lived for married women not yet in charge of the household to go back to their parents' home for the summer. Although my father's mother was then still quite strong, my mother had quite a few domestic duties which made it impossible for her to spend many days at her old home during the summer. All she could spare was a few days after visiting the ancestral graves, and at such times I always went with her to stay in her parents' house. That was in Pingqiao Village not far from the sea, a very remote little village on a river with less than thirty households of peasants and fishermen, and just one tiny grocery. To me, however, it was heaven, for not only was I treated as a guest of honour but here I could skip reading the *Book of Songs*.*

There were many children for me to play with. For with the arrival of a visitor from such a distance they

* The earliest anthology of poetry in China and part of every school curriculum

got leave from their parents to do less work in order to play with me. In a small village, the guest of one family is virtually the guest of the whole community. We were all about the same age, but when it came to determining seniority many were at least my uncles or granduncles, since everybody in the village had the same family name and belonged to one clan. But we were all good friends, and if by some chance we fell out and I hit one of my granduncles, it never occurred to any child or grown-up in the village to call me "insubordinate." Ninety-nine out of a hundred of them could neither read nor write.

We spent most of our days digging up earthworms, putting them on little hooks made of copper wire, and lying on the river bank to catch prawns. The silliest of water creatures, prawns willingly use their own pincers to push the point of the hook into their mouths, so in a few hours we could catch a big bowlful. It was the custom to give these prawns to me. Another thing we did was to graze buffaloes together. But, maybe because they are animals of a higher order, oxen and buffaloes are hostile to strangers, and they treated me with such contempt that I never dared get too close. I could only follow at a distance and stand there. At such times my small friends, no longer impressed by my ability to recite classical poetry, would all start hooting with laughter.

What I looked forward to most was going to Zhaozhuang to see the opera. Zhaozhuang was a slightly larger village five li away. Since Pingqiao was too small to afford to put on operas, every year it chipped in towards a performance at Zhaozhuang. At the time, it never occurred to me to wonder why they should put on operas every year. Thinking back to it now, I dare say it may have been a ritual drama for the late spring festival.

The year that I was eleven or twelve, this long-awaited day came round again. But as ill luck would have it, there was no boat for hire that morning. Pingqiao Village had only one big ferry-boat, which put out in the

morning and came back in the evening, and it was out of the question to use this. All the other boats were unsuitable, being too small. And the neighbouring villages, when people were sent to ask, had no boats either — they had all been hired already. My grandmother, very vexed, blamed the family for not hiring one earlier and started nagging. To console her, Mother said that our operas at Luzhen were much better than in these little villages, and as we saw several a year there was no need to go today. But I was nearly in tears from chagrin, and Mother did her best to impress on me on no account to make a scene, because it would upset my grandmother, nor must I go with other people either, or Grandmother might worry.

In a word, it had fallen through. In the afternoon, when all my friends had left and the opera had started, I imagined I could hear the sound of gongs and drums and knew they were in front of the stage buying soya-bean milk to drink.

I caught no prawns that day, did not eat much either. Mother was very upset but could not think what to do. By supper time Grandmother too had finally caught on and she said I was right to be cross, they had been too remiss, and never before had guests been treated so badly. After the meal, youngsters back from the opera gathered round and gaily described it to us. I was the only one silent. They all sighed and said how sorry they were for me. Suddenly one of the brightest, Shuangxi, had an inspiration and asked, "A big boat? Hasn't Eighth Granduncle's ferry-boat come back?" A dozen other boys cottoned on and at once started agitating to take the boat and go with me. I cheered up. But Grandmother was nervous, thinking we were all children and undependable. And Mother said it would not be fair to ask grown-ups to stay up all night and go with us, as they all had to work the next day. While our fate hung in the balance, Shuangxi went to the root of the problem,

declaring loudly, "I guarantee it'll be all right! It's a big boat, Brother Xun never jumps around, and all of us can swim!"

It was true. Not a boy in the dozen but could swim, and two or three of them were first-rate swimmers in the sea.

Grandmother and Mother, convinced, raised no further objections. Both smiled. We immediately rushed out.

My heart after being so heavy was suddenly light, and I felt as though floating on air. Once outside, I saw in the moonlight a ferry-boat with a white awning moored at the bridge. We all jumped aboard, Shuangxi seizing the front pole and Afa the back one, while the younger boys sat down with me in the middle and those a little older went to the stern. By the time Mother followed us out to warn "Be careful!" we had already cast off. We pushed off from the bridge, floated back a few feet, then moved forward under the bridge. Two oars were set up, each manned by two boys who changed shifts every 11. Chatter, laughter and shouts mingled with the lapping of water against our bow, to our right and left stretched emerald green fields of beans and wheat, as we flew forward towards Zhaozhuang.

The scent of beans, wheat and river-weeds wafted towards us through the mist, and the moonlight shone faintly through it. Distant grey hills, undulating like the backs of some leaping iron beasts, seemed to be racing past the stern of our boat; but I still felt our progress was slow. When the oarsmen had changed shifts four times, we began to make out the faint outline of Zhaozhuang and to catch the sound of singing and music. There were several lights too, which we guessed must be on the stage unless they were fishermen's lights.

The music was probably fluting. Eddying round and round and up and down, it soothed me and set me dreaming at the same time, till I felt as though I was about

to drift far away with it through the night air heavy with the scent of beans, wheat and river-weeds

As we approached the lights, they proved to be fishermen's lights and I realized it was not Zhaozhuang that I had been looking at. Directly ahead of us was a pine-wood where I had played the year before and seen a broken stone horse, fallen on its side, as well as a stone sheep couched in the grass. Once past the wood, our boat rounded a bend into a cove, and Zhaozhuang was really before us.

Our eyes were drawn to the stage standing in a plot of empty ground by the river outside the village, hazy in the distant moonlight, barely distinguishable from its surroundings. It seemed that the fairyland I had seen in pictures had come alive here. The boat was moving faster now, and presently we could make out figures on the stage and a blaze of gaudy colours. The river close to the stage was black with the boat awnings of the spectators.

"There's no room near the stage, let's watch from a distance," suggested Afa.

The boat had slowed down now, and soon we arrived. True enough, it was impossible to get close to the stage. We had to make fast even further away from it than the shrine opposite. But, in any case, we did not want our boat with its white awning to mix with those black ones and, besides, there was no room. . . .

While we hastily moored, there appeared on the stage a man with a long black beard and four pennons fixed to his back. With a spear he fought a whole group of bare-armed men. Shuangxi told us this was a famous acrobat who could turn eighty-four somersaults one after the other. He had counted for himself earlier in the day.

We all crowded to the bow to watch the fighting, but the acrobat did not turn any somersaults. Only a few of the bare-armed men turned head over heels a few times, then trooped off. Then a girl came out and sang in a

shrill falsetto "There aren't many watching in the evening," said Shuangxi, "and the acrobat's taking it easy. Who wants to show off to an empty house?" That made sense to me, because by then there were not many spectators. The country folk, having work to do the next day, could not stay up all night and had gone home to bed. Standing there still were just a scattering of a few dozen idlers from Zhaozhuang and the villages around. The families of the local rich remained in the boats with black awnings, but they were not really interested in the opera. Most of them had come to the opera to eat cakes, fruit or melon-seeds. So it could really be reckoned an empty house.

As a matter of fact, I was not too keen on somersaults either. What I wanted most to see was a snake spirit swathed in white, its two hands clasping above it a wand-like snake's head, and next a leaping tiger dressed in yellow. But I waited a long time in vain. As soon as the girl left, out came a very old man acting the part of a young one. Feeling tired, I asked Guisheng to buy me some soyabean milk. He came back presently to say, "There isn't any. The deaf man who sells it has gone. There was some in the daytime, I drank two bowls then I'll get you a dipperful of water to drink."

Instead of drinking the water, I stuck it out as best I could. I cannot say what I saw, but by degrees something strange seemed to happen to the faces of the players, whose features blurred as if melting into one flattened surface. Most of the younger boys yawned, while the older ones chatted among themselves. It was only when a clown in a red shirt was fastened to a pillar on the stage, and a greybeard started horsewhipping him, that we roused ourselves to watch again and laughed. I really think that was the best scene of the evening.

But then the old woman came out. This was the character I dreaded most, especially when she sat down to sing. Now I saw by everybody's disappointment that

they felt just as I did. To start with, the old woman simply walked to and fro singing, then she sat on a chair in the middle of the stage. I felt most dismayed, and Shuangxi and the rest started swearing. I waited patiently till, after a long time, the old woman raised her hand. I thought she was going to stand up. But dashing my hopes she lowered her hand slowly again just as before, and went on singing. Some of the boys in the boat could not help groaning; the rest began to yawn again. Finally Shuangxi, when he could stand it no longer, said he was afraid she might go on singing till dawn and we had better leave. We all promptly agreed, becoming as eager as when we had set out. Three or four boys ran to the stern, seized the poles to punt back several yards, then headed the boat around. Cursing the old woman, they set up the oars and started back for the pine-wood.

Judging by the position of the moon we had not been watching very long, and once we left Zhaozhuang the moonlight seemed unusually bright. When we turned back to look at the lantern-lit stage, it appeared just as it had when we came, hazy as a fairy pavilion, covered in a rosy mist. Once again the flutes sounded melodiously in our ears. I suspected that the old woman must have finished, but could hardly suggest going back again to see.

Soon the pine-wood was behind us. Our boat was moving fairly fast, but there was such thick darkness all around you could tell it was very late. As they discussed the players, laughing and swearing, the rowers pulled harder on the oars. Now the splash of water against our bow was even more distinct. The ferry-boat seemed like a great white fish carrying a freight of children through the foam. Some old fishermen who fished all night stopped their punts to cheer at the sight.

We were still about one li from Pingqiao when our boat slowed down, the oarsmen saying that they were

tired after rowing so hard, with nothing to eat for hours. It was Guisheng who had a bright idea this time. He said the broad beans were just ripe, and there was fuel on the boat — we could filch some beans and cook them. Everybody approving, we promptly drew alongside the bank and stopped. The pitch-black fields were filled with plump broad beans.

“Hey, Afa! They’re your family’s over here, and Old Liu Yi’s over there. Which shall we take?” Shuangxi, the first to leap ashore, called from the bank.

As we all jumped ashore too Afa said, “Wait a bit and I’ll have a look.” He walked up and down feeling the beans, then straightened up to say, “Take ours, they’re much bigger.” With a shout we scattered through his family’s bean field, each picking a big handful of beans and throwing them into the boat. Shuangxi thought that if we took any more and Afa’s mother found out, she would make a scene, so we all went to Old Liu Yi’s field to pick another handful each.

Then a few of the older boys started rowing slowly again, while others lit a fire in the stern and the younger boys and I shelled the beans. Soon they were cooked, and we let the boat drift while we gathered round and ate them with our fingers. When the beans were finished we went on again, washing the pot and throwing the pods into the river, to destroy all traces. What worried Shuangxi now was that we had used the salt and firewood on Eighth Granduncle’s boat, and being a canny old man he was sure to find out and berate us. But after some discussion we decided that we had nothing to fear. If he swore at us, we would ask him to return the tallow branch he had taken the previous year from the river bank, and to his face call him “Old Scabby.”

“We’re all back! How could anything go wrong? Didn’t I guarantee that?” Shuangxi’s voice suddenly rang out from the bow.

Looking past him, I saw we were already at Pingqiao and someone was standing at the foot of the bridge — it was my mother to whom Shuangxi had called. As I walked up to the bow the boat passed under the bridge, then stopped, and we all went ashore. Mother was rather angry. She asked why we had come back so late — it was after midnight. But she was pleased to see us too and smilingly invited everyone to go and have some puffed rice.

They told her we had all had a snack to eat and were sleepy, so we had better get to bed at once, and off we all went to our different homes.

I did not get up till noon the next day, and there was no word of any trouble with Eighth Granduncle over the salt or firewood. That afternoon we went to catch prawns as usual.

“Shuangxi, you little devils stole my beans yesterday! And instead of picking them properly you trampled down quite a few.” I looked up and saw Old Liu Yi on a punt, coming back from selling beans. There was still a heap of let-over beans at the bottom of the punt.

“Yes. We were treating a visitor. We didn’t mean to take yours to begin with,” said Shuangxi. “Look! You’ve frightened away my prawn!”

When the old man saw me, he stopped punting and chuckled. “Treating a visitor? So you should.” Then he asked me, “Was yesterday’s opera good, Brother Xun?”

I nodded. “Yes, it was.”

“Did you enjoy the beans?”

I nodded again. “Very much.”

To my surprise, that gratified Old Liu Yi enormously. Sticking up one thumb he said complacently, “People from big towns who have studied really know what’s good! I select my bean seeds one by one, yet country folk who can’t tell good from bad say my beans aren’t up to other people’s. I’ll give some to your mother today for her to try. . . .” With that he punted off.

When Mother called me home for supper, on the table there was a large bowl of boiled beans which Old Liu Yi had brought for the two of us. And I heard he had praised me highly to Mother, saying, "He's so young, yet he knows what's what. He's sure to come first in the official examinations in future. Your fortune's as good as made, ma'am." But when I ate the beans, they did not taste as good as those of the night before.

It is a fact, right up till now, I have really never eaten such good beans or seen such a good opera as I did that night.

October 1922

THE NEW-YEAR SACRIFICE

The end of the year by the old calendar does really seem a more natural end to the year for, to say nothing of the villages and towns, the very sky seems to proclaim the New Year's approach. Intermittent flashes from pallid, lowering evening clouds are followed by the rumble of crackers bidding farewell to the Hearth God* and, before the deafening reports of the bigger bangs close at hand have died away, the air is filled with faint whiffs of gunpowder. On one such night I returned to Luzhen, my home town. I call it my home town, but as I had not made my home there for some time I put up at the house of a certain Fourth Mr. Lu, whom I am obliged to address as Fourth Uncle since he belongs to the generation before mine in our clan. A former Imperial Academy licentiate who believes in Neo-Confucianism,** he seemed very little changed, just slightly older, but without any beard as yet. Having exchanged some polite remarks upon meeting he observed that I was fatter, and having observed that I was fatter launched into a violent attack on the reformists*** I did not take this personally, how-

* On the twenty-third of the twelfth lunar month the Hearth God was supposed to go up to heaven to make a report.

** The Confucian school in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) which claimed that all things in the universe and the feudal order were ordained by "Reason" and could never change.

*** Referring to Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and others who in 1898, supported by Emperor Guang Xu, started a bourgeois reform movement. After this was crushed by the die-hards, Kang Youwei and others fled abroad and organized a royalist group advocating constitutional monarchy, becoming a reactionary political clique.

ever, as the object of his attack was Kang Youwei. Still, conversation proved so difficult that I shortly found myself alone in the study

I rose late the next day and went out after lunch to see relatives and friends, spending the following day in the same way. They were all very little changed, just slightly older, but every family was busy preparing for the New-Year sacrifice. This is the great end-of-year ceremony in Luzhen, during which a reverent and splendid welcome is given to the God of Fortune so that he will send good luck for the coming year. Chickens and geese are killed, pork is bought, and everything is scrubbed and scoured until all the women's arms — some still in twisted silver bracelets — turn red in the water. After the meat is cooked chopsticks are thrust into it at random, and when this "offering" is set out at dawn, incense and candles are lit and the God of Fortune is respectfully invited to come and partake of it. The worshippers are confined to men and, of course, after worshipping they go on letting off firecrackers as before. This is done every year, in every household — so long as it can afford the offering and crackers — and naturally this year was no exception.

The sky became overcast and in the afternoon it was filled with a flurry of snowflakes, some as large as plum-blossom petals, which merged with the smoke and the bustling atmosphere to make the small town a welter of confusion. By the time I had returned to my uncle's study, the roof of the house was already white with snow, which made the room brighter than usual, highlighting the red stone rubbing that hung on the wall of the big character "Longevity" as written by the Taoist saint Chen Tuan* One of the pair of scrolls flanking it had fallen down and was lying loosely rolled up on the long table. The other, still in its place, bore the inscription

* A tenth-century hermit.

"Understanding of principles brings peace of mind." Idly, I strolled over to the desk beneath the window to turn over the pile of books on it, but only found an apparently incomplete set of *The Kang Xi Dictionary*, the *Selected Writings of Neo-Confucian Philosophers*, and *Commentaries on the Four Books** At all events I must leave the next day, I decided.

Besides, the thought of my meeting with Xianglin's Wife the previous day was preying on my mind. It had happened in the afternoon. On my way back from calling on a friend in the eastern part of the town, I had met her by the river and knew from the fixed look in her eyes that she was going to accost me. Of all the people I had seen during this visit to Luzhen, none had changed so much as she had. Her hair, streaked with grey five years before, was now completely white, making her appear much older than one around forty. Her sallow, dark-tinged face that looked as if it had been carved out of wood was fearfully wasted and had lost the grief-stricken expression it had borne before. The only sign of life about her was the occasional flicker of her eyes. In one hand she had a bamboo basket containing a chipped, empty bowl; in the other, a bamboo pole, taller than herself, that was split at the bottom. She had clearly become a beggar pure and simple.

I stopped, waiting for her to come and ask for money.

"So you're back?" were her first words.

"Yes."

"That's good. You are a scholar who's travelled and seen the world. There's something I want to ask you." A sudden gleam lit up her lacklustre eyes.

This was so unexpected that surprise rooted me to the spot.

* Compiled by Luo Pei in the Qing Dynasty for use in the imperial examinations.

“It’s this” She drew two paces nearer and lowered her voice, as if letting me into a secret. “Do dead people turn into ghosts or not?”

My flesh crept. The way she had fixed me with her eyes made a shiver run down my spine, and I felt far more nervous than when a surprise test is sprung on you at school and the teacher insists on standing over you. Personally, I had never bothered myself in the least about whether spirits existed or not; but what was the best answer to give her now? I hesitated for a moment, reflecting that the people here still believed in spirits, but she seemed to have her doubts, or rather hopes — she hoped for life after death and dreaded it at the same time. Why increase the sufferings of someone with a wretched life? For her sake, I thought, I’d better say there was

“Quite possibly, I’d say,” I told her falteringly.

“That means there must be a hell too?”

“What, hell?” I faltered, very taken aback. “Hell? Logically speaking, there should be too — but not necessarily. Who cares anyway?”

“Then will all the members of a family meet again after death?”

“Well, as to whether they’ll meet again or not. . . .” I realized now what an utter fool I was. All my hesitation and manoeuvring had been no match for her three questions. Promptly taking fright, I decided to recant. “In that case . . . actually, I’m not sure. . . . In fact, I’m not sure whether there are ghosts or not either.”

To avoid being pressed by any further questions I walked off, then beat a hasty retreat to my uncle’s house, feeling thoroughly disconcerted. I may have given her a dangerous answer, I was thinking. Of course, she may just be feeling lonely because everybody else is celebrating now, but could she have had something else in mind? Some premonition? If she had had some other idea, and something happens as a result, then

my answer should indeed be partly responsible. . . Then I laughed at myself for brooding so much over a chance meeting when it could have no serious significance. No wonder certain educationists called me neurotic. Besides, I had distinctly declared, "I'm not sure," contradicting the whole of my answer. This meant that even if something did happen, it would have nothing at all to do with me.

"I'm not sure" is a most useful phrase.

Bold inexperienced youngsters often take it upon themselves to solve problems or choose doctors for other people, and if by any chance things turn out badly they may well be held to blame; but by concluding their advice with this evasive expression they achieve blissful immunity from reproach. The necessity for such a phrase was brought home to me still more forcibly now, since it was indispensable even in speaking with a beggar woman.

However, I remained uneasy, and even after a night's rest my mind dwelt on it with a certain sense of foreboding. The oppressive snowy weather and the gloomy study increased my uneasiness. I had better leave the next day and go back to the city. A large dish of plain shark's fin stew at the Fu Xing Restaurant used to cost only a dollar. I wondered if this cheap delicacy had risen in price or not. Though my good companions of the old days had scattered, that shark's fin must still be sampled even if I were on my own. Whatever happened I would leave the next day, I decided.

Since, in my experience, things I hoped would not happen and felt should not happen invariably did occur all the same, I was much afraid this would prove another such case. And, sure enough, the situation soon took a strange turn. Towards evening I heard what sounded like a discussion in the inner room, but the conversation ended before long and my uncle walked away observing

loudly, "What a moment to choose! Now of all times! Isn't that proof enough she was a bad lot?"

My initial astonishment gave way to a deep uneasiness; I felt that this had something to do with me. I looked out of the door, but no one was there. I waited impatiently till their servant came in before dinner to brew tea. Then at last I had a chance to make some inquiries.

"Who was Mr Lu so angry with just now?" I asked.

"Why, Xianglin's Wife, of course," was the curt reply.

"Xianglin's Wife? Why?" I pressed.

"She's gone."

"Dead?" My heart missed a beat. I started and must have changed colour. But since the servant kept his head lowered, all this escaped him. I pulled myself together enough to ask

"When did she die?"

"When? Last night or today — I'm not sure."

"How did she die?"

"How? Of poverty of course." After this stolid answer he withdrew, still without having raised his head to look at me.

My agitation was only short-lived, however. For now that my premonition had come to pass, I no longer had to seek comfort in my own "I'm not sure," or his "dying of poverty," and my heart was growing lighter. Only from time to time did I still feel a little guilty. Dinner was served, and my uncle impressively kept me company. Tempted as I was to ask about Xianglin's Wife, I knew that, although he had read that "ghosts and spirits are manifestations of the dual forces of Nature,"* he was still so superstitious that on the eve of the New-Year sacrifice it would be unthinkable to mention anything like death or illness. In case of necessity one should use veiled allusions, but since this was unfortunately beyond me I had to bite back the questions which kept rising to

* This was said by the Song Dynasty Neo-Confucian Zhang Zai.

the tip of my tongue. And my uncle's solemn expression suddenly made me suspect that he looked on me too as a bad lot who had chosen this moment, now of all times, to come and trouble him. To set his mind at rest as quickly as I could, I told him at once of my plan to leave Luzhen the next day and go back to the city. He did not press me to stay, and at last the uncomfortably quiet meal came to an end.

Winter days are short, and because it was snowing darkness had already enveloped the whole town. All was stir and commotion in the lighted houses, but outside was remarkably quiet. And the snowflakes hissing down on the thick snowdrifts intensified one's sense of loneliness. Seated alone in the amber light of the vegetable-oil lamp I reflected that this wretched and forlorn woman, abandoned in the dust like a worn-out toy of which its owners have tired, had once left her own imprint in the dust, and those who enjoyed life must have wondered at her for wishing to live on; but now at last she had been swept away by death. Whether spirits existed or not I did not know; but in this world of ours the end of a futile existence, the removal of someone whom others are tired of seeing, was just as well both for them and for the individual concerned. Occupied with these reflections, I listened quietly to the hissing of the snow outside, until little by little I felt more relaxed.

But the fragments of her life that I had seen or heard about before combined now to form a whole.

She was not from Luzhen. Early one winter, when my uncle's family wanted a new maid, Old Mrs. Wei the go-between brought her along. She had a white mourning band round her hair and was wearing a black skirt, blue jacket, and pale green bodice. Her age was about twenty-six, and though her face was sallow her cheeks were red. Old Mrs. Wei introduced her as Xianglin's Wife, a neighbour of her mother's family, who wanted

to go out to work now that her husband had died. My uncle frowned at this, and my aunt knew that he disapproved of taking on a widow. She looked just the person for them, though, with her big strong hands and feet, and, judging by her downcast eyes and silence, she was a good worker who would know her place. So my aunt ignored my uncle's frown and kept her. During her trial period she worked from morning till night as if she found resting irksome, and proved strong enough to do the work of a man; so on the third day she was taken on for five hundred cash a month.

Everybody called her Xianglin's Wife and no one asked her own name, but since she had been introduced by someone from Wei Village as a neighbour, her surname was presumably also Wei. She said little, only answering briefly when asked a question. Thus it took them a dozen days or so to find out bit by bit that she had a strict mother-in-law at home and a brother-in-law of ten or so, old enough to cut wood. Her husband, who had died that spring, had been a woodcutter too, and had been ten years younger than she was. This little was all they could learn.

Time passed quickly. She went on working as hard as ever, not caring what she ate, never sparing herself. It was generally agreed that the Lu family's maid actually got through more work than a hard-working man. At the end of the year, she swept and mopped the floors, killed the chickens and geese, and sat up to boil the sacrificial meat, all single-handed, so that they did not need to hire extra help. And she for her part was quite contented. Little by little the trace of a smile appeared at the corners of her mouth, while her face became whiter and plumper.

Just after the New Year she came back from washing rice by the river most upset because in the distance she had seen a man, pacing up and down on the opposite bank, who looked like her husband's elder cousin — very

likely he had come in search of her. When my aunt in alarm pressed her for more information, she said nothing. As soon as my uncle knew of this he frowned

“That’s bad,” he observed “She must have run away”

Before very long this inference was confirmed

About a fortnight later, just as this incident was beginning to be forgotten, Old Mrs Wei suddenly brought along a woman in her thirties whom she introduced as Xianglin’s mother. Although this woman looked like the hill-dweller she was, she behaved with great self-possession and had a ready tongue in her head. After the usual civilities she apologized for coming to take her daughter-in-law back, explaining that early spring was a busy time and they were short-handed at home with only old people and children around

“If her mother-in-law wants her back, there’s nothing more to be said,” was my uncle’s comment

Thereupon her wages were reckoned up. They came to 1,750 cash, all of which she had left in the keeping of her mistress without spending any of it. My aunt gave the entire sum to Xianglin’s mother, who took her daughter-in-law’s clothes as well, expressed her thanks, and left. By this time it was noon

“Oh, the rice! Didn’t Xianglin’s Wife go to wash the rice?” exclaimed my aunt some time later. It was probably hunger that reminded her of lunch.

A general search started then for the rice-washing basket. My aunt searched the kitchen, then the hall, then the bedroom; but not a sign of the basket was to be seen. My uncle could not find it outside either, until he went right down to the riverside. Then he saw it set down fair and square on the bank, some vegetables beside it.

Some people on the bank told him that a boat with a white awning had moored there that morning but, since the awning covered the boat completely, they had no idea who was inside and had paid no special attention to begin

with But when Xianglin's Wife had arrived and was kneeling down to wash rice, two men who looked as if they came from the hills had jumped off the boat and seized her Between them they dragged her on board. She wept and shouted at first but soon fell silent, probably because she was gagged Then along came two women, a stranger and Old Mrs Wei. It was difficult to see clearly into the boat, but the victim seemed to be lying, tied up, on the planking.

"Disgraceful! Still . . ." said my uncle

That day my aunt cooked the midday meal herself, and their son Aniu lit the fire

After lunch Old Mrs Wei came back.

"Disgraceful!" said my uncle

"What's the meaning of this? How dare you show your face here again?" My aunt, who was washing up, started fuming as soon as she saw her. "First you recommended her, then help them carry her off, causing such a shocking commotion. What will people think? Are you trying to make fools of our family?"

"*Aiya*, I was completely taken in! I've come specially to clear this up How was I to know she'd left home without permission from her mother-in-law when she asked me to find her work? I'm sorry, Mr. Lu I'm sorry, Mrs. Lu. I'm growing so stupid and careless in my old age, I've let my patrons down. It's lucky for me you're such kind, generous people, never hard on those below you I promise to make it up to you by finding someone good this time."

"Still . . ." said my uncle.

That concluded the affair of Xianglin's Wife, and before long it was forgotten.

My aunt was the only one who still spoke of Xianglin's Wife This was because most of the maids taken on afterwards turned out to be lazy or greedy, or both, none of them giving satisfaction. At such times she would

invariably say to herself, "I wonder what's become of her now?" — implying that she would like to have her back. But by the next New Year she too had given up hope.

The first month was nearing its end when Old Mrs. Wei called on my aunt to wish her a happy New Year. Already tipsy, she explained that the reason for her coming so late was that she had been visiting her family in Wei Village in the hills for a few days. The conversation, naturally, soon touched on Xianglin's Wife.

"Xianglin's Wife?" cried Old Mrs. Wei cheerfully. "She's in luck now. When her mother-in-law dragged her home, she'd promised her to the sixth son of the Ho family in Ho Glen. So a few days after her return they put her in the bridal chair and sent her off."

"Gracious! What a mother-in-law!" exclaimed my aunt.

"Ah, madam, you really talk like a great lady! This is nothing to poor folk like us who live up in the hills. That young brother-in-law of hers still had no wife. If they didn't marry her off, where would the money have come from to get him one? Her mother-in-law is a clever, capable woman, a fine manager, so she married her off into the mountains. If she'd betrothed her to a family in the same village, she wouldn't have made so much; but as very few girls are willing to take a husband deep in the mountains at the back of beyond, she got eighty thousand cash. Now the second son has a wife, who cost only fifty thousand; and after paying the wedding expenses she's still over ten thousand in hand. Wouldn't you call her a fine manager?"

"But was Xianglin's Wife willing?"

"It wasn't a question of willing or not. Of course any woman would make a row about it. All they had to do was tie her up, shove her into the chair, carry her to the man's house, force on her the bridal headdress, make her bow in the ceremonial hall, lock the two of them into their room — and that was that. But Xianglin's

Wife is quite a character. I heard that she made a terrible scene. It was working for a scholar's family, everyone said, that made her different from other people. We go-betweens see life, madam. Some widows sob and shout when they remarry, some threaten to kill themselves, some refuse to go through the ceremony of bowing to heaven and earth after they've been carried to the man's house; some even smash the wedding candlesticks. But Xianglin's Wife was really extraordinary. They said she screamed and cursed all the way to Ho Glen, so that she was completely hoarse by the time they got there. When they dragged her out of the chair, no matter how the two chair-bearers and her brother-in-law held her, they couldn't make her go through the ceremony. The moment they were off guard and had loosened their grip — gracious Buddha! — she bashed her head on a corner of the altar, gashing it so badly that the blood spurted out. Even though they smeared on two handfuls of incense ashes and tied it up with two pieces of red cloth, they couldn't stop the bleeding. It took quite a few of them to shut her up finally with the man in the bridal chamber, but even then she went on cursing. Oh, it was really . . .” Shaking her head, she lowered her eyes and fell silent.

“And what then?” asked my aunt.

“They said that the next day she didn't get up” Old Mrs. Wei raised her eyes.

“And after?”

“After? She got up. At the end of the year she had a baby, a boy, who was reckoned as two this New Year. These few days when I was at home, some people back from a visit to Ho Glen said they'd seen her and her son, and both mother and child are plump. There's no mother-in-law over her, her man is a strong fellow who can earn a living, and the house belongs to them. Oh, yes, she's in luck all right.”

After this event my aunt gave up talking of Xianglin's Wife

But one autumn, after two New Years had passed since this good news of Xianglin's Wife, she once more crossed the threshold of my uncle's house, placing her round bulb-shaped basket on the table and her small bedding-roll under the eaves. As before, she had a white mourning band round her hair and was wearing a black skirt, blue jacket, and pale green bodice. Her face was sallow, her cheeks no longer red; and her downcast eyes, stained with tears, had lost their brightness. Just as before, it was Old Mrs. Wei who brought her to my aunt.

"It was really a bolt from the blue," she explained compassionately. "Her husband was a strong young fellow; who'd have thought that typhoid fever would carry him off? He'd taken a turn for the better, but then he ate some cold rice and got worse again. Luckily she had the boy and she can work — she's able to gather firewood, pick tea, or raise silkworms — so she could have managed on her own. But who'd have thought that the child, too, would be carried off by a wolf? It was nearly the end of spring, yet a wolf came to the glen — who could have guessed that? Now she's all on her own. Her husband's elder brother has taken over the house and turned her out. So she's no way to turn for help except to her former mistress. Luckily this time there's nobody to stop her and you happen to be needing someone, madam. That's why I've brought her here. I think someone used to your ways is much better than a new hand. . ."

"I was really too stupid, really . . ." put in Xianglin's Wife, raising her lacklustre eyes. "All I knew was that when it snowed and wild beasts up in the hills had nothing to eat, they might come to the villages. I didn't know that in spring they might come too. I got up at dawn and opened the door, filled a small basket with beans and told our Amao to sit on the doorstep and shell

them. He was such a good boy, he always did as he was told, and out he went. Then I went to the back to chop wood and wash the rice, and when the rice was in the pan I wanted to steam the beans. I called Amao, but there was no answer. When I went out to look there were beans all over the ground but no Amao. He never went to the neighbours' houses to play; and, sure enough, though I asked everywhere he wasn't there. I got so worried, I begged people to help me find him. Not until that afternoon, after searching high and low, did they try the gully. There they saw one of his little shoes caught on a bramble. "That's bad," they said. "A wolf must have got him." And sure enough, further on, there he was lying in the wolf's den, all his innards eaten away, still clutching that little basket tight in his hand . . ." At this point she broke down and could not go on.

My aunt had been undecided at first, but the rims of her eyes were rather red by the time Xianglin's Wife broke off. After a moment's thought she told her to take her things to the servants' quarters. Old Mrs. Wei heaved a sigh, as if a great weight had been lifted from her mind; and Xianglin's Wife, looking more relaxed than when first she came, went off quietly to put away her bedding without having to be told the way. So she started work again as a maid in Luzhen.

She was still known as Xianglin's Wife.

But now she was a very different woman. She had not worked there more than two or three days before her mistress realized that she was not as quick as before. Her memory was much worse too, while her face, like a death-mask, never showed the least trace of a smile. Already my aunt was expressing herself as not too satisfied. Though my uncle had frowned as before when she first arrived, they always had such trouble finding servants that he raised no serious objections, simply warning his wife on the quiet that while such people

might seem very pathetic they exerted a bad moral influence. She could work for them but must have nothing to do with ancestral sacrifices. They would have to prepare all the dishes themselves. Otherwise they would be unclean and the ancestors would not accept them.

The most important events in my uncle's household were ancestral sacrifices, and formerly these had kept Xianglin's Wife especially busy, but now she had virtually nothing to do. As soon as the table had been placed in the centre of the hall and a front curtain fastened around its legs, she started setting out the winecups and chopsticks in the way she still remembered.

"Put those down, Xianglin's Wife," cried my aunt hastily. "Leave that to me."

She drew back sheepishly then and went for the candlesticks.

"Put those down, Xianglin's Wife," cried my aunt again in haste. "I'll fetch them."

After walking round in the hall several times without finding anything to do, she moved doubtfully away. All she could do that day was to sit by the stove and feed the fire.

The townspeople still called her Xianglin's Wife, but in quite a different tone from before; and although they still talked to her, their manner was colder. Quite impervious to this, staring straight in front of her, she would tell everybody the story which night or day was never out of her mind.

"I was really too stupid, really," she would say. "All I knew was that when it snowed and the wild beasts up in the hills had nothing to eat, they might come to the villages. I didn't know that in spring they might come too. I got up at dawn and opened the door, filled a small basket with beans and told our Amao to sit on the doorstep and shell them. He was such a good boy; he always did as he was told, and out he went. Then I went to the back to chop wood and wash the rice, and

when the rice was in the pan I wanted to steam the beans. I called Amao, but there was no answer. When I went out to look, there were beans all over the ground but no Amao. He never went to the neighbours' houses to play, and, sure enough, though I asked everywhere he wasn't there. I got so worried, I begged people to help me find him. Not until that afternoon, after searching high and low, did they try the gully. There they saw one of his little shoes caught on a bramble. 'That's bad,' they said. 'A wolf must have got him.' And sure enough, further on, there he was lying in the wolf's den, all his innards eaten away, still clutching that little basket tight in his hand . . .” At this point her voice would be choked with tears.

This story was so effective that men hearing it often stopped smiling and walked blankly away, while the women not only seemed to forgive her but wiped the contemptuous expression off their faces and added their tears to hers. Indeed, some old women who had not heard her in the street sought her out specially to hear her sad tale. And when she broke down, they too shed the tears which had gathered in their eyes, after which they sighed and went away satisfied, exchanging eager comments.

As for her, she asked nothing better than to tell her sad story over and over again, often gathering three or four hearers around her. But before long everybody knew it so well that no trace of a tear could be seen even in the eyes of the most kindly, Buddha-invoking old ladies. In the end, practically the whole town could recite it by heart and were bored and exasperated to hear it repeated.

“I was really too stupid, really,” she would begin

“Yes. All you knew was that in snowy weather, when the wild beasts in the mountains had nothing to eat, they might come down to the villages.” Cutting short her recital abruptly, they walked away.

She would stand there open-mouthed, staring after them stupidly, and then wander off as if she too were bored by the story. But she still tried hopefully to lead up from other topics such as small baskets, and other people's children to the story of her Amao. At the sight of a child of two or three she would say, "Ah, if my Amao were alive he'd be just that size . . ."

Children would take fright at the look in her eyes and clutch the hem of their mothers' clothes to tug them away. Left by herself again, she would eventually walk blankly away. In the end everybody knew what she was like. If a child were present they would ask with a spurious smile, "If your Amao were alive, Xianglin's Wife, wouldn't he be just that size?"

She may not have realized that her tragedy, after being generally savoured for so many days, had long since grown so stale that it now aroused only revulsion and disgust. But she seemed to sense the cold mockery in their smiles, and the fact that there was no need for her to say any more. So she would simply look at them in silence.

New-Year preparations always start in Luzhen on the twentieth day of the twelfth lunar month. That year my uncle's household had to take on a temporary manservant. And since there was more than he could do they asked Amah Liu to help by killing the chickens and geese; but being a devout vegetarian who would not kill living creatures, she would only wash the sacrificial vessels. Xianglin's Wife, with nothing to do but feed the fire, sat there at a loose end watching Amah Liu as she worked. A light snow began to fall.

"Ah, I was really too stupid," said Xianglin's Wife as if to herself, looking at the sky and sighing.

"There you go again, Xianglin's Wife" Amah Liu glanced with irritation at her face. "Tell me, wasn't that when you got that scar on your forehead?"

All the reply she received was a vague murmur.

"Tell me this. What made you willing after all?"

"Willing?"

"Yes. Seems to me you must have been willing
Otherwise "

"Oh, you don't know how strong he was "

"I don't believe it. I don't believe he was so strong that you with your strength couldn't have kept him off. You must have ended up willing. That talk of his being so strong is just an excuse."

"Why . . . just try for yourself and see " She smiled.

Amah Liu's lined face broke into a smile too, wrinkling up like a walnut-shell. Her small beady eyes swept the other woman's forehead, then fastened on her eyes. At once Xianglin's Wife stopped smiling, as if embarrassed, and turned her eyes away to watch the snow.

"That was really a bad bargain you struck, Xianglin's Wife," said Amah Liu mysteriously. "If you'd held out longer or knocked yourself to death outright, that would have been better. As it is, you're guilty of a great sin though you lived less than two years with your second husband. Just think: when you go down to the lower world, the ghosts of both men will start fighting over you. Which ought to have you? The King of Hell will have to saw you into two and divide you between them. I feel it really is. . . ."

Xianglin's Wife's face registered terror then. This was something no one had told her up in the mountains.

"Better guard against that in good time, I say. Go to the Temple of the Tutelary God and buy a threshold to be trampled on instead of you by thousands of people. If you atone for your sins in this life you'll escape torment after death."

Xianglin's Wife said nothing at the time, but she must have taken this advice to heart, for when she got up the next morning there were dark rims round her eyes. After breakfast she went to the Temple of the Tutelary God at the west end of the town and asked to buy a

threshold as an offering. At first the priest refused, only giving a grudging consent after she was reduced to tears of desperation. The price charged was twelve thousand cash.

She had long since given up talking to people after their contemptuous reception of Amao's story; but as word of her conversation with Amah Liu spread, many of the townsfolk took a fresh interest in her and came once more to provoke her into talking. The topic, of course, had changed to the scar on her forehead.

"Tell me, Xianglin's Wife, what made you willing in the end?" one would ask.

"What a waste, to have bashed yourself like that for nothing," another would chime in, looking at her scar.

She must have known from their smiles and tone of voice that they were mocking her, for she simply stared at them without a word and finally did not even turn her head. All day long she kept her lips tightly closed, bearing on her head the scar considered by everyone as a badge of shame, while she shopped, swept the floor, washed the vegetables and prepared the rice in silence. Nearly a year went by before she took her accumulated wages from my aunt, changed them for twelve silver dollars, and asked for leave to go to the west end of the town. In less time than it takes for a meal she was back again, looking much comforted. With an unaccustomed light in her eyes, she told my aunt contentedly that she had now offered up a threshold in the Temple of the Tutelary God.

When the time came for the ancestral sacrifice at the winter solstice she worked harder than ever, and as soon as my aunt took out the sacrificial vessels and helped Aniu to carry the table into the middle of the hall, she went confidently to fetch the winecups and chopsticks.

"Put those down, Xianglin's Wife!" my aunt called hastily.

She withdrew her hand as if scorched, her face turned ashen grey, and instead of fetching the candlesticks she just stood there in a daze until my uncle came in to burn some incense and told her to go away. This time the change in her was phenomenal. The next day her eyes were sunken, her spirit seemed broken. She took fright very easily too, afraid not only of the dark and of shadows, but of meeting anyone. Even the sight of her own master or mistress set her trembling like a mouse that had strayed out of its hole in broad daylight. The rest of the time she would sit stupidly as if carved out of wood. In less than half a year her hair had turned grey, and her memory had deteriorated so much that she often forgot to go and wash the rice.

"What's come over Xianglin's Wife? We should never have taken her on again," my aunt would sometimes say in front of her, as if to warn her.

But there was no change in her, no sign that she would ever recover her wits. So they decided to get rid of her and tell her to go back to Old Mrs. Wei. That was what they were saying, at least, while I was there; and, judging by subsequent developments, this is evidently what they must have done. But whether she started begging as soon as she left my uncle's house, or whether she went first to Old Mrs. Wei and later became a beggar, I do not know.

I was woken up by the noisy explosion of crackers close at hand and, from the faint glow shed by the yellow oil lamp and the bangs of fireworks as my uncle's household celebrated the sacrifice, I knew that it must be nearly dawn. Listening drowsily I heard vaguely the ceaseless explosion of crackers in the distance. It seemed to me that the whole town was enveloped by the dense cloud of noise in the sky, mingling with the whirling snowflakes. Enveloped in this medley of sound I relaxed; the doubt which had preyed on my mind from dawn till

night was swept clean away by the festive atmosphere, and I felt only that the saints of heaven and earth had accepted the sacrifice and incense and were reeling with intoxication in the sky, preparing to give Luzhen's people boundless good fortune.

February 7, 1924

IN THE TAVERN

During my travels from the north to the southeast I made a detour to my home and then went on to S — This town, only thirty li from my native place, can be reached in less than half a day by a small boat. I had taught for a year in a school here. In the depth of winter after snow the landscape was bleak, but a combination of indolence and nostalgia made me put up briefly in the Luo Si Hotel, a new hotel since my time. The town was small. I looked for several old colleagues I thought I might find, but not one of them was there. They had long since gone their different ways. And when I passed the gate of the school that too had changed its name and appearance, making me feel quite a stranger. In less than two hours my enthusiasm had waned and I rather reproached myself for coming.

The hotel I was in let rooms but did not serve meals, which had to be ordered from outside, but these were about as unpalatable as mud. Outside the window was only a stained and spotted wall, covered with withered moss. Above was the leaden sky, a colourless dead white; moreover a flurry of snow had begun to fall. Since my lunch had been poor and I had nothing to do to while away the time, my thoughts turned quite naturally to a small tavern I had known well in the past called One Barrel House, which I reckoned could not be far from the hotel. I immediately locked my door and set out to find it. Actually, all I wanted was to escape the boredom of my stay, not to do any serious drinking. One Barrel House was still there, its narrow mouldering front

and dilapidated signboard unchanged. But from the landlord down to the waiters there was not a soul I knew — in One Barrel House too I had become a complete stranger. Still I climbed the familiar stairway in the corner to the little upper storey. The five small wooden tables up here were unchanged, only the window at the back, originally latticed, had been fitted with glass panes.

“A catty of yellow wine. To go with it? Ten pieces of fried beancurd with plenty of paprika sauce”

As I gave this order to the waiter who had come up with me I went and sat down at the table by the back window. The fact that the place was empty enabled me to pick the best seat, one with a view of the deserted garden below. Most likely this did not belong to the tavern. I had looked out at it many times in the past, sometimes too in snowy weather. But now, to eyes accustomed to the north, the sight was sufficiently striking. Several old plum trees in full bloom were braving the snow as if oblivious of the depth of winter; while among the thick dark green foliage of a camellia beside the crumbling pavilion a dozen crimson blossoms blazed bright as flame in the snow, indignant and arrogant, as if despising the wanderer's wanderlust. At this I suddenly remembered the moistness of the heaped snow here, clinging, glistening and shining, quite unlike the dry northern snow which when a high wind blows will fly up to fill the sky like mist . . .

“Your wine, sir . . .” said the waiter carelessly, putting down my cup, chopsticks, wine-pot and dish. The wine had come. I turned to the table, set everything straight and filled my cup. I felt that the north was certainly not my home, yet when I came south I could only count as a stranger. The powdery dry snow which whirled through the air up there and the clinging soft snow here were equally alien to me. In a slightly melancholy mood I took a leisurely sip of wine. The wine tasted pure and the fried beancurd was excellently cooked, only the pa-

prika sauce was not hot enough; but then the people of S — had never understood pungent flavours

Probably because it was the afternoon, the place had none of the atmosphere of a tavern. By the time I had drunk three cups, the four other tables were still unoccupied. A sense of loneliness stole over me as I stared at the deserted garden, yet I did not want other customers to come up. Thus I could not help being irritated by the occasional footsteps on the stairs, and was relieved to find it was only the waiter. And so I drank another two cups of wine.

“This time it must be a customer,” I thought, at the sound of footsteps much slower than those of the waiter. When I judged that he must be at the top of the stairs, I raised my head rather apprehensively to look at this extraneous company and stood up with a start. It had never occurred to me that I might run into a friend here — if such he would still let me call him. The newcomer was an old classmate who had been my colleague when I was a teacher, and although he had changed a great deal I knew him at a glance. Only he had become very slow in his movements, quite unlike the spry dynamic Lü Weifu of the old days.

“Well, Weifu, is it you? Fancy meeting you here!”

“Well, well, is it you? Just fancy. . . .”

I invited him to join me, but he seemed to hesitate before doing so. This struck me as strange, then I felt rather hurt and annoyed. A closer look revealed that Lu had still the same unkempt hair and beard, but his pale lantern-jawed face was thin and wasted. He appeared very quiet if not dispirited, and his eyes beneath their thick black brows had lost their alertness; but while looking slowly around, at sight of the deserted garden they suddenly flashed with the same piercing light I had seen so often at school.

“Well,” I said cheerfully but very awkwardly, “it must be ten years since last we saw each other. I heard long

ago that you were at Jinan, but I was so wretchedly lazy I never wrote . . .”

“It was the same with me I’ve been at Taiyuan for more than two years now with my mother When I came back to fetch her I learned that you had already left, left for good and all ”

“What are you doing at Taiyuan?” I asked

“Teaching in the family of a fellow-provincial ”

“And before that?”

“Before that?” He took a cigarette from his pocket, lit it and put it to his lips, then watching the smoke he puffed out said reflectively, “Just futile work, amounting to nothing at all ”

He in turn asked what I had been doing all these years. I gave him a rough idea, at the same time calling the waiter to bring a cup and chopsticks in order that Lu could share my wine while we had another two catties heated We also ordered dishes In the past we had never stood on ceremony, but now we began deferring to each other so that finally we fixed on four dishes suggested by the waiter: peas spiced with aniseed, jellied pork, fried beancurd and salted mackerel

“As soon as I came back I knew I was a fool.” Holding his cigarette in one hand and the winecup in the other, he spoke with a bitter smile. “When I was young, I saw the way bees or flies stuck to one spot If something frightened them they would buzz off, but after flying in a small circle they would come back to stop in the same place; and I thought this really ridiculous as well as pathetic. Little did I think I’d be flying back myself too after only describing a small circle And I didn’t think you’d come back either. Couldn’t you have flown a little further?”

“That’s difficult to say. Probably I too have simply described a small circle.” I also spoke with a rather bitter smile. “But why did you fly back?”

“For something quite futile” In one gulp he emptied his cup, then took several pulls at his cigarette and his eyes widened a little. “Futile — but you may as well hear about it.”

The waiter brought up the freshly heated wine and dishes and set them on the table. The smoke and the fragrance of fried beancurd seemed to make the upstairs room more cheerful, while outside the snow fell still more thickly.

“Perhaps you knew,” he went on, “that I had a little brother who died when he was three and was buried in the country here. I can’t even remember clearly what he looked like, but I’ve heard my mother say he was a very lovable child and very fond of me. Even now it brings tears to her eyes to speak of him. This spring an elder cousin wrote to tell us that the ground beside his grave was gradually being swamped, and he was afraid before long it would slip into the river. We should go at once and do something about it. This upset my mother so much that she couldn’t sleep for several nights — she can read letters herself, you know. But what could I do? I had no money, no time. There was nothing that could be done.

“Now at last, because I’m on holiday over New Year, I’ve been able to come south to move his grave.” He tossed off another cup of wine and looking out of the window exclaimed, “Could you find anything like this up north? Blossom in thick snow, and the soil beneath the snow not frozen. So the day before yesterday I bought a small coffin in town — because I reckoned that the one under the ground must have rotted long ago — took cotton and bedding, hired four workmen, and went into the country to move his grave. I suddenly felt most elated, eager to dig up the grave, eager to see the bones of the little brother who had been so fond of me: this was a new experience for me. When we reached the grave, sure enough, the river was encroaching on it and

the water was less than two feet away. The poor grave not having had any earth added to it for two years was subsiding. Standing there in the snow, I pointed to it firmly and ordered the workmen, 'Dig it up.'

"I really am a commonplace fellow. I felt that my voice at this juncture was rather unnatural, and that this order was the greatest I had given in all my life. But the workmen didn't find it strange in the least, and set to work to dig. When they reached the enclosure I had a look, and sure enough the coffin had rotted almost completely away; there was nothing left but a heap of splinters and chips of wood. My heart beat faster as I set these aside myself, very carefully, wanting to see my little brother. However, I was in for a surprise. Bedding, clothes, skeleton, all had gone!

"I thought, 'These have all disappeared, but hair, I have always heard, is the last thing to rot. There may still be some hair.' So I bent down and searched carefully in the mud where the pillow should have been, but there was none. Not a trace remained."

I suddenly noticed that the rims of his eyes were rather red, but immediately attributed this to the effect of the wine. He had scarcely touched the dishes but had been drinking incessantly and must have drunk more than a catty; his looks and gestures had become more animated, more like the Lu Weifu whom I had known. I called the waiter to heat two more catties of wine, then turned back to face my companion, my cup in my hand, as I listened to him in silence.

"Actually there was really no need to move it: I had only to level the ground, sell the coffin and make an end of the business. Although it might have seemed odd my going to sell the coffin, if the price were low enough the shop from which I bought it would have taken it, and I could at least have recouped a few cents for wine. But I didn't. I still spread out the bedding, wrapped up in cotton some of the clay where his body had been,

covered it up, put it in the new coffin, moved it to my father's grave and buried it beside him. And having a brick vault built kept me busy most of yesterday too, supervising the work. But in this way I can count the affair ended, at least enough to deceive my mother and set her mind at rest. Well, well, the look you're giving me shows you are wondering why I've changed so much. Yes, I still remember the time when we went together to the tutelary god's temple to pull off the idols' beards, and how for days on end we used to discuss methods of reforming China until we even came to blows. But this is how I am now, willing to let things slide and to compromise. Sometimes I think, 'If my old friends were to see me now, probably they would no longer acknowledge me as a friend' But this is what I am like now."

He took out another cigarette, put it to his lips and lit it.

"Judging by your expression, you still expect something of me. Naturally I am much more obtuse than before, but I'm not completely blind yet. This makes me grateful to you, at the same time rather uneasy. I'm afraid I've let down the old friends who even now still wish me well . . ." He stopped and took several puffs at his cigarette before going on slowly, "Only today, just before coming to this One Barrel House, I did something futile yet something I was glad to do. My former neighbour on the east side was called Changfu. He was a boatman and had a daughter named Ashun. When you came to my house in those days you may have seen her but you certainly wouldn't have paid any attention to her, because she was still small then. She didn't grow up to be pretty either, having just an ordinary thin oval face and pale skin. Only her eyes were unusually large with very long lashes and whites as clear as a cloudless night sky — I mean the cloudless sky of the north on a windless day, here it is not so clear. She was very capable. She lost her mother while in her teens, and had

to look after a small brother and sister besides waiting on her father; and all this she did very competently. She was so economical too that the family gradually grew better off. There was scarcely a neighbour who didn't praise her, and even Changfu often expressed his appreciation. When I was setting off on my journey this time, my mother remembered her — old people's memories are so long. She recalled that once Ashun saw someone wearing red velvet flowers in her hair, and wanted a spray for herself. When she couldn't get one she cried nearly all night, so that her father beat her and her eyes remained red and swollen for two or three days. These red flowers came from another province and couldn't be bought even in S —, so how could she ever hope to have any? Since I was coming south this time, my mother told me to buy two sprays for her.

“Far from feeling vexed at this commission, I was actually delighted, really glad of the chance to do something for Ashun. The year before last I came back to fetch my mother, and one day when Changfu was at home I dropped in for some reason to chat with him. By way of refreshment he offered me some buckwheat mush, remarking that they added white sugar to it. As you can see, a boatman who could afford white sugar was obviously not poor and must eat pretty well. I let myself be persuaded but begged them to give me only a small bowl. He quite understood and instructed Ashun, ‘These scholars have no appetite. Give him a small bowl, but add more sugar.’ However, when she had prepared the concoction and brought it in it gave me quite a turn, because it was a large bowl, as much as I could eat in a whole day. Though compared with Changfu's bowl, admittedly, it was small. This was the first time I had eaten buckwheat mush, and I just could not stomach it though it was so sweet. I gulped down a few mouthfuls and decided to leave the rest when I happened to notice Ashun standing some distance away in one corner of the

room, and I simply hadn't the heart to put down my chopsticks. In her face I saw both hope and fear — fear presumably that she had prepared it badly, and hope that we would find it to our liking. I knew that if I left most of my bowl she would feel very disappointed and sorry. I made up my mind to it and shovelled the stuff down, eating almost as fast as Changfu. That taught me how painful it is forcing oneself to eat; and I remembered experiencing the same difficulty as a child when I had to finish a bowl of worm-medicine mixed with brown sugar. I didn't hold it against her though, because her half-suppressed smile of satisfaction when she came to take away our empty bowls more than repaid me for all my discomfort. So that night, although indigestion kept me from sleeping well and I had a series of nightmares, I still wished her a lifetime of happiness and hoped that for her sake the world would change for the better. But such thoughts were only the residue of my old dreams. The next instant I laughed at myself, and promptly forgot them.

"I hadn't known before that she had been beaten on account of a spray of velvet flowers, but when my mother spoke of it I remembered the buckwheat mush incident and became unaccountably diligent. First I made a search in Taiyuan, but none of the shops had them. It was only when I went to Jinan. . . ."

There was a rustle outside the window as a pile of snow slithered off the camellia which had been bending beneath its weight; then the branches of the tree straightened themselves, flaunting their thick dark foliage and blood-red flowers even more clearly. The sky had grown even more leaden. Sparrows were twittering, no doubt because dusk was falling and finding nothing to eat on the snow-covered ground they were going back early to their nests to sleep.

"It was only when I went to Jinan. . . ." He glanced out of the window, then turned back, drained a cup of

wine, took several puffs at his cigarette and went on, "Only then did I buy the artificial flowers. I didn't know whether they were the same as those she had been beaten for, but at least they were made of velvet. And not knowing whether she liked deep or light colours, I bought one spray of red, one spray of pink, and brought them both here.

"This afternoon straight after lunch I went to see Changfu, having stayed on an extra day just for this. Though his house was still there it seemed to me rather gloomy, but perhaps that was simply my imagination. His son and second daughter Azhao were standing at the gate. Both of them had grown. Azhao is quite unlike her sister, she looks simply ghastly; but at my approach she rushed into the house. I learned from the boy that Changfu was not at home. 'And your elder sister?' I asked. At that he glared at me and demanded what my business with her was. He looked fierce enough to fling himself at me and bite me. I dithered, then walked away. Nowadays I just let things slide . . .

"You can have no idea how I dread calling on people, much more so than in the old days. Because I know what a nuisance I am, I am even sick of myself, so, knowing this, why inflict myself on others? But since this commission had to be carried out, after some reflection I went back to the firewood shop almost opposite their house. The proprietor's mother old Mrs. Fa was still there and, what's more, still recognized me. She actually asked me into the shop to sit down. After the usual polite preliminaries I told her why I had come back to S — and was looking for Changfu. I was taken aback when she sighed:

"'What a pity Ashun hadn't the luck to wear these velvet flowers.'

"Then she told me the whole story. 'It was probably last spring that Ashun began to look pale and thin. Later she had fits of crying, but if asked why she wouldn't

say. Sometimes she even cried all night until Changfu couldn't help losing his temper and swearing at her for carrying on like a crazy old maid. But when autumn came she caught a chill, then she took to her bed and never got up again. Only a few days before she died she confessed to Changfu that she had long ago started spitting blood and perspiring at night like her mother. But she hadn't told him for fear of worrying him. One evening her uncle Changgeng came to demand a loan — he was always sponging on them — and when she wouldn't give him any money he sneered, "Don't give yourself airs; your man isn't even up to me!" That upset her, but she was too shy to ask any questions and could only cry. As soon as Changfu knew this, he told her what a decent fellow the man chosen for her was, but it was too late. Besides, she didn't believe him. "It's a good thing I'm already this way," she said. "Now nothing matters any more."

"Old Mrs. Fa also said, 'If her man really hadn't been up to Changgeng, that would have been truly frightful. Not up to a chicken thief — what sort of creature would that be? But I saw him with my own eyes at the funeral: dressed in clean clothes and quite presentable. And he said with tears in his eyes that he'd worked hard all those years on the boat to save up money to marry, but now the girl was dead. Obviously he was really a good sort, and Changgeng had been lying. It was too bad that Ashun believed such a rascally liar and died for nothing. Still, we can't blame anyone else: this was Ashun's fate.'

"Since that was the case, my business was finished too. But what about the two sprays of artificial flowers I had brought with me? Well, I asked her to give them to Azhao. This Azhao had fled at the sight of me as if I were a wolf or monster; I really didn't want to give them to her. However, give them I did, and I have only to tell my mother that Ashun was delighted with them

and that will be that Who cares about such futile affairs anyway? One only wants to muddle through them somehow When I have muddled through New Year I shall go back to teaching the Confucian classics."

"Is that what you're teaching?" I asked in astonishment.

"Of course. Did you think I was teaching English? First I had two pupils, one studying the *Book of Songs*, the other *Mencius* Recently I have got another, a girl, who is studying the *Canon for Girls** I don't even teach mathematics, not that I wouldn't teach it, but they don't want it taught."

"I could really never have guessed that you would be teaching such books."

"Their father wants them to study these. I'm an outsider, it's all the same to me Who cares about such futile affairs anyway? There's no need to take them seriously . . ."

His whole face was scarlet as if he were quite drunk, but the gleam in his eyes had died down I gave a slight sigh, not knowing what to say. There was a clatter on the stairs as several customers came up The first was short, with a round bloated face; the second was tall, with a conspicuous red nose. Behind them followed others, and as they walked up the small upper floor shook I turned to Lü Weifu who was trying to catch my eye, then called for the bill.

"Is your salary enough to live on?" I asked as we prepared to leave.

"I have twenty dollars a month, not quite enough to manage on."

"What are your future plans then?"

"Future plans? I don't know. Just think: Has any single thing turned out as we hoped of all we planned

* A book describing the feudal standard of behaviour for girls and the virtues they should cultivate

in the past? I'm not sure of anything now, not even of what tomorrow will bring, not even of the next minute. ”

The waiter brought up the bill and handed it to me. Lu Weifu had abandoned his earlier formality. He just glanced at me, went on smoking, and allowed me to pay.

We left the tavern together, parting at the door because our hotels lay in opposite directions. As I walked back alone to my hotel, the cold wind buffeted my face with snowflakes, but I found this thoroughly refreshing. I saw that the sky, already dark, had interwoven with the houses and streets in the white, shifting web of thick snow.

February 16, 1924

A HAPPY FAMILY

After the style of Xu Qinwen*

“ . . . One writes simply as one feels: such a work is like sunlight, radiating from a source of infinite brightness, not like a spark from a flint struck on iron or stone. This alone is true art. And such a writer alone is a true artist . . . But I . . . what do I rank as?”

Having thought so far he suddenly jumped out of bed. It had occurred to him that he must make some money by writing to support his family, and he had already decided to send his manuscripts to the *Happy Monthly* publishers, because the remuneration appeared to be comparatively generous. But in that case the choice of subjects would be limited, otherwise the work would probably not be accepted. All right, let it be limited. What were the chief problems occupying the minds of the younger generation? . . . Undoubtedly there must be not a few, perhaps a great many, concerning love, marriage, the family. . . . Yes, there were certainly many people perplexed by such questions, even now discussing them. In that case, write about the family! But how to write? . . . Otherwise it would probably not be accepted. Why predict anything unlucky? Still. . . .

Jumping out of bed, in four or five steps he reached the desk, sat down, took out a piece of paper with green lines, and promptly yet resignedly wrote the title: A Happy Family.

* A novelist contemporary with Lu Xun. The author declared that he modelled this story on Xu's "An Ideal Companion."

His pen immediately came to a standstill. He raised his head, his two eyes fixed on the ceiling, trying to decide on an environment for this Happy Family.

“Beijing?” he thought. “That won’t do; it’s too dead, even the atmosphere is dead. Even if a high wall were built round this family, still the air could scarcely be kept separate. No, that would never do! Jiangsu and Zhejiang may start fighting any day, and Fujian is even more out of the question. Sichuan? Guangdong? They are in the midst of fighting.* What about Shandong or Henan? . . . No, one of them might be kidnapped, and if that happened the happy family would become an unhappy one. The rents in the foreign concessions in Shanghai and Tianjin are too high. . . . Somewhere abroad? Ridiculous. I don’t know what Yunnan and Guizhou are like, but communications are too poor . . .”

He racked his brains but, unable to think of a good place, decided to fix tentatively on A — Then, however, he thought, “Nowadays many people object to the use of the Western alphabet to represent the names of people and places, saying it lessens the readers’ interest. Probably I had better not use it in my story this time, to be on the safe side. In that case what would be a good place? There is fighting in Hunan too; the rents in Dalian have gone up again. In Chahar, Jilin and Heilongjiang I have heard there are brigands, so they won’t do either! . . .”

Again he racked his brains to think of a good place, but in vain; so finally he made up his mind to fix tentatively on A — as the name of the place where his Happy Family should be.

“After all this Happy Family will have to be at A —. There can’t be any question about that. The family naturally consists of a husband and wife — the master and mistress — who married for love. Their marriage

* During this period there was civil war between warlords in many parts of China

contract contains over forty terms going into great detail, so that they have extraordinary equality and absolute freedom. Moreover they have both had a higher education and belong to the cultured élite. . . . Japanese-returned students are no longer the fashion, so let them be Western-returned students. The master of the house always wears a foreign suit, his collar is always snowy white. His wife's hair is always curled up like a sparrow's nest in front, her pearly white teeth are always peeping out, but she wears Chinese dress. . . ."

"That won't do, that won't do! Twenty-five catties!"

Hearing a man's voice outside the window he involuntarily turned his head to look. The sun shone through the curtains hanging by the window, dazzling his eyes, while he heard a sound like small bundles of wood being thrown down. "It doesn't matter," he thought, turning back again. "Twenty-five catties' of what? . . . They are the cultured élite, devoted to the arts. But because they have both grown up in happy surroundings, they don't like Russian novels. Most Russian novels describe the lower classes, so they are really quite out of keeping with such a family. 'Twenty-five catties'? Never mind. In that case, what books do they read? . . . Byron's poetry? Keats? That won't do, neither of them are safe. . . . Ah, I have it: they both like reading *An Ideal Husband*. Although I haven't read the book myself, even university professors praise it so highly that I am sure this couple must enjoy it too. You read it, I read it — they have a copy each, two copies altogether in the family . . ."

Becoming aware of a hollow feeling in his stomach, he put down the pen and rested his head on his hands, like a globe supported by two axles.

". . . The two of them are just having lunch," he thought. "The table is spread with a snowy white table cloth, and the cook brings in the dishes — Chinese food. 'Twenty-five catties.' Of what? Never mind. Why should

it be Chinese food? Westerners say Chinese cooking is the most progressive, the best to eat, the most hygienic; so they eat Chinese food. The first dish is brought in, but what is this first dish? . . .”

“Firewood . . .”

He turned his head with a start, to see standing on his left the mistress of his own family, her two gloomy eyes fastened on his face.

“What?” He spoke rather indignantly, feeling that her coming disturbed his work.

“The firewood is all used up, so today I have bought some more. Last time it was still two hundred and forty cash for ten catties, but today he wants two hundred and sixty. Suppose I give him two hundred and fifty?”

“All right, two hundred and fifty, let it be.”

“He has weighed it very unfairly. He insists that there are twenty-four and a half catties, but suppose I count it as twenty-three and a half?”

“All right. Count it as twenty-three and a half catties.”

“Then, five fives are twenty-five, three fives are fifteen. . . .”

“Oh, five fives are twenty-five, three fives are fifteen . . .” He could get no further either, but after stopping for a moment suddenly took up his pen and started working out a sum on the lined paper on which he had written “A Happy Family.” After working at it for some time he raised his head to say:

“Five hundred and eighty cash.”

“In that case I haven’t got enough here; I am still eighty or ninety short. . . .”

He pulled open the drawer of the desk, took out all the money in it — somewhere between twenty and thirty coppers — and put it in her outstretched hand. Then he watched her go out, and finally turned back to the desk. His head seemed to be bursting as if filled to the brim with sharp faggots. Five fives are twenty-five — scattered Arabic numerals were still imprinted on his

brain. He gave a long sigh and breathed out again deeply, as if by this means he might expel the firewood, the "five fives are twenty-five," and the Arabic numerals which had stuck in his head. Sure enough, after breathing out his heart seemed much lighter, whereupon he started thinking vaguely again:

"What dish? It doesn't matter, so long as it is something out of the way. Fried pork or prawns' roe and sea-slugs are really too common. I must have them eating 'Dragon and Tiger.' But what is that exactly? Some people say it's made of snakes and cats, and is an upper-class Guangdong dish, only eaten at big feasts. But I've seen the name on the menu in a Jiangsu restaurant; still, Jiangsu people aren't supposed to eat snakes or cats, so it must be, as someone else said, made of frogs and eels. Now what part of the country shall this couple be from? Never mind. After all, people from any part of the country can eat a dish of snake and cat (or frog and eel), without injuring their Happy Family. At any rate, this first dish is to be 'Dragon and Tiger'; there can be no question about that.

"Now that this bowl of 'Dragon and Tiger' is placed in the middle of the table, they take up their chopsticks simultaneously, point to the dish, smile sweetly at each other and say, in a foreign tongue:

" 'Chérie, s'il vous plaît!'

" 'Voulez-vous commencer, chéri!'

" 'Mais non, après vous!'

"Then they reach out their chopsticks simultaneously, and simultaneously take a morsel of snake — no, no, snake's flesh really sounds too peculiar; it would be better after all to say a morsel of eel. It is settled then that 'Dragon and Tiger' is made of frogs and eels. They pick out two morsels of eel simultaneously, exactly the same size. Five fives are twenty-five, three fives. . . . Never mind. And simultaneously put them in their mouths. . . ." Against his will he wanted to turn round, because he

was conscious of a good deal of excitement behind him, and considerable coming and going. But he persevered, and pursued his train of thought distractedly.

"This seems rather sentimental; no family would behave like this. Whatever makes me so woolly-minded? I'm afraid this good subject will never be written up . . . Or perhaps there is no need to have returned students; people who have received higher education in China would do just as well. They are both university graduates, the cultured élite, the élite. . . . The man is a writer, the woman is also a writer, or else a lover of literature. Or else the woman is a poetess; the man is a lover of poetry, a respecter of womanhood. Or else . . ."

Finally he could contain himself no longer, and turned round.

Beside the bookcase behind him had appeared a mound of cabbages, three at the bottom, two above, and one at the top, confronting him like a large letter A.

"Oh!" He started and gave a sigh, feeling his cheeks burn, while prickles ran up and down his spine. "Ah!" He took a very deep breath to get rid of the prickly feeling in his spine, then went on thinking, "The house of the Happy Family must have plenty of rooms. There is a store-room where things like cabbages are put. The master's study is apart, its walls lined with bookshelves; there are naturally no cabbages there. The shelves are filled with Chinese books and foreign books, including of course *An Ideal Husband* — two copies altogether. There is a separate bedroom, a brass bedstead, or something simpler like one of the elmwood beds made by the convicts of Number One Prison would do equally well. Beneath the bed is very clean. . . ." He glanced beneath his own bed; the firewood had all been used up, and there was only a piece of straw rope left, still coiling there like a dead snake.

"Twenty-three and a half catties. . . ." He felt that the firewood was just about to pour in in a never-ending stream under his bed, and his head ached again, so he got up quickly and went to the door to close it. But he had scarcely put his hand on the door when he felt that this was overhasty and let it go instead, dropping the door curtain that was thick with dust. At the same time he thought, "This method avoids the severity of shutting oneself in, as well as the discomfort of keeping the door open; it is quite in keeping with the *Doctrine of the Mean*.*"

". . . So the master's study door is always closed" He walked back, sat down and thought, "Anyone with business must first knock at the door, and have his permission to come in; that is really the only thing to be done. Now suppose the master is sitting in his study and the mistress comes to discuss literature, she knocks too. . . . At least of this one can be assured — she will not bring in any cabbages.

"'Entrez, chérie, s'il vous plaît!'

"But what happens when the master has no time to discuss literature? Does he ignore her, hearing her stand outside tapping gently on the door? That probably wouldn't do. Maybe it is all described in *An Ideal Husband* — that must really be an excellent novel. If I get paid for this article I must buy a copy to read!"

Slap!

His back stiffened, because he knew from experience that this slapping sound was made by his wife's hand striking their three-year-old daughter's head.

"In a Happy Family . . ." he thought, his back still rigid, hearing the child sobbing, "children are born late, yes, born late. Or perhaps it would be better to have none at all, just two people without any ties Or it might be better to stay in a hotel and let them look

* A Confucian classic advocating the principle of moderation in all things.

after everything, a single man without. . . ” Hearing the sound of sobbing increasing in volume, he stood up and brushed past the curtain, thinking, “Karl Marx wrote his *Das Kapital* while his children were crying around him. He must really have been a great man . . . ” He walked out, opened the outer door, and was assailed by a strong smell of kerosene. The child was lying to the right of the door, face downwards. As soon as she saw him she started crying aloud.

“There, there, all right! Don’t cry, don’t cry! There’s a good girl.” He bent down to pick her up. Having picked her up he turned round to see his wife standing furiously to the left of the door, also with a rigid back, her hands on her hips as if she were preparing to start physical exercises.

“Even you have to come and bully me! You can’t help, you only make trouble — even the kerosene lamp had to turn over. What shall we light this evening? . . .”

“There, there, all right! Don’t cry, don’t cry!” Ignoring his wife’s trembling tones, he carried the child into the house, and stroked her head. “There’s a good girl,” he repeated. Then he put her down, pulled out a chair and sat down. Setting her between his knees, he raised his hand. “Don’t cry, there’s a good girl,” he said. “Daddy will do ‘Pussy Washing’ for you.” At the same time he craned his neck, licked his palms from a distance twice, then with them traced circles towards his face.

“Aha! Pussy!” She started laughing.

“That’s right, that’s right. Pussy.” He traced several more circles, and then stopped, seeing her smiling at him with tears still in her eyes. It struck him suddenly that her sweet, innocent face was just like her mother’s five years ago, especially her bright red lips, although the general outline was smaller. That had been another bright winter’s day when she heard his decision to overcome all obstacles and sacrifice everything for her; when she too looked at him in the same way, smiling, with

tears in her eyes He sat down disconsolately, as if a little drunk

“Ah, sweet lips,” he thought.

The door curtain was suddenly fastened back and the firewood brought in

Then, suddenly coming to himself again, he saw that the child, still with tears in her eyes, was looking at him with her bright red lips parted. “Lips . . .” He glanced sideways to where the firewood was being brought in “. . . Probably it will be nothing but five fives are twenty-five, nine nines are eighty-one, all over again! . . . And two gloomy eyes. . .” So thinking he snatched up the green-lined paper with the heading and the figures written on it, crumpled it up and then unfolded it again to wipe her eyes and nose. “Good girl, run along and play by yourself” He pushed her away as he spoke, at the same time throwing the ball of paper into the wastepaper basket

But at once he felt rather sorry for the child, and, turning his head, followed her with his eyes as she walked forlornly away, while his ears were filled with the sound of firewood. Determined to concentrate, he turned back again and closed his eyes to put a stop to all distracting thoughts, sitting there quietly and peacefully.

He saw passing before him a flat, round, black-freckled flower with an orange centre, which floated from the left of his left eye right over to the opposite side where it disappeared; then a bright green flower, with a dark green centre; and finally a pile of six cabbages which formed themselves before him into an enormous letter A

March 19, 1924

SOAP

With her back to the north window in the slanting sunlight, Siming's wife was pasting paper coins for the dead with her eight-year-old daughter, Xiu'er, when she heard the slow, heavy footsteps of someone in cloth shoes and knew her husband was back. She paid no attention, though, simply went on pasting coins. But the tread of cloth shoes drew nearer and nearer, till it finally stopped beside her. Then she could not help looking up to see Siming before her, hunching his shoulders and stooping forward to fumble desperately under his cloth jacket in the inner pocket of his long gown.

By dint of twisting and turning he extracted his hand at last with a small oblong package in it, which he handed to his wife. As she took it, she smelt an indefinable fragrance rather reminiscent of olive. On the green paper wrapper was a bright golden seal with a network of tiny designs. Xiu'er bounded forward to seize this and look at it, but her mother promptly pushed her aside.

"Been shopping? . . ." she asked as she looked at it.

"Er — yes" He stared at the package in her hand.

The green paper wrapper was opened. Inside was a layer of very thin paper, also a palm-leaf-green, and not till this was unwrapped was the object itself exposed — glossy and hard, besides being palm-leaf-green, with another network of fine designs on it. The thin paper was a cream colour, it appeared. The indefinable fragrance rather reminiscent of olive was stronger now.

"My, this is really good soap!"

She held the soap to her nose as gingerly as if it were a child, and sniffed at it as she spoke.

“Er — yes. Just use this in future. . . .”

As he spoke, she noticed him eyeing her neck, and felt herself flushing up to her cheekbones. Sometimes when she rubbed her neck, especially behind the ears, her fingers detected a roughness; and though she knew this was the accumulated dirt of many years, she had never given it much thought. Now, under his scrutiny, she could not help blushing as she looked at this green, foreign soap with the curious scent, and this blush spread right to the tips of her ears. She mentally resolved to have a thorough wash with this soap after supper.

“There are places you can’t wash clean just with honey locust pods,”* she muttered to herself.

“Ma, can I have this?” As Xiu’er reached out for the palm-leaf-green paper, Zhao’er, the younger daughter who had been playing outside, came running in too. Mrs Siming promptly pushed them both aside, folded the thin paper in place, wrapped the green paper round it as before, then leant over to put it on the highest shelf of the wash-stand. After one final glance, she turned back to her paper coins.

“Xuecheng!” Siming seemed to have remembered something. He gave a long-drawn-out shout, sitting down on a high-backed chair opposite his wife.

“Xuecheng!” she helped him call.

She stopped pasting coins to listen, but not a sound could she hear. When she saw him with upturned head waiting so impatiently, she felt quite apologetic.

“Xuecheng!” she called shrilly at the top of her voice.

This call indeed proved effective, for they heard the tramp of leather shoes draw near, and Xuecheng was

* In many parts of China, honey locust pods were used for washing. They were cheaper than soap, but not so effective.

standing before her. He was in shirt sleeves, and his plump round face was shiny with perspiration.

"What were you doing?" she asked disapprovingly. "Why didn't you hear your father call?"

"I was practising Hexagram Boxing." He turned at once to his father and straightened up, looking at him as if to ask what he wanted.

"Xuecheng, I want to ask you the meaning of *o-du-fu*!"*

"*O-du-fu*? . . . Isn't it a very fierce woman?"

"What nonsense! The idea!" Siming was suddenly furious. "Am I a woman, pray?"

Xuecheng recoiled two steps, and stood straighter than ever. Though his father's gait sometimes reminded him of the way old men walked in Beijing opera, he had never considered Siming as a woman. His answer, he saw now, had been a great mistake.

"As if I didn't know *o-du-fu* means a very fierce woman. Would I have to ask *you* that? — This isn't Chinese, it's foreign devils' language, I'm telling you. What does it mean, do you know?"

"I . . . I don't know." Xuecheng felt even more uneasy.

"Pah! What use is it my spending all that money to send you to school if you don't even understand a little thing like this? Your school boasts that it lays equal stress on speech and comprehension, yet it hasn't taught you anything. The ones speaking this devils' language couldn't have been more than fourteen or fifteen, actually a little younger than you, yet they were chattering away in it, while you can't even tell me the meaning. And you have the face to answer 'I don't know.' Go and look it up for me at once!"

* In Chinese this means "vicious wife"

“Yes,” answered Xuecheng deep down in his throat, then respectfully withdrew

“I don’t know what students today are coming to,” declared Siming with emotion after a pause “As a matter of fact, in the time of Guang Xu,* I was all in favour of opening schools, but I never foresaw how great the evils would be. What ‘emancipation’ and ‘freedom’ have we had? There is no true learning, nothing but absurdities. I’ve spent quite a bit of money on Xuecheng, all to no purpose. It wasn’t easy to get him into this half-Western, half-Chinese school, where they claim they lay equal stress on ‘speaking and comprehending English.’** You’d think all should be well. But — bah! — after one whole year of study he can’t even understand *o-du-fu*! He must still be studying dead books. What use is such a school, I ask you? What I say is: Close the whole lot of them!”

“Yes, really, better close the whole lot of them,” chimed in his wife sympathetically, pasting away at the paper money.

“There’s no need for Xiu’er and her sister to attend any school. ‘What’s the good of girls studying?’ as Ninth Grandpa said. When he opposed girls’ schools I attacked him for it; but now I see the old folk were right after all. Just think, it’s already in very poor taste the way women wander up and down the streets, and now they want to cut their hair as well. Nothing disgusts me so much as these short-haired schoolgirls. What I say is: There’s some excuse for soldiers and bandits, but these girls are the ones who turn everything upside-down. They ought to be very severely dealt with indeed. . . .”

* I e., 1875-1908.

** English was taught in nearly all the new schools at that time, and learning to speak was considered as important as learning to read

“Yes, as if it wasn’t enough for all men to look like monks, the women are imitating nuns”*

“Xuecheng!”

Xuecheng hurried in holding a small, fat, gilt-edged book, which he handed to his father

“This looks like it,” he said, pointing to one place. “Here. . . .”

Siming took it and looked at it. He knew it was a dictionary, but the characters were very small and horizontally printed too. He turned frowning towards the window, and screwed up his eyes to read the passage Xuecheng had pointed out.

“‘A society founded in the eighteenth century for mutual relief’ — No, that can’t be it. — How do you pronounce this?” He pointed at the devils’ word in front

“Odd fellows”

“No, no, that wasn’t it” Siming suddenly lost his temper again. “I told you it was bad language, a swear-word of some sort, to abuse someone of my type. Understand? Go and look it up!”

Xuecheng glanced at him several times, but did not move.

“This is too puzzling. How can he make head or tail of it? You must explain things clearly to him first, before he can look it up properly.” Seeing Xuecheng in a quandary, his mother felt sorry for him and intervened rather indignantly on his behalf.

“It was when I was buying soap at Guang Run Xiang on the main street,” sighed Siming, turning to her. “There were three students shopping there too. Of course, to them I must have seemed a little pernicky. I looked at five or six kinds of soap all over forty cents, and turned them down. Then I looked at some priced ten cents a cake, but it was too poor, with no scent at

* Monks and nuns in China shaved their heads. Hence, at the end of the Qing Dynasty and later, conservatives laughed at the men who cut their queues, claiming they looked like monks.

all Since I thought it best to strike a happy mean, I chose that green soap at twenty-four cents a cake. The assistant was one of these supercilious young fellows with eyes on the top of his head, so he pulled a long dog's face. At that those impudent students started winking at each other and talking devils' language. Then I wanted to unwrap the soap and look at it before paying — for with all that foreign paper round it, how could I tell whether it was good or bad? But that supercilious young fellow not only refused, but was very unreasonable and passed some offensive remarks, at which those whipper-snappers laughed. It was the youngest of the lot who said that, looking straight at me, and the rest of them started laughing. So it must have been some bad word." He turned back to Xuecheng. "Look for it in the section headed Bad Language!"

"Yes," answered Xuecheng deep down in his throat, then respectfully withdrew.

"Yet they still shout 'New Culture! New Culture!' when the world's in such a state! Isn't this bad enough?" His eyes on the rafters, he went on. "The students have no morals, society has no morals. Unless we find some panacea, China will really be finished. Look, how pathetic that was!"

"What?" asked his wife casually, not really curious.

"A filial daughter. . . ." His eyes came round to her, and there was respect in his voice. "There were two beggars on the main street. One was a girl who looked eighteen or nineteen. Actually, it's most improper to beg at that age, but beg she did. She was with an old woman of about seventy, who had white hair and was blind. They were begging under the eaves of that clothes shop, and everybody said how filial she was. The old one was her grandmother. Whatever trifle the girl received, she gave it to her grandmother, choosing to go hungry herself. But do you think people would give alms to even such a filial daughter?"

He fixed her with his eye, as if to test her intelligence. She made no answer, but fixed him with *her* eye, as if waiting for him to elucidate.

“Bah — no!” He supplied the answer himself at last. “I watched for a long time, and saw one person only give her a copper. Plenty of others had gathered round, but only to jeer at them. There were two low types as well, one of whom had the impertinence to say —

“‘Afa! Don’t be put off by the dirt on this piece of goods. If you buy two cakes of soap and give her a good scrubbing, the result won’t be bad at all!’ Think, what a way to talk!”

She snorted and lowered her head. After quite a time, she asked rather casually, “Did *you* give her any money?”

“Did I? — No. I’d have felt ashamed to give just one or two coins. She wasn’t an ordinary beggar, you know . . .”

“Mm.” Without waiting for him to finish she stood up slowly and walked to the kitchen. Dusk was gathering, and it was time for supper.

Siming stood up too, and walked into the courtyard. It was lighter out than in. Xuecheng was practising Hexagram Boxing in a corner by the wall. This constituted his “home education,” and he used the economical method of employing the hour between day and night for this purpose. Xuecheng had been boxing now for about half a year. Siming nodded very slightly, as if in approval, then began to pace the courtyard with his hands behind his back. Before long, the broad leaves of the evergreen which was the only potted plant they had were swallowed up in the darkness, and stars twinkled between white clouds which looked like torn cotton. Night had fallen. Siming could not repress his growing indignation. He felt called on to do great deeds, to declare war on all the bad students around and on this

wicked society. By degrees he grew bolder and bolder, his steps became longer and longer, and the thud of his cloth soles grew louder and louder, waking the hen and her chicks in the coop so that they cheeped in alarm

A light appeared in the hall — the signal that supper was ready — and the whole household gathered round the table in the middle. The lamp stood at the lower end of the table, while Siming sat alone at the head. His plump, round face was like Xuecheng's, with the addition of two sparse whiskers. Seen through the hot vapour from the vegetable soup, he looked like the God of Wealth you find in temples. On the left sat Mrs. Siming and Zhao'er, on the right Xuecheng and Xiu'er. Chopsticks pattered like rain against the bowls. Though no one said a word, their supper table was very animated.

Zhao'er upset her bowl, spilling soup over half the table. Siming opened his narrow eyes as wide as he could. Only when he saw she was going to cry did he stop glaring at her and reach out with his chopsticks for a tender morsel of cabbage he had spotted. But the tender morsel had disappeared. He looked right and left, and discovered Xuecheng on the point of stuffing it into his wide-open mouth. Disappointed, he ate a mouthful of yellowish leaves instead.

"Xuecheng!" He looked at his son. "Have you found that phrase or not?"

"Which phrase? — No, not yet!"

"Pah! Look at you, not a good student and with no sense either — all you can do is eat! You should learn from that filial daughter: although she's a beggar, she still treats her grandmother very respectfully, even if it means going hungry herself. But what do you impudent students know of such things? You'll grow up like those low types. . . ."

"I've thought of one possibility, but I don't know if it's right . . . I think, perhaps, they may have said *o-du-fu-la*"*

"That's right! That's it exactly! That's exactly the sound it was. *o-du-fu-la*. What does that mean? You belong to the same group: you must know"

"Mean? — I'm not sure what it means"

"Nonsense. Don't try to deceive me. You're all a bad lot."

"'Even thunder won't strike folk at meal,'" burst out Mrs. Siming suddenly. "Why do you keep losing your temper today? Even at supper you can't stop hitting the hen while pointing at the dog. What do boys that age understand?"

"What?" Siming was on the point of answering back when he saw her sunken cheeks were quivering with anger, her colour had changed, and a fearful glint had come into her triangular eyes. He hastily changed his tune. "I've not been losing my temper. I'm just telling Xuecheng to learn a little sense."

"How can he understand what's in *your* mind?" She looked angrier than ever. "If he had any sense, he'd long since have lit a lantern or a torch and gone out to fetch that filial daughter. You've already bought her one cake of soap. all you have to do is buy another . . ."

"Nonsense! That's what that low type said."

"I'm not so sure. If you buy another cake and give her a good scrubbing, then worship her, the whole world will be at peace"

"How can you say such a thing? What connection is there? Because I remembered you'd no soap. . ."

"There's a connection all right. You bought it specially for the filial daughter; so go and give her a good scrubbing. I don't deserve it. I don't want it. I don't want to share her glory."

* Chinese transliteration of "old fool"

“Really, how can you talk like that?” mumbled Siming. “You women . . .” His face was perspiring like Xuecheng’s after Hexagram Boxing, probably mostly because the food had been so hot.

“What about us women? We women are much better than you men. If you men aren’t cursing eighteen- or nineteen-year-old girl students, you’re praising eighteen- or nineteen-year-old girl beggars such dirty minds you have! Scrubbing, indeed! — Disgusting!”

“Didn’t you hear? That was one of those low types. . . .”

“Siming!” A thundering voice was heard from the darkness outside.

“Daotong? I’m coming!”

Siming knew this was Ho Daotong, famed for his powerful voice, and he shouted back as joyfully as a criminal newly reprieved.

“Xuecheng, hurry up and light the lamp to show Uncle Ho into the library!”

Xuecheng lit a candle, and ushered Daotong into a room on the west. They were followed by Bu Weiyuan.

“I’m sorry I didn’t welcome you. Excuse me.” With his mouth still full of rice, Siming came in and bowed with clasped hands in greeting. “Won’t you join us at our simple meal? . . .”

“We’ve already eaten,” Weiyuan stepped forward and greeted him. “We’ve hurried here at this time of night because of the eighteenth essay and poem contest of the Moral Rearmament Literary League. Isn’t tomorrow the seventeenth?”

“What? Is it the sixteenth today?” asked Siming in surprise.

“See how absent-minded you are!” boomed Daotong.

“So we’ll have to send something in tonight to the newspaper office, to make sure they print it tomorrow.”

“I’ve already drafted the title of the essay. See whether you think it will do or not.” As he was speaking, Daotong produced a slip of paper from his handkerchief and handed it to Siming.

Siming stepped up to the candle, unfolded the paper, and read it word by word, “‘We humbly suggest an essay in the name of the whole nation to beg the President to issue an order for the promotion of the Confucian classics and the worship of the mother of Mencius,* in order to revive this moribund world and preserve our national character.’ Very good. Very good. Isn’t it a little long, though?”

“That doesn’t matter,” answered Daotong loudly. “I’ve worked it out, and it won’t cost more to advertise. But what about the title for the poem?”

“The title for the poem?” Siming suddenly looked most respectful. “I’ve thought of one. How about ‘The Filial Daughter’? It’s a true story, and she deserves to be eulogized. On the main street today . . .”

“Oh, no, that won’t do,” put in Weiyuan hastily, waving his hand to stop Siming. “I saw her too. She isn’t from these parts, and I couldn’t understand her dialect, nor she mine. I don’t know where she’s from. Everyone says she’s filial; but when I asked her if she could write poems, she shook her head. If she could, that would be fine.”**

“But since loyalty and filial piety are so important, it doesn’t matter too much if she can’t write poems. . . .”

“That isn’t true. Quite otherwise.” Weiyuan raised his hands and rushed towards Siming, to shake and push

* A woman famous for her virtue. According to tradition, she moved house three times to avoid undesirable companions for her son.

** In old China, it was considered romantic for women to exchange ideas with men through the medium of poems.

him "She'd only be interesting if she could write poems"

"Let's use this title" Siming pushed him aside "Add an explanation and print it In the first place, it will serve to eulogize her; in the second, we can use this to criticize society. What is the world coming to anyway? I watched for some time, and didn't see anybody give her a cent — aren't people utterly heartless?"

"*Aiya*, Siming!" Weiyuan rushed over again. "You're cursing baldheads to a monk. I didn't give her anything because I didn't happen to have any money on me"

"Don't be so sensitive, Weiyuan" Siming pushed him aside again "Of course you're an exception Let me finish There was quite a crowd around them, showing no respect, just jeering There were two low types as well, who were even more impertinent One of them said, 'Afa! If you buy two cakes of soap and give her a good scrubbing, the result won't be bad at all!' Just think. . . ."

"Ha, ha! Two cakes of soap!" Daotong suddenly bel-
lowed with laughter, nearly splitting their ear-drums.
"Buy soap! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Daotong! Daotong! Don't make such a noise!" Siming gave a start, panic-stricken.

"A good scrubbing! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Daotong!" Siming looked stern. "We're discussing serious matters Why should you make such a noise, nearly deafening everyone? Listen to me: we'll use both these titles, and send them straight to the newspaper office so that they come out without fail tomorrow I'll have to trouble you both to take them there."

"All right, all right. Of course," agreed Weiyuan readily.

"Ha, ha! A good scrubbing! Ho, ho!"

"Daotong!" shouted Siming, furious.

This shout made Daotong stop laughing. After they had drawn up the explanation, Weiyuan copied it on

the paper and left with Daotong for the newspaper office. Siming carried the candle to see them out, then walked back to the door of the hall feeling rather apprehensive. After some hesitation, though, he finally crossed the threshold. As he went in, his eyes fell on the small, green, oblong package of soap in the middle of the central table, the gold characters on it glittering in the lamp-light, with fine designs around them.

Xiu'er and Zhao'er were playing on the floor at the lower end of the table, while Xuecheng sat on the right side looking up something in his dictionary. Last of all, on the high-backed chair in the shadows far from the lamp, Siming discovered his wife. Her impassive face showed neither joy nor anger, and she was staring at nothing.

"A good scrubbing indeed! Disgusting!"

Faintly, Siming heard Xiu'er's voice behind him. He turned, but she was not moving. Only Zhao'er had put both small hands to her face as if to shame somebody.

This was no place for him. He blew out the candle, and went into the yard to pace up and down. And, because he forgot to be quiet, the mother hen and her chicks started cheeping again. At once he walked more lightly, moving further away. After a long time, the lamp in the hall was transferred to the bedroom. The moonlight on the ground was like seamless white gauze, and the moon — quite full — seemed a jade disc among the bright clouds.

He felt not a little depressed, as if he, like the filial daughter, was "utterly forlorn and alone." That night he slept very late.

By the next morning, however, the soap was being honoured by being used. Getting up later than usual, he saw his wife leaning over the wash-stand rubbing her neck, with bubbles like those emitted by great crabs heaped up over both her ears. The difference between these and the small white bubbles produced by honey

locust pods was like that between heaven and earth. After this, an indefinable fragrance rather reminiscent of olive always emanated from Mrs. Siming. Not for nearly half a year did this suddenly give place to another scent, which all who smelt it averred was like sandalwood.

March 22, 1924

THE MISANTHROPE

I

My friendship with Wei Lianshu, now that I come to think of it, was certainly a strange one. It began and ended with a funeral.

When I lived in S —, I often heard him mentioned as an odd fellow. After studying zoology, he had become a history teacher in a middle school, he treated others in cavalier fashion, yet liked to concern himself with their affairs, and while maintaining that the family system should be abolished, he would remit his salary to his grandmother the same day that he drew it. He had many other strange ways, enough to set tongues wagging in the town. One autumn I stayed at Hanshishan with some relatives also named Wei, who were distantly related to him. However, they understood him even less, looking on him as if he were a foreigner. "He's not like us!" they said.

This was not strange, for although China had had modern schools for some twenty years, there was not even a primary school in Hanshishan. He was the only one to have left that mountain village to study; hence in the villagers' eyes he was an undoubted freak. They also envied him, though, saying he had made a lot of money.

Towards the end of autumn, there was an epidemic of dysentery in the village, and in alarm I thought of returning to the town. I heard his grandmother had

contracted the disease too, and because of her age her case was serious. Moreover there was not a single doctor in the village. Wei had no other relative but this grandmother, who led a simple life with a maidservant. As he had lost both parents in his childhood, she had brought him up. She was said to have known much hardship earlier, but was now leading a comfortable life. Since he had neither wife nor children, however, his family was very quiet, and this presumably was one of the things considered freakish about him.

The village was a hundred li from the town by land, and seventy li by water; so that it would take four days to fetch Wei back. In this out-of-the-way village such matters were considered momentous news, eagerly canvassed by all. The next day the old woman was reported to be in a critical state, and the messenger on his way. However, before dawn she died, her last words being:

“Why won’t you let me see my grandson?”

Elders of the clan, close relatives, members of his grandmother’s family and others crowded the room anticipating Wei’s return, which would be in time for the funeral. The coffin and shroud had long been ready, but the immediate problem was how to cope with this grandson, for they expected he would insist on changes in the funeral rites. After a conference, they decided on three terms which he must accept. First, he must wear deep mourning; secondly, he must kowtow to the coffin; and, thirdly, he must let Buddhist monks and Taoist priests say mass. In short, all must be done in the traditional manner.

This decision once reached, they decided to gather there in full force when Wei arrived home, to assist each other in this negotiation which could admit of no compromise. Licking their lips, the villagers eagerly awaited developments. Wei, as a “modern,” “a follower of foreign creeds,” had always proved unreasonable. A

struggle would certainly ensue, which might even result in some novel spectacle

He arrived home, I heard, in the afternoon, and only bowed to his grandmother's shrine as he entered. The elders proceeded at once according to plan. They summoned him to the hall, and after a lengthy preamble led up to the subject. Then, speaking in unison and at length, they gave him no chance to argue. At last, however, they dried up, and a deep silence fell in the hall. All eyes fastened fearfully on his lips. But without changing countenance, he answered simply:

"All right"

This was totally unexpected. A weight had been lifted from their minds, yet their hearts felt heavier than ever, for this was so "freakish" as to give rise to anxiety. The villagers looking for news were also disappointed and said to each other, "Strange. He said, 'All right.' Let's go and watch." Wei's "all right" meant that all would be in accordance with tradition, in which case it was not worth watching; still, they wanted to look on, and after dusk the hall filled with light-hearted spectators.

I was one of those who went, having first sent along my gift of incense and candles. As I arrived he was already putting the shroud on the dead. He was a thin man with an angular face, hidden to a certain extent by his dishevelled hair, dark eyebrows and moustache. His eyes gleamed darkly. He laid out the body very well, as deftly as an expert, so that the spectators were impressed. According to the local custom, at a married woman's funeral members of the dead woman's family found fault even if all was well done, however he remained silent, complying with their wishes with a face devoid of all expression. A grey-haired old woman standing before me gave a sigh of envy and respect.

Then people kowtowed; then they wailed, all the women chanting as they wailed. When the body was put in the coffin, all kowtowed again, then wailed again,

until the lid of the coffin was nailed down. Silence reigned for a moment, and then there was a stir of surprise and dissatisfaction. I too suddenly realized that Wei had not shed a single tear from beginning to end. He was simply sitting on the mourner's mat, his two eyes gleaming darkly.

In this atmosphere of surprise and dissatisfaction, the ceremony ended. The disgruntled mourners seemed about to leave, but Wei was still sitting on the mat, lost in thought. Suddenly, tears fell from his eyes, then he burst into a long wail like a wounded wolf howling in the wilderness at the dead of night, anger and sorrow mingled with his agony. This was not in accordance with tradition and, taken by surprise, we were at a loss. After a little hesitation, some went to try to persuade him to stop, and these were joined by more and more people until finally there was a crowd round him. But he sat there wailing, motionless as an iron statue.

With a sense of anti-climax, the crowd dispersed. Wei continued to cry for about half an hour, then suddenly stopped, and without a word to the mourners went straight inside. Later it was reported by spies that he had gone into his grandmother's room, lain down on the bed and, to all appearances, fallen sound asleep.

Two days later, on the eve of my return to town, I heard the villagers discussing eagerly, as if they were possessed, how Wei intended to burn most of his dead grandmother's furniture and possessions, giving the rest to the maidservant who had served her during her life and attended her on her deathbed. Even the house was to be lent to the maid for an indefinite period. Wei's relatives argued themselves hoarse, but he was adamant.

Largely out of curiosity, perhaps, on my way back I passed his house and went in to express condolence. He received me wearing a hemless white mourning dress, and his expression was as cold as ever. I urged him

not to take it so to heart, but apart from grunting non-committally all he said was

“Thanks for your concern”

II

Early that winter we met for the third time. It was in a bookshop in S —, where we nodded simultaneously, showing at least that we were acquainted. But it was at the end of that year, after I lost my job, that we became friends. Thenceforward I paid Wei many visits. In the first place, of course, I had nothing to do; in the second place he was said to sympathize with lame dogs, despite his habitual reserve. However, fortune being fickle, lame dogs do not remain lame for ever, hence he had few steady friends. Report proved true, for as soon as I sent in my card, he received me. His sitting-room consisted of two rooms thrown into one, quite bare of ornament, with nothing in it apart from table and chairs but some bookcases. Although he was reputed to be terribly “modern,” there were few modern books on the shelves. He knew that I had lost my job, but after the usual polite remarks had been exchanged, host and guest sat silent, with nothing to say to each other. I noticed he very quickly finished his cigarette, only dropping it to the ground when it nearly burnt his fingers.

“Have a cigarette,” he said suddenly, reaching for another.

So I took one and, between puffs, spoke of teaching and books, still finding very little to say. I was just thinking of leaving when shouts and footsteps were heard outside the door, and four children rushed in. The eldest was about eight or nine, the smallest four or five. The hands, faces and clothes were very dirty, and they were thoroughly unprepossessing; yet Wei’s face lit up with

pleasure, and getting up at once he walked to the other room, saying:

"Come, Daliang, Erliang, all of you! I have bought the mouth-organs you wanted yesterday"

The children rushed in after him, to return immediately with a mouth-organ apiece, but once outside they started fighting, and one of them cried

"There's one each; they're exactly the same. Don't squabble!" he said as he followed them.

"Whose children are they?" I asked

"The landlord's. They have no mother, only a grandmother."

"Your landlord is a widower?"

"Yes. His wife died three or four years ago, and he has not remarried. Otherwise, he would not rent his spare rooms to a bachelor like me" He said this with a cold smile

I wanted very much to ask why he had remained single so long, but I did not know him well enough

Once you knew him well, he was a good talker. He was full of ideas, many of them quite remarkable. What exasperated me were some of his guests. As a result, probably, of reading Yu Dafu's* romantic stories, they constantly referred to themselves as "the young unfortunate" or "the outcast"; and, sprawling on the big chairs like lazy and arrogant crabs, they would sigh, smoke and frown all at the same time.

Then there were the landlord's children, who were always fighting among themselves, knocking over bowls and plates, begging for cakes, keeping up an ear-splitting din. Yet the sight of them invariably dispelled Wei's customary coldness, and they seemed to be the most precious thing in his life. Once the third child was said to have measles. He was so worried that his dark face

* A contemporary of Lu Xun's, who wrote about repressed young men

took on an even darker hue. The attack proved a light one, however, and thereafter the children's grandmother made a joke of his anxiety.

"Children are always good. They are all so innocent . . ." he seized an opening to say one day, having, apparently, sensed my impatience.

"Not always," I answered casually.

"Always. Children have none of the faults of grown-ups. If they turn out badly later, as you contend, it is because they have been moulded by their environment. Originally they are not bad, but innocent. . . . I think China's only hope lies in this."

"I don't agree. Without the root of evil, how could they bear evil fruit in later life? Take a seed, for example. It is because it contains the embryo leaves, flowers and fruits, that it can grow later into these things. There must be a cause. . . ." Since my unemployment, just like those great officials who resigned from office and took up Buddhism, I had been reading the Buddhist sutras. I did not understand Buddhist philosophy though, and was just talking at random.

However, Wei was annoyed. He gave me a look, then said no more. I could not tell whether he had no more to say, or whether he felt it not worth arguing with me. But he looked cold again, as he had not done for a long time, and smoked two cigarettes one after the other in silence. By the time he reached for the third cigarette, I had to beat a retreat.

Our estrangement lasted three months. Then, owing in part to forgetfulness, in part to the fact that he fell out with those "innocent" children, he came to consider my slighting remarks about children as excusable. Or so I surmised. This happened in my house after drinking one day, when, with a rather melancholy look, he cocked his head, and said:

"Come to think of it, it's really curious. On my way here I met a small child with a reed in his hand, which

he pointed at me, shouting, 'Kill!' He was just a toddler. . . ."

"He must have been moulded by his environment"

As soon as I had said this, I wanted to take it back. However, he did not seem to care, just went on drinking heavily, smoking furiously in between

"I meant to ask you," I said, trying to change the subject. "You don't usually call on people, what made you come out today? I've known you for more than a year, yet this is the first time you've been here."

"I was just going to tell you don't call on me for the time being. There are a father and son in my place who are perfect pests. They are scarcely human!"

"Father and son? Who are they?" I was surprised

"My cousin and his son Well, the son resembles the father."

"I suppose they came to town to see you and have a good time?"

"No. They came to talk me into adopting the boy"

"What, to adopt the boy?" I exclaimed in amazement
"But you are not married."

"They know I won't marry But that's nothing to them. Actually they want to inherit that tumble-down house of mine in the village. I have no other property, you know; as soon as I get money I spend it I've only that house Their purpose in life is to drive out the old maidservant who is living in the place for the time being"

The cynicism of his remark took me aback. However I tried to soothe him, by saying:

"I don't think your relatives can be so bad. They are only rather old-fashioned For instance, that year when you cried bitterly, they came forward eagerly to plead with you. . . ."

"When I was a child and my father died, I cried bitterly because they wanted to take the house from me and make me put my mark on the document, and they came

forward eagerly *then* to plead with me . . .” He looked up, as if searching the air for that bygone scene.

“The crux of the matter is — you have no children. Why don’t you get married?” I had found a way to change the subject, and this was something I had been wanting to ask for a long time. It seemed an excellent opportunity.

He looked at me in surprise, then dropped his gaze to his knees, and started smoking. I received no answer to my question.

III

Yet, even this inane existence he was not allowed to enjoy in peace. Gradually there appeared anonymous attacks in the less reputable papers, and in the schools rumours spread concerning him. This was not the simple gossip of the old days, but deliberately damaging. I knew this was the outcome of articles he had taken to writing for the magazines, so I paid no attention. The citizens of S — disliked nothing more than fearless argument, and anyone guilty of it would indubitably become the object of secret attacks. This was the rule, and Wei knew it too. However, in spring, when I heard he had been asked to resign by the school authorities, I confessed it surprised me. Of course, this was only to be expected, and it surprised me simply because I had hoped my friend could escape. The citizens of S — were not proving more vicious than usual.

I was occupied then with my own problems, negotiating to go to a school in Shanyang that autumn, so I had no time to call on him. Some three months passed before I was at leisure, and even then it had not occurred to me to visit him. One day, passing the main street, I happened to pause before a second-hand book-stall, where I was startled to see displayed an early

edition of the *Commentaries on the "Records of the Historian,"** from Wei's collection. He was no connoisseur, but he loved books, and I knew he prized this particular book. He must be very hard pressed to have sold it. It seemed scarcely possible he could have become so poor only two or three months after losing his job; yet he spent money as soon as he had it, and had never saved. So I decided to call on him. On the same street I bought a bottle of liquor, two packages of peanuts and two smoked fish-heads.

His door was closed. I called out twice, but there was no reply. Thinking he was asleep, I called louder, hammering on the door at the same time.

"He's probably out." The children's grandmother, a fat woman with small eyes, thrust her grey head out from the opposite window, and spoke impatiently.

"Where has he gone?" I asked.

"Where? Who knows — where could he go? You can wait, he will be back soon."

So I pushed open the door and went into his sitting-room. It was greatly changed, looking desolate in its emptiness. There was little furniture left, while all that remained of his library were those foreign books which could not be sold. The middle of the room was still occupied by the table round which those woeful and gallant young men, unrecognized geniuses, and dirty, noisy children had formerly gathered. Now it all seemed very quiet, and there was a thin layer of dust on the table. I put the bottle and packages down, pulled over a chair, and sat down by the table facing the door.

Very soon, sure enough, the door opened, and someone stepped in as silently as a shadow. It was Wei. It might have been the twilight that made his face look dark; but his expression was unchanged.

* By Sima Zhen of the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

"Ah, it's you? How long have you been here?" He seemed pleased

"Not very long," I said. "Where have you been?"

"Nowhere in particular. Just taking a stroll."

He pulled up a chair too and sat by the table. We started drinking, and spoke of his losing his job. However, he did not care to talk much about it, considering it as only to be expected. He had come across many similar cases. It was not strange at all, and not worth discussing. As usual, he drank heavily, and discoursed on society and the study of history. Something made me glance at the empty bookshelves and, remembering the *Commentaries on the "Records of the Historian,"* I was conscious of a slight loneliness and sadness.

"Your sitting-room has a deserted look. . . . Have you had fewer visitors recently?"

"None at all. They don't find it much fun when I'm not in a good mood. A bad mood certainly makes people uncomfortable. Just as no one goes to the park in winter . . ."

He took two sips of liquor in succession, then fell silent. Suddenly, looking up, he asked, "I suppose you have had no luck either in finding work?"

Although I knew he was only venting his feelings as a result of drinking, I felt indignant at the way people treated him. Just as I was about to say something, he pricked up his ears, then, scooping up some peanuts, went out. Outside, the laughter and shouts of the children could be heard.

But as soon as he went out, the children became quiet. It sounded as if they had left. He went after them, and said something, but I could hear no reply. Then he came back, as silent as a shadow, and put the handful of peanuts back in the package.

"They don't even want to eat anything I give them," he said sarcastically, in a low voice.

"Old Wei," I said, forcing a smile, although I was sick at heart, "I think you are tormenting yourself unnecessarily. Why think so poorly of your fellow men?"

He only smiled cynically.

"I haven't finished yet. I suppose you consider that people like me, who come here occasionally, do so in order to kill time or amuse themselves at your expense?"

"No, I don't. Well, sometimes I do. Perhaps they come to find something to talk about."

"Then you are wrong. People are not like that. You are really wrapping yourself up in a cocoon. You should take a more cheerful view." I sighed.

"Maybe. But tell me, where does the thread for the cocoon come from? Of course, there are plenty of people like that; take my grandmother, for example. Although I have none of her blood in my veins, I may inherit her fate. But that doesn't matter, I have already bewailed my fate together with hers . . ."

Then I remembered what had happened at his grandmother's funeral. I could almost see it before my eyes.

"I still don't understand why you cried so bitterly," I said bluntly.

"You mean at my grandmother's funeral? No, you wouldn't." He lit the lamp. "I suppose it was because of that that we became friends," he said quietly. "You know, this grandmother was my grandfather's second wife. My father's own mother died when he was three." Growing thoughtful, he drank silently, and finished a smoked fish-head.

"I didn't know it to begin with. Only, from my childhood I was puzzled. At that time my father was still alive, and our family was well off. During the lunar New Year we would hang up the ancestral images and hold a grand sacrifice. It was one of my rare pleasures to look at those splendidly dressed images. At that time a maidservant would always carry me to an image, and point at it, saying, 'This is your own grandmother. Bow

to her so that she will protect you and make you grow up strong and healthy' I could not understand how I came to have another grandmother, in addition to the one beside me. But I liked this grandmother who was 'my own'. She was not as old as the granny at home. Young and beautiful, wearing a red costume with golden embroidery and a headdress decked with pearls, she resembled my mother. When I looked at her, her eyes seemed to gaze down on me, and a faint smile appeared on her lips. I knew she was very fond of me too.

"But I liked the granny at home too, who sat all day under the window slowly plying her needle. However, no matter how merrily I laughed and played in front of her, or called to her, I could not make her laugh; and that made me feel she was cold, unlike other children's grandmothers. Still, I liked her. Later on, though, I gradually cooled towards her, not because I had grown older and learned she was not my own grandmother, but rather because I was exasperated by the way she kept on sewing mechanically, day in day out. She was unchanged, however. She sewed, looked after me, loved and protected me as before, and though she seldom smiled, she never scolded me. It was the same after my father died. Later on, we lived almost entirely on her sewing, so it was still the same, until I went to school . . ."

The light flickered as the kerosene gave out, and he stood up to refill the lamp from a small tin kettle under the bookcase.

"The price of kerosene has gone up twice this month," he said slowly, after turning up the wick. "Life will become harder every day. She remained the same until I graduated from school and got a job, when our life became more secure. She didn't change, I suppose, until she was sick and couldn't carry on, but had to take to her bed . . ."

“Since her later days, I think, were not too unhappy on the whole, and she lived to a great age, I need not have mourned. Besides, weren’t there a lot of others there eager to wail? Even those who had tried their hardest to rob her wailed, or appeared bowed down with grief.” He laughed. “However, at that moment her whole life rose to my mind — the life of one who created loneliness for herself and tasted its bitterness. And I felt there were many people like that. I wanted to weep for them; but perhaps it was largely because I was too sentimental. . . .

“Your present advice to me is what I felt with regard to her. But actually my ideas at that time were wrong. As for myself, since I grew up my feelings for her cooled. . . .”

He paused, with a cigarette between his fingers and bending his head lost himself in thought. The lamplight flickered.

“Well, it is hard to live so that no one will mourn for your death,” he said, as if to himself. After a pause he looked up at me, and asked, “I suppose you can’t help? I shall have to find something to do very soon.”

“Have you no other friends you could ask?” I was in no position to help myself then, let alone others.

“I have a few, but they are all in the same boat. . . .”

When I left him, the full moon was high in the sky and the night was very still.

IV

The teaching profession in Shanyang was no bed of roses. I taught for two months without receiving a cent of salary, until I had to cut down on cigarettes. But the school staff, even those earning only fifteen or sixteen dollars a month, were easily contented. They all had iron constitutions steeled by hardship, and, although lean

and haggard, would work from morning till night; while if interrupted at work by their superiors, they would stand up respectfully. Thus they all practised plain living and high thinking. This reminded me, somehow, of Wei's parting words. He was then even more hard up, and often looked embarrassed, having apparently lost his former cynicism. When he heard that I was leaving, he had come late at night to see me off, and, after hesitating for some time, had stuttered

"Would there be anything for me there? Even copying work, at twenty to thirty dollars a month, would do. I . . ."

I was surprised. I had not thought he would consider anything so low, and did not know how to answer

"I . . . I have to live a little longer . . ."

"I'll look out when I get there. I'll do my best."

This was what I had promised at the time, and the words often rang in my ears later, as if Wei were before me, stuttering, "I have to live a little longer." I tried to interest various people in his case, but to no avail. There were few vacancies, and many unemployed, they always ended by apologizing for being unable to help, and I would write him an apologetic letter. By the end of the term, things had gone from bad to worse. The magazine *Reason*, edited by some of the local gentry, began to attack me. Naturally no names were mentioned, but it cleverly insinuated that I was stirring up trouble in the school, even my recommendation of Wei being interpreted as a manoeuvre to gather a clique about me.

So I had to keep quiet. Apart from attending class, I lay low in my room, sometimes even fearing I might be considered as stirring up trouble when cigarette smoke escaped from my window. For Wei, naturally, I could do nothing. This state of affairs prevailed till midwinter.

It had been snowing all day, and the snow had not stopped by evening. Outside was so still, you could

almost hear the sound of stillness. I closed my eyes and sat there in the dim lamplight, doing nothing, imagining the snowflakes falling to augment the boundless drifts of snow. It would be nearly New Year at home too, and everybody would be busy. I saw myself a child again, making a snowman with a group of children on the level ground in the back yard. The eyes of the snowman, made of jet-black fragments of coal, suddenly turned into Wei's eyes.

"I have to live a little longer." The same voice again.

"What for?" I asked inadvertently, aware immediately of the ineptitude of my remark.

It was this reply that woke me up. I sat up, lit a cigarette and opened the window, only to find the snow falling even faster. Then I heard a knock at the door, and a moment later it opened to admit the servant, whose step I knew. He handed me a big envelope, more than six inches in length. The address was scrawled, but I saw Wei's name on it.

This was the first letter he had written me since I left S — Knowing he was a bad correspondent, I had not wondered at his silence, only sometimes I had felt he should have given me some news of himself. So the receipt of this letter was quite a surprise. I tore it open. The letter had been hastily scrawled, and said:

. Shenfei,

How should I address you? I am leaving a blank for you to fill in as you please. It will be all the same to me.

I have altogether received three letters from you. I did not reply for one simple reason: I had no money even to buy stamps.

"Perhaps you would like to know what has happened to me. To put it simply: I have failed. I thought I had failed before, but I was wrong then; now, however, I am really a failure. Formerly there was someone

who wanted me to live a little longer, and I wished it too, but found it difficult. Now, there is no need, yet I must go on living.

Shall I then live on?

The one who wanted me to live a little longer could not live himself. He was trapped and killed by the enemy. Who killed him? No one knows.

Changes take place so swiftly! During the last half year I have virtually been a beggar, it's true, I could be considered a beggar. However, I had my purpose. I was willing to beg for the cause, to go cold and hungry for it, to be lonely for it, to suffer hardship for it. But I did not want to destroy myself. So you see, the fact that one person wanted me to live on, proved extremely potent. But now there is no one, not one. At the same time I feel I do not deserve to live, nor do some other people either, in my opinion. Yet, I am conscious of wanting to live on to spite those who wish me dead; for at least there is no one left who wants me to live decently, and so no one can be hurt. I don't want to hurt such people. But now there is no one, not one. What a joy! Wonderful! I am now doing what I formerly detested and opposed. I am now giving up all I formerly believed in and upheld. I have really failed — but I have won.

Do you think I am mad? Do you think I have become a hero or a great man? No, it is not that. It is very simple, I have become adviser to General Du, hence I have eighty dollars salary a month.

. . . Shenfei,

What will you think of me? You decide; it is the same to me.

Perhaps you still remember my former sitting-room, the one in which we had our first and last talks. I am still using it. There are new guests, new bribes, new flattery, new seeking for promotion, new kowtows and bows, new mahjong and drinking games, new haughti-

ness and disgust, new sleeplessness and vomiting of blood. .

You said in your last letter that your teaching was not going well. Would you like to be an adviser? Say the word, and I will arrange it for you. Actually, work in the gatehouse would be the same. There would be the same guests, bribes and flattery. . . .

It is snowing heavily here. How is it where you are? It is now midnight, and having just vomited some blood has sobered me. I recall that you have actually written three times in succession to me since autumn — amazing! So I must give you some news of myself, hoping you will not be shocked.

I probably shall not write again; you know my ways of old. When will you be back? If you come soon, we may meet again. Still, I suppose we have taken different roads, so you had better forget me. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for trying to find work for me. But now please forget me; I am doing "well."

Wei Lianshu
December 14th.

Though this letter did not "shock" me, when, after a hasty perusal, I read it carefully again, I felt both uneasy and relieved. At least his livelihood was secure, and I need not worry any more. At any rate, I could do nothing here. I thought of writing to him, but felt there was nothing to say.

In fact, I was gradually forgetting him. His face no longer sprang so often to my mind's eye. However, less than ten days after hearing from him, the office of the *S — Weekly* started sending me its paper. I did not read such papers as a rule, but since it was sent to me I glanced at some of the contents. And this reminded me of Wei, for the paper frequently carried poems and essays about him, such as "Calling on the Scholar Wei at Night

During a Snowstorm," "A Poetic Gathering at the Scholarly Abode of Adviser Wei," and so forth. Once, indeed, under the heading "Table Talk," they retailed with gusto certain stories which had previously been considered material for ridicule, but which had now become "Tales of an Eccentric Genius." Only an exceptional man, it was implied, could have done such unusual things.

Although this recalled him to me, my impression of him was growing fainter. Yet all the time he seemed to be gaining a closer hold on me, which often gave me an inexplicable sense of uneasiness and cast a shadow of apprehension. However, by autumn the newspaper stopped coming, while the Shanyang magazine began to publish the first instalment of a long essay called "The Element of Truth in Rumours," which asserted that rumours about certain gentlemen had reached the ears of the mighty. My name was among those attacked. I had then to be very careful. I had to take care that my cigarette smoke did not get in other people's way. All these precautions took so much time I could attend to nothing else, and naturally had no leisure to think of Wei. I had actually forgotten him.

However, I could not hold my job till summer. By the end of May I had left Shanyang.

V

I wandered between Shanyang, Licheng and Taigu for more than half a year, but could find no work, so I decided to go back to S—. I arrived one afternoon in early spring. It was a cloudy day with everything wrapped in mist. Since there were vacant rooms in my old hostel, I stayed there. On the road I had started thinking of Wei, and after my arrival I made up my mind to call on him after dinner. Taking two packages of the well-known Wenxi cakes, I threaded my way through

several damp streets, stepping cautiously past many sleeping dogs, until I reached his door. It seemed very bright inside. I thought even his rooms were better lit since he had become an adviser, and smiled to myself. However, when I looked up, I saw a strip of white paper* stuck on the door. It occurred to me, as I stepped inside, that the children's grandmother might be dead, but I went straight in.

In the dimly lit courtyard there was a coffin, by which some soldier or orderly in uniform was standing, talking to the children's grandmother. A few workers in short coats were loitering there too. My heart began to beat faster. Just then she turned to look at me.

"Ah, you're back? Why didn't you come earlier?" she suddenly exclaimed.

"Who . . . who has passed away?" Actually by now I knew, but yet I asked.

"Adviser Wei died the day before yesterday."

I looked around. The sitting-room was dimly lit, probably by one lamp only; the front room, however, was decked with white funeral curtains, and the woman's grandchildren had gathered outside that room.

"His body is there," she said, coming forward and pointing to the front room. "After Mr Wei was promoted, I let him my front room too, that is where he is now."

There was no writing on the funeral curtain. In front stood a long table, then a square table, spread with some dozen dishes. As I went in, two men in long white gowns suddenly appeared to bar the way, their eyes, like those of a dead fish, fixed in surprise and mistrust on my face. I hastily explained my relation with Wei, and the landlady came up to confirm my statement. Then

* White is the mourning colour in China. White paper on the door indicated that there had been a death in the house.

their hands and eyes dropped, and they allowed me to go forward to bow to the dead

As I bowed, a wail sounded beside me from the floor. Looking down I saw a child of about ten, kneeling on a mat, also dressed in white. His hair had been cut short, and had some hemp attached to it.

Later I found out that one of these men was Wei's cousin, his nearest in kin, while the other was a distant nephew. I asked to be allowed to see Wei, but they tried their best to dissuade me, saying I was too "polite." Finally they gave in, and lifted the curtain.

This time I saw Wei in death. But, strangely enough, though he was wearing a crumpled shirt, stained in front with blood, and his face was very lean, his expression was unchanged. He was sleeping so placidly, with closed mouth and eyes, that I was tempted to put my finger before his nostrils to see if he were still breathing.

Everything was deathly still, both the living and the dead. As I withdrew, his cousin accosted me to state that Wei's untimely death, just when he was in the prime of life and had a great future before him, was not only a calamity for his humble family but a cause of sorrow for his friends. He seemed to be apologizing for Wei for dying. Such eloquence is rare among villagers. However, after that he fell silent again, and everything was deathly still, both the living and the dead.

Feeling cheerless, but by no means sad, I withdrew to the courtyard to chat with the old woman. She told me the funeral would soon take place; they were waiting for the shroud. And when the coffin was nailed down, people born under certain stars should not be near. She rattled on, her words pouring out like a flood. She spoke of Wei's illness, incidents during his life, and even voiced certain criticisms.

"You know, after Mr. Wei came into luck, he was a different man. He held his head high and looked very

haughty. He stopped treating people in his old pedantic way. Did you know, he used to act like an idiot, and call me madam? Later on," she chuckled, "he called me 'old bitch', it was too funny for words. When people sent him rare herbs like *atractylis*, instead of eating them himself, he would throw them into the courtyard, just here, and call out, 'You take this, old bitch!' After he came into luck, he had scores of visitors; so I vacated my front room for him, and moved into a side one. As we have always said jokingly, he became a different man after his good luck. If you had come one month earlier, you could have seen all the fun here: drinking games practically every day, talking, laughing, singing, poetry writing and mahjong games. . . .

"He used to be more afraid of children than they are of their own father, practically grovelling to them. But recently that changed too, and he was a good one for jokes. My grandchildren liked to play with him, and would go to his rooms whenever they could. He would think up all sorts of practical jokes. For instance, when they wanted him to buy things for them, he would make them bark like dogs or make a thumping kowtow. Ah, that was fun. Two months ago, my second grandchild asked him to buy him a pair of shoes, and had to make three thumping kowtows. He's still wearing them; they aren't worn out yet."

When one of the men in white came out, she stopped talking. I asked about Wei's illness, but there was little she could tell me. She knew only that he had been losing weight for a long time, but they had thought nothing of it because he always looked so cheerful. About a month before, they heard he had been coughing blood, but it seemed he had not seen a doctor. Then he had to stay in bed, and three days before he died he seemed to have lost the power of speech. His cousin had come all the way from the village to ask him if he had any savings, but he said not a word. His cousin

thought he was shamming, but some people had said those dying of consumption did lose the power of speech

"But Mr Wei was a queer man," she suddenly whispered. "He never saved money, always spent it like water. His cousin still suspects we got something out of him. Heaven knows, we got nothing. He just spent it in his haphazard way. Buying something today, selling it tomorrow, or breaking it up — God knows what happened. When he died there was nothing left, all spent! Otherwise it would not be so dismal today. . . ."

"He just fooled about, not wanting to do the proper thing. I had thought of that, and spoken to him. At his age, he should have got married; it would have been easy for him then. And if no suitable family could be found, at least he could have bought a few concubines to go on with. People should keep up appearances. But he would laugh whenever I brought it up. 'Old bitch, you are always worrying about such things for other people,' he would say. He was never serious, you see; he wouldn't listen to good advice. If he had listened to me, he wouldn't be wandering lonely in the nether world now; at least there would be wailing from his dear ones. . . ."

A shop assistant arrived, bringing some clothes with him. The three relatives of the dead picked out the underwear, then disappeared behind the curtain. Soon, the curtain was lifted; the new underwear had been put on the corpse, and they proceeded to put on his outer garments. I was surprised to see them dress him in a pair of khaki military trousers with broad red stripes, and a tunic with glittering epaulettes. I could not say what rank these indicated, or how he acquired it. Then the body was placed in the coffin. Wei lay there awkwardly, a pair of brown leather shoes beside his feet, a paper sword at his waist, and beside his lean and ashen face a military cap with a gilt band.

The three relatives wailed beside the coffin, then stopped and wiped their tears. The boy with hemp attached to his hair withdrew, as did the old woman's third grandchild — no doubt they had been born under the wrong stars.

As the labourers lifted the coffin lid, I stepped forward to see Wei for the last time.

In his awkward costume he lay placidly, with closed mouth and eyes. There seemed to be an ironical smile on his lips, mocking the ridiculous corpse.

When the nails began to be hammered in, the wailing started afresh. I could not stand it very long, so withdrew to the courtyard, then, somehow, I was out of the gate. The damp road glistened, and I looked up at the sky where the cloud banks had scattered and a full moon hung, shedding a cool light.

I walked with quickened steps, as if eager to break through some heavy barrier, but finding it impossible. Something struggled in my ears, and, after a long, long time, burst out. It was like a long howl, the howl of a wounded wolf crying in the wilderness in the depth of night, anger and sorrow mingled in its agony.

Then my heart felt lighter, and I paced calmly on along the damp cobbled road under the moon.

October 17, 1925

REGRET FOR THE PAST

Juansheng's Notes

I want, if I can, to record my remorse and grief, for Zijun's sake as well as for my own

How silent and empty it is, this shabby room in a forgotten corner of the hostel. Time certainly flies. A whole year has passed since I fell in love with Zijun and, thanks to her, escaped from this silence and emptiness. On my return here, as ill luck would have it, this was the only room vacant. The broken window with the half-withered locust tree and old wistaria outside it and the square table in front of it are unchanged. Unchanged too are the mouldering wall and wooden bed beside it. At night I lie alone, just as I did before living with Zijun. The past year has been blotted out as if it had never been, as if I had never moved out of this shabby room to set up house, in a small way but with high hopes, in Lucky Lane.

Nor is that all. A year ago there was a difference in this silence and emptiness for it held expectancy, the expectancy of Zijun's arrival. The tapping of high heels on the brick pavement, cutting into my long, restless waiting, would galvanize me into life. Then I would see her pale round face dimpling in a smile, her thin white arms, striped cotton blouse and black skirt. And she would bring in to show me a new leaf from the half-withered locust tree outside the window, or clusters of the mauve wistaria flowers that hung from a vine which looked as if made of iron.

But now there is only silence and emptiness Zijun will never come back — never, never again.

When Zijun was not here, I could see nothing in this shabby room. Out of sheer boredom I would pick up a book — science or literature, it was all the same to me — and read on and on till it suddenly dawned on me that I had turned a dozen pages without taking in a word. My sense of hearing, however, was so acute that I seemed able to hear all the footsteps outside the gate, including those of Zijun, gradually approaching — but all too often they faded away again to be lost at last in the medley of other footfalls. I hated the steward's son who wore cloth-soled shoes which sounded quite different from those of Zijun. I hated the little wretch next door who used face-cream, often wore new leather shoes, and whose steps sounded all too like those of Zijun.

Could her rickshaw have been upset? Could she have been run over by a tram?

I would want to put on my hat to go and find her, but her uncle had cursed me to my face.

Then, abruptly, I would hear her draw nearer, step by step, so that by the time I went out to meet her she would already have passed the wistaria trellis, her face dimpling in a smile. Probably she wasn't badly treated after all in her uncle's home. I would calm down and, after we had gazed at each other in silence for a moment, the shabby room would gradually be filled with the sound of my pronouncements on the tyranny of the family, the need to break with tradition, the equality of men and women, Ibsen, Tagore and Shelley . . . She would nod her head, smiling, her eyes filled with a childlike look of wonder. On the wall was pinned a copper-plate reproduction of a bust of Shelley, cut out from a magazine. It was one of the best-looking likenesses of him, but when I pointed it out to her she only

gave it a hasty glance, then hung her head as if in embarrassment. In matters like this, Zijun had probably not freed herself completely from the trammels of old ideas. It occurred to me later that it might be better to substitute a picture of Shelley drowning at sea, or a portrait of Ibsen. But I never got round to it. And now even this print has vanished.

“I’m my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me.”

She came out with this statement clearly, firmly and gravely after a thoughtful silence, following a conversation about her uncle who was here and her father in the country. We had known each other then for half a year. By that time I had told her all my views, all about myself, and what my failings were. I had hidden very little, and she understood me completely. These few words of hers stirred me to the bottom of my heart and rang in my ears for many days afterwards. I was unspeakably happy to know that Chinese women were not as hopeless as the pessimists made out, and that we should see in the not too distant future the splendour of the dawn.

Each time I saw her out, I kept several paces behind her. And each time the old wretch’s face, bewhiskered as if with fish tentacles, would be pressed so hard against the dirty window-pane that the tip of his nose was flattened. And each time we reached the outer courtyard, against the bright glass window there was the little wretch’s face, plastered with face-cream. But looking neither right nor left as she walked proudly out, she did not see them. And I walked proudly back.

“I’m my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me.” Her mind was completely made up on this point. She was by far the more thoroughgoing and resolute of the two of us. What did she care

about the half pot of face-cream or the flattened nose tip?

I cannot remember clearly how I expressed my true, passionate love for her. Not only now my impression just after the event itself was hazy. Thinking back that night, I recollected only a few disjointed scraps, while a month or two after we started living together, even these vanished like dreams without a trace. All I can remember is that for about a fortnight beforehand I had considered very carefully what attitude to take, how to make my declaration, and how to behave if turned down. But when the time came it was all in vain. In my nervousness, something constrained me to use a method seen in films. The thought of this makes me thoroughly ashamed, yet it is the only thing I remember clearly. Even today it is like a solitary lamp in a dark room, showing me clasping her hand with tears in my eyes and going down on one knee . . .

At the time I did not even notice Zijun's reaction clearly. All I knew was that she accepted my proposal. However, I seem to remember that her face first turned pale then gradually flushed red, redder than I ever saw it before or after. Sadness and joy mingled with apprehension flashed from her childlike eyes, although she tried to avoid my gaze, looking ready in her confusion to fly out of the window. Then I knew she accepted my proposal, although not knowing what she said or whether she said anything at all.

She, however, remembered everything. She could reel off the speech I made as if she had learned it by heart. She described my conduct in detail, to the life, like a film unfolding itself before her eyes, including of course that trashy scene from the movies which I was only too anxious to forget. The night, when all was still, was our time for review. I was often interrogated and examined, or ordered to repeat everything said on that oc-

casion, yet she often had to fill in gaps and correct my mistakes as if I were a Grade D student

Gradually these reviews became few and far between. But whenever I saw her gazing raptly into space, a tender look dawning on her dimpling face, I knew she was going over that old lesson again and feared she was visualizing my ridiculous act from the movies. I knew, though, that she must be visualizing it, that she insisted on visualizing it.

But she didn't find it ridiculous. Though I thought it laughable, even contemptible, to her it was no joke. And I knew this beyond a doubt because of her true, passionate love for me.

Late spring last year was our happiest and also our busiest time. I had calmed down by then, although bestirring my mental faculties in step with my physical activity. This was when we started walking side by side in the street. We went several times to the park, but most of our outings were in search of lodgings. On the road I was conscious of searching looks, sarcastic smiles or lewd and contemptuous glances which unless I was on my guard set me shivering, so that at every instant I had to summon all my pride and defiance to my support. She, however, was completely fearless and impervious to all this. She continued slowly and calmly on her way, as if there were no one in sight.

It was no easy matter finding lodgings. In most cases we were refused on some pretext or other, while we ourselves turned down a few places as unsuitable. To start with we were very particular — and yet not too particular either, because we saw that most of these lodgings did not look the sort of place where we could live. Later on, all we asked was to be tolerated. We had looked at over twenty places before we found one we could make do. two rooms with a northern exposure in a small house in Lucky Lane. The owner was a petty official but an

intelligent man, who occupied only the central and the side rooms. His household consisted simply of a wife, a baby girl not yet one year old, and a maidservant from the country. As long as the child didn't cry, it would be very quiet.

Our furniture, simple as it was, had already taken the greater part of the money I had raised; and Zijun had sold her only gold ring and earrings too. I tried to stop her, but when she insisted I didn't press the point. I knew that unless allowed to make a small investment in our home she would feel uncomfortable.

She had already quarrelled with her uncle, so enraging him in fact that he had disowned her. And I had broken with several friends who thought they were giving me good advice but were actually either afraid for me, or jealous. Still, this meant we were very quiet. Although it was getting on for dusk when I left the office and the rickshaw man always went slowly, at last the time came when we were together again. First we would look at each other in silence, then relax and talk intimately, and finally fall silent again. We both bowed our heads pensively then, without anything particular in mind. Little by little, body and soul alike, she became an open book to me. In the short space of three weeks I learned more about her, overcoming many impediments which I had fancied I understood but now discovered to have been real barriers.

As the days passed, Zijun became more lively. She had no liking for flowers though, and when I bought two pots of flowers at the market she left them unwatered for four days so that they died neglected in a corner. I hadn't the time to see to everything. She had a liking for animals, however, which she may have picked up from the official's wife; and in less than a month our household was greatly increased as four chicks of ours started picking their way across the courtyard with the landlady's dozen. But the two mistresses could tell them

apart, each able to identify her own. Then there was a spotted peke, bought at the market. I believe he had a name of his own to begin with, but Zijun gave him another one—Asui. And I called him Asui too, though I didn't like the name.

It is true that love must be constantly renewed, must grow and create. When I spoke of this to Zijun, she nodded understandingly.

Ah, what peaceful, happy evenings those were!

Tranquillity and happiness will grow stale if unchanged, unrenewed. While in the hostel, we had occasional differences of opinion or misunderstandings, but even these vanished after we moved to Lucky Lane. We just sat facing each other in the lamplight, reminiscing, savouring again the joy of the new harmony which had followed our disputes.

Zijun grew plumper, her cheeks became rosier, the only pity was that she was too busy. Housekeeping left her no time even to chat, much less to read or go for walks. We often said we would have to get a maid.

Another thing that upset me on my return in the evening was her covert look of unhappiness, or the forced smile which depressed me even more. Luckily I discovered that this was owing to her secret feud with the petty official's wife, the bone of contention being the two families' chicks. But why wouldn't she tell me outright? People ought to have a home of their own. A lodging of this kind was no place to live in.

I had my routine too. Six days of the week I went from home to the bureau and from the bureau home. In the office I sat at my desk copying, copying endless official documents and letters. At home I kept her company or helped her light the stove, boil rice or steam rolls. This was when I learned to cook.

Still, I ate much better here than in the hostel. Although cooking was not Zijun's forte, she threw herself

into it heart and soul. Her ceaseless anxieties on this score made me anxious too, and in this way we shared the sweet and the bitter together. She kept at it so hard all day, perspiration made her short hair cling to her brows, and her hands began to grow rough.

And then she had to feed Asui and the chicks . . . No one else could do this chore.

I told her I would rather go without food than see her work herself to the bone like this. She just glanced at me without a word, looking rather wistful, so that I couldn't very well say any more. But she went on working as hard as ever.

Finally the blow I had been expecting fell. The evening before the Double Tenth Festival, I was sitting idle while she washed the dishes when we heard a knock on the door. When I opened it, the messenger from our bureau handed me a mimeographed slip of paper. I had a good idea what it was and, when I took it to the lamp, sure enough it read

By order of the commissioner, Shi Juansheng is discharged.

The secretariat, October 9th

I had foreseen this while we were still in the hostel. Face-Cream, being one of the gambling friends of the commissioner's son, was bound to have spread rumours and tried to make trouble. I was only surprised that this hadn't happened sooner. In fact this was really no blow, because I had already decided that I could work as a clerk somewhere else or teach, or even, though it was more difficult, do some translation work. I knew the editor of *Freedom's Friend*, and had corresponded with him a couple of months previously. But all the same, my heart was thumping. What distressed me most was that even Zijun, fearless as she was, had turned pale. Recently she seemed to be weaker, more faint-hearted.

“What does it matter?” she said “We can make a fresh start. We . . .”

Her voice trailed off and, to my ears, it failed to carry conviction. The lamplight, too, seemed unusually dim. Men are really ludicrous creatures, so easily upset by trifles. First we gazed at each other in silence, then started discussing what to do. Finally we decided to live as economically as possible on the money we had, to advertise in the paper for a post as clerk or teacher, and to write at the same time to the editor of *Freedom's Friend* explaining my present situation and asking him to accept a translation from me to help tide me over this difficult period.

“Suit the action to the word! Let's make a fresh start.”

I went straight to the table and pushed aside the bottle of sesame oil and saucer of vinegar, while Zijun brought over the dim lamp. First I drew up the advertisement; then I made a selection of books to translate. I hadn't looked at my books since we moved house, and each volume was thick with dust. Last of all I wrote the letter.

I hesitated for a long time over the wording of the letter. When I stopped writing to think, and glanced at her in the dusky lamplight, she was looking very wistful again. I had never imagined a trifle like this could cause such a striking change in someone so firm and fearless as Zijun. She really had grown much weaker lately; this wasn't something that had just started that evening. More put out than ever, I had a sudden vision of a peaceful life — the quiet of my shabby room in the hostel flashed before my eyes, and I was just about to take a good look at it when I found myself back in the dusky lamplight again.

It took me a long time to finish the letter, a very lengthy letter. And I was so tired after writing it that I realized I must have grown weaker myself lately too. We decided to send in the advertisement and post the letter the next day. Then with one accord we straightened up

silently, as if conscious of each other's fortitude and strength, able to see new hope growing from this fresh beginning

Indeed, this blow from outside infused new spirit into us. While in the bureau I had been like a wild bird in a cage, given just enough bird-seed by its captor to keep alive but not to thrive, doomed as time passed to lose the use of its wings, so that if ever released it would be unable to fly. Now, at any rate, I had got out of the cage. I must soar anew through the boundless sky before it was too late, before I had forgotten how to flap my wings.

Of course we could not expect results from a small advertisement right away. However, translating is not so simple either. You read something and think you understand it, but when you come to translate it difficulties crop up everywhere, and progress is very slow. Still, I was determined to do my best. In less than a fortnight, the edge of a fairly new dictionary was black with my fingerprints, which shows how seriously I took my work. The editor of *Freedom's Friend* had said that his magazine would never ignore a good manuscript.

Unfortunately, there was no room where I could be undisturbed, and Zijun was not as quiet or considerate as she had been. Our place was so cluttered up with dishes and bowls, so filled with smoke, that it was impossible to work steadily there. But of course I had only myself to blame for not being able to afford a study. On top of this there were Asui and the chicks. The chicks, moreover, had now grown into hens and were more of a bone of contention than ever between the two families.

Then there was the never-ending business of eating every day. All Zijun's energies seemed to go to this. One ate to earn and earned to eat, while Asui and the hens had to be fed too. Apparently she had forgotten all she had ever learned, and did not realize that she was

interrupting my train of thought when she called me to meals. And although I sometimes showed a little displeasure as I sat down, she paid no attention at all, just went on munching away quite unconcerned.

It took her five weeks to realize that my work could not be restricted by regular meal-times. When the realization came she was probably annoyed, but she said nothing. After that my work did go forward faster, and soon I had translated 50,000 words. I had only to polish the manuscript, and it could be sent in with two already completed shorter pieces to *Freedom's Friend*. Those meals were still a headache though. I didn't mind the dishes being cold, but there wasn't enough to go round. Although my appetite was much smaller than before now that I was sitting at home all day using my brain, even so there wasn't always even enough rice. It had been given to Asui, sometimes along with the mutton which I myself rarely had a chance of eating recently. Asui was so thin, she said, it was really pathetic, besides it made the landlady sneer at us. She couldn't stand being laughed at.

So there were only the hens to eat my left-overs. It was a long time before I realized this. I was very conscious however that my "place in nature,"* as Huxley describes it, was only somewhere between the peke and the hens.

Later on, after much argument and insistence, the hens started appearing on our table and we and Asui were able to enjoy them for over ten days. They were very thin though, because for a long time they had been fed only a few grains of sorghum a day. After that, life became much more peaceful. Only Zijun was very dispirited and often seemed sad and bored, or even sulky. How easily people change!

* *Man's Place in Nature*, published in 1863, is one of T. H. Huxley's well-known works.

But we couldn't keep Asui either. We had stopped hoping for a letter from anywhere, and Zijun had long had not even a scrap of food with which to get him to beg or stand on his hindlegs. Besides, winter was fast approaching, and we didn't know what to do about a stove. His appetite had long been a heavy liability, of which we were all too conscious. So even the dog had to go.

If we had tied a tag to him and put him on sale in the market, we might have made a few coppers. But neither of us could bring ourselves to do this. Finally I muffled his head in a cloth and took him outside the West Gate, where I let him loose. When he ran after me, I pushed him into a pit — not a very deep one.

When I got home, I found the place much more peaceful; but Zijun's tragic expression quite staggered me. I had never seen such a look on her face before. Of course it was because of Asui, but why take it so to heart? And I hadn't told her about pushing him into the pit.

That night, something icy crept into her tragic expression.

"Really!" I couldn't help blurting out. "What's got into you today, Zijun?"

"What?" She didn't even glance at me.

"The way you look. . ."

"It's nothing — nothing at all."

Eventually I guessed from her behaviour that she considered me callous. Actually, when on my own I had managed all right, although too proud to mix much with family connections. Since my move I had become estranged from my former friends. But if I could only take wing and fly away, I still had plenty of ways to make a living. The wretchedness of my present life was largely due to her — getting rid of Asui was a case in point. But Zijun seemed too obtuse now even to understand that.

When I took an opportunity to hint this to her, she nodded as if she understood. But judging by her later behaviour, she either didn't take it in or else she didn't believe me.

The cold weather and her cold looks made it impossible for me to be comfortable at home. But where could I go? I could get away from her icy looks in the street and parks, but the cold wind there cut like a knife. Finally I found a haven in the public library.

Admission was free, and there were two stoves in the reading room. Although the fires were very low, the mere sight of the stoves made one warmer. There were no books worth reading — the old ones were out of date, and there were no new ones to speak of.

But I didn't go there to read. There were usually a few other people there, sometimes as many as a dozen, all thinly clad like me. We kept up a pretence of reading in order to keep out of the cold. This suited me down to the ground. In the streets you were liable to meet people you knew who would glance at you contemptuously, but here there was no uncalled-for trouble of that kind, because my acquaintances were all gathered round other stoves or warming themselves at the stoves in their own homes.

Although there were no books for me to read there, I found quiet in which to think. As I sat there alone thinking over the past, I realized that during the last half year, for love — blind love — I had neglected all the other important things in life. First and foremost, livelihood. A man must make a living before there can be any place for love. There must be a way out for those who struggle, and I hadn't yet forgotten how to flap my wings, although I was much weaker than before. . . .

The reading room and the readers gradually faded. I saw fishermen on the angry sea, soldiers in the trenches, dignitaries in their cars, speculators at the stock ex-

change, heroes in mountain forests, teachers on their platforms, night prowlers, thieves in the dark. . . Zijun was nowhere near me. She had lost all her courage in her resentment over Asui and absorption in her cooking. The strange thing was that she didn't look particularly thin . . .

It grew colder. The few lumps of slow-burning hard coal in the stove had at last burnt out, and it was closing time. I had to go back to Lucky Lane to expose myself to that icy look. Of late I had sometimes been met with warmth, but this only upset me more. One evening, I remember, from Zijun's eyes flashed the childlike look I had not seen for so long, as she reminded me with a smile of something that had happened at the hostel. But there was a constant look of fear in her eyes as well. I knew she was worried by the fact that my behaviour recently had been colder than her own, so sometimes, to comfort her, I forced myself to talk and laugh. But each forced laugh and remark at once rang hollow. And the way this hollowness immediately re-echoed in my ears, like a hateful sneer, was more than I could bear.

Zijun may have felt this too, for after this she lost her wooden calm and, though she tried her best to hide it, often showed anxiety. She treated me, however, much more tenderly.

I wanted to speak to her plainly, but lacked the courage. Whenever I made up my mind to speak, the sight of those childlike eyes compelled me, for the time being, to force a smile. But my smile turned straightway into a sneer at myself and made me lose my cold composure.

After that she revived the old questions and started new tests, forcing me to give all sorts of hypocritical answers to show my affection for her. Hypocrisy became branded on my heart, so filling it with falseness that it was hard to breathe. I often felt, in my depression, that really great courage was needed to tell the truth, for a

man who lacked courage and reconciled himself to hypocrisy could never open up a new path in life. What's more, he just could not exist.

Then Zijun started looking resentful. This happened for the first time one morning, one bitterly cold morning, or so I imagined. I laughed up my sleeve with freezing indignation. All the ideas and intelligent, fearless phrases she had learnt were empty after all; yet she had no inkling of their emptiness. She had given up reading long ago, so did not understand that the first thing in life is to make a living and that to do this people must advance hand in hand, or else soldier on alone. All she could do was cling to someone else's clothing, making it hard for even a fighter to struggle, and bringing ruin on both.

I felt that our only hope lay in parting. She ought to make a clean break. The thought of her death occurred to me abruptly, but at once I reproached myself and felt remorse. Happily it was morning, and there was plenty of time for me to tell her the truth. Whether or not we could make a fresh start depended on this.

I deliberately brought up the past. I spoke of literature, then of foreign authors and their works, of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *The Lady from the Sea*. I praised Nora for being strong-minded. . . . All this had been said the previous year in the shabby room in the hostel, but now it rang hollow. As the words left my mouth I could not free myself from the suspicion that an unseen urchin behind me was maliciously parroting everything I said.

She listened, nodding agreement, then was silent. And I wound up abruptly, the last echo of my voice vanishing in the emptiness.

"Yes," she said presently, after another silence. "But. . . Juansheng, I feel you're a different person these days. Is that true? Tell me honestly."

This was a head-on blow. But taking a grip of myself, I explained my views and proposals: only by making a fresh start and building a new life could we both avoid ruin.

To clinch the matter I said firmly

“ . . . Besides, you can go boldly ahead now without any scruples. You asked me for the truth. You’re right we shouldn’t be hypocritical. Well, the truth is it’s because I don’t love you any more. Actually, this makes it much better for you, because it’ll be easier for you to go ahead without any regret. . . .”

I was expecting a scene, but all that followed was silence. Her face turned ashen pale, as pale as death; but in a moment her colour came back and that childlike look darted from her eyes. She gazed around like a hungry or thirsty child searching for its kindly mother. But she only stared into space, fearfully avoiding my eyes.

The sight was more than I could stand. Fortunately it was still early. Braving the cold wind, I hurried to the public library.

There I saw *Freedom’s Friend*, with my short articles in it. This took me by surprise and breathed a little fresh life into me. “There are plenty of ways open to me,” I reflected. “But things can’t go on like this.”

I started calling on old friends with whom I had long been out of touch, but didn’t go more than once or twice. Naturally their rooms were warm, yet I felt chilled to the marrow. And in the evenings I huddled in a room colder than ice.

An icy needle was piercing my heart so that it kept aching numbly. “There are plenty of ways open to me,” I reflected. “I haven’t forgotten how to flap my wings.” The thought of her death occurred to me abruptly, but at once I reproached myself and felt remorse.

In the library the new path ahead of me often flashed before my eyes. She had faced up bravely to the facts and boldly left this icy home. Left it, what's more, without any sense of grievance. Then light as a cloud I floated through the void, the blue sky above me and, below, mountain ranges, mighty oceans, sky-scrapers, battle-fields, motor-cars, thoroughfares, rich men's mansions, bright busy shopping centres, and the dark night . . .

What's more, indeed, I foresaw that this new life was just around the corner.

Somehow we managed to live through the fearful winter, a bitter Beijing winter. But like dragonflies caught by mischievous boys who tie them up to play with and torment at will, although we had come through alive we were prostrate — the end was only a matter of time.

I wrote three letters to the editor of *Freedom's Friend* before receiving a reply. The envelope contained nothing but two book tokens, one for twenty cents, the other for thirty cents. So my nine cents spent on postage to press for payment and my whole day without food had all gone for nothing.

Then what I had been expecting finally happened.

As winter gave place to spring and the wind became less icy, I spent more time roaming the streets, not getting home generally before dark. On one such dark evening I came home listlessly as usual and, as usual, grew so depressed at the sight of our gate that my feet began to drag. Eventually, however, I reached my room. It was dark inside. As I groped for the matches and struck a light, the place seemed extraordinarily quiet and empty.

I was standing there in bewilderment, when the official's wife called me outside.

"Zijun's father came today and took her away," she said simply.

This was not what I had expected. I felt as if hit on the back of the head, and stood speechless.

"She went?" I finally managed to ask.

"Yes "

"Did — did she say anything?"

"No. Just asked me to tell you when you came back that she'd gone."

I couldn't believe it; yet the room was extraordinarily quiet and empty. I gazed around in search of Zijun, but all I could see were some shabby sticks of furniture scattered sparsely about the room, as if to prove their inability to conceal anyone or anything. It occurred to me that she might have left a letter or at least jotted down a few words, but no. Only salt, dried chilli, flour and half a cabbage had been placed together, with a few dozen coppers at the side. These were all our worldly goods, and now she had solemnly left these all to me, mutely bidding me to use them to eke out my existence a little longer.

As if repelled by my surroundings, I hurried out to the middle of the courtyard where all around me was dark. Bright lamplight showed on the window-paper of the central room, where they were teasing the baby to make her laugh. My heart grew calmer as by degrees I glimpsed a way out of this heavy oppression: high mountains and marshlands, thoroughfares, brightly lit banquets, trenches, pitch-black night, the thrust of a sharp knife, utterly noiseless footsteps . . .

Relaxing, I thought about travelling expenses and sighed.

As I lay with closed eyes I conjured up a picture of the future, but before the night was half over it had vanished. In the gloom I suddenly seemed to see a pile of groceries, then Zijun's ashen face appeared to gaze at me beseechingly with childlike eyes. But as soon as I pulled myself together, there was nothing there.

However, my heart was still heavy. Why couldn't I have waited a few days instead of blurting out the truth to her like that? Now she knew all that was left to her was the blazing fury of her father — to his children he was a heartless creditor — and the cold looks of bystanders, colder than frost or ice. Apart from this there was only emptiness. What a fearful thing it is to bear the heavy burden of emptiness, walking what is called one's path in life amid cold looks and blazing fury! This path ends, moreover, in nothing but a grave without so much as a tombstone.

I ought not to have told Zijun the truth. Since we had loved each other, I should have indulged her to the last with lies. If truth is precious, it should not have proved such a heavy burden of emptiness to Zijun. Of course lies are empty too, but at least they would not have proved so crushing a burden in the end.

I had imagined that if I told Zijun the truth she could go forward boldly without scruples, just as when we started living together. But I must have been wrong. Her courage and fearlessness then were owing to love.

Lacking the courage to shoulder the heavy burden of hypocrisy, I thrust the burden of the truth on to her. Because she had loved me she would have to bear this heavy burden amid cold looks and blazing fury to the end of her days.

I had thought of her death . . . I saw that I was a weakling who deserved to be cast out by the strong, honest men and hypocrites both. Yet she, from first to last, had hoped that I could eke out my existence. . . .

I must leave Lucky Lane, which was so extraordinarily empty and lonely. To my mind, if only I could get away, it would be as if Zijun were still at my side; or at least

as if she were still in town and might drop in on me at any time, as she had when I lived in the hostel

However, all my letters went unanswered, as did applications to friends to find me a post. There was nothing for it but to seek out a family connection whom I had not visited for a long time. This was an old classmate of my uncle's, a highly respected senior licentiate* who had lived in Beijing for many years and had a wide circle of acquaintances.

The gatekeeper eyed me scornfully, no doubt on account of my shabby clothes. When finally I was admitted, my uncle's friend still acknowledged our acquaintance but treated me very coldly. He knew all about us.

"Obviously you can't stay here," he told me coldly, after being asked to recommend me to a job elsewhere. "But where will you go? It's extremely difficult. . . . That, h'm, that friend of yours, Zijun, I suppose you know, is dead."

I was dumbfounded.

"Are you sure?" I blurted out at last.

He laughed drily. "Of course I am. My servant Wang Sheng comes from the same village as her family."

"But — how did she die?"

"Who knows? At any rate, she's dead."

I have forgotten how I took my leave and went home. I knew he wouldn't tell a lie. Zijun would never come back as she had last year. Although she had thought to bear the burden of emptiness amid cold looks and blazing fury till the end of her days, it had been too much for her. Fate had decreed that she should die believing the truth I had told her — die in a world without love.

* A successful candidate of a certain grade in the official examination system of the Qing Dynasty

Obviously I could not stay there. But where could I go?

Around me was a great void and deathlike silence. I seemed to see the darkness before the eyes of those, each one in turn, who died unloved, to hear all their bitter, despairing cries as they struggled.

I was waiting for something new, something nameless and unexpected. But day after day passed in the same deathlike silence.

I went out much less than before, sitting or lying in the great void, allowing this deathlike silence to eat away my soul. Sometimes the silence itself seemed afraid, seemed to recoil. At such times there flashed into my mind nameless, unexpected new hope.

One overcast morning when the sun had failed to struggle out from behind the clouds and the very air was tired, sounds of pattering paws and snuffling made me open my eyes. A glance around the room revealed nothing, but looking down I saw a tiny creature perambulating the floor. It was thin, covered with dust, more dead than alive. . . .

When I took a closer look, my heart missed a beat. I jumped up.

It was Asui. He had come back.

I left Lucky Lane not just because of the cold glances of my landlord, his wife and their maid, but largely on account of Asui. But where could I go? There were many ways open to me of course, this I knew, and sometimes I glimpsed them stretching out before me. What I didn't know was how to take the first step.

After much cogitation and weighing of pros and cons, I decided that the hostel was the only possible lodging place for me. Here is the same shabby room as before, the same wooden bed, half-withered locust tree and

wistaria vine But all that formerly gave me love and life, hope and happiness, has vanished Nothing remains but emptiness, the empty existence I exchanged for the truth.

There are many ways open to me and I must take one of them, because I am still living. I still don't know, though, how to take the first step. Sometimes the road seems like a great grey serpent, writhing and darting at me. I wait and wait, watching it approach, but it always vanishes suddenly in the darkness.

The early spring nights are as long as ever. Sitting idle as the time drags, I recall a funeral procession I saw in the street this morning. There were paper figures and paper horses in front and, behind, weeping like singing. Now I see how clever they are — this is so simple

Then Zijun's funeral springs to my mind She bore the heavy burden of emptiness alone, advancing down the long grey road only to be swallowed up amid cold looks and blazing fury

If only there really were ghosts, really were a hell! Then, no matter how the infernal whirlwind roared, I would seek out Zijun to tell her of my remorse and grief, to beg for her forgiveness. Failing this, the poisonous flames of hell would engulf me and fiercely consume all my remorse and grief.

In the whirlwind and flames I would put my arms round Zijun and ask her pardon, or let her take her revenge . . .

However, this is emptier than my new life. I have nothing now but the early spring night which is still as long as ever. Since I am living, I must make a fresh start. And the first step is just to record my remorse and grief, for Zijun's sake as well as for my own.

All I have is weeping like singing as I mourn for Zijun,
burying her in oblivion

I want to forget For my own sake, I do not want to
remember the oblivion I gave Zijun for her burial

I must make a fresh start in life. Hiding the truth
deep in my wounded heart, I must advance silently,
taking oblivion and falsehood as my guide . .

October 21, 1925

THE DIVORCE

"Ah, Uncle Mu! A happy New Year and good luck to you!"

"How are you, Basan? Happy New Year!"

"Happy New Year! So Aigu's here as well."

"Well met, Grandad Mu!"

As Zhuang Musan and his daughter Aigu stepped down into the boat from Magnolia Bridge Wharf a hum of voices broke out on board. Some of the passengers clasped their hands and bowed, and four places were vacated on the benches of the cabin. Calling out greetings, Zhuang Musan sat down, leaning his long pipe against the side of the boat. Aigu sat on his left opposite Basan, her scythe-shaped feet fanning out to form a V.

"Going into town, Grandad Mu?" asked a man with a ruddy face like the shell of a crab.

"Not to town." Grandad Mu sounded rather dispirited. But his dark red face was so wrinkled in any case that he looked much the same as usual. "We're making a trip to Pang Village."

All on board stopped talking to stare at them.

"Is it Aigu's business again?" asked Basan at last.

"It is. . . . This affair will be the death of me. It's dragged on now for three years. We've quarrelled and patched it up time after time; yet still the thing isn't settled . . ."

"Will you be going to Mr. Wei's house again?"

"That's right. This won't be the first time he's acted as peace-maker; but I've never agreed to his terms. Not that it matters. Their family's having their New Year

reunion now. Even Seventh Master from the city will be there."

"Seventh Master?" Basan opened his eyes very wide "So he'll be there to put his word in too, eh? . . . Well . . . As a matter of fact, since we pulled down their kitchen range last year we've had our revenge more or less. Besides, there's really no point in Aigu going back there" He lowered his eyes again

"I'm not set on going back there, Brother Basan!" Aigu looked up indignantly. "I'm doing this to spite them Just think! Young Beast carried on with that little widow and decided he didn't want me. But is it as simple as that? Old Beast just egged on his son and tried to get rid of me too — as if it were all that easy! What about Seventh Master? Just because he exchanges cards with the magistrate, does that mean he can't talk our language? He can't be such a blockhead as Mr. Wei, who says nothing but 'Separate, better separate' I'll tell him what I've had to put up with all these years, and we'll see who he says is right!"

Basan was convinced, and kept his mouth shut

The boat was very quiet, with no sound but the plash of water against the bow. Zhuang Musan reached for his pipe and filled it.

A fat man sitting opposite, next to Basan, rummaged in his girdle for a flint and struck a light, which he held to Zhuang Musan's pipe.

"Thank you, thank you," said Zhuang Musan, nodding to him.

"Though this is the first time we've met," said the fat man respectfully, "I heard of you long ago Yes, who is there in all the eighteen villages by the coast who doesn't know of Uncle Mu? We've known too for some time that Young Shi was carrying on with a little widow. When you took your six sons to tear down their kitchen range last year, who didn't say you were right?"

. . . All the big gates open for you, you have plenty of face. Why be afraid of *them*?"

"This uncle is a truly discerning man," said Aigu approvingly. "I don't know who he is, though."

"My name is Wang Degui," replied the fat man promptly.

"They can't just push me out! I don't care whether it's Seventh Master or Eighth Master. I'll go on making trouble till their family's ruined and all of them are dead! Mr Wei has been at me four times, hasn't he? Even Dad's been thrown off his balance by the sight of that settlement money. . . ."

Zhuang Musan swore softly to himself.

"But, Grandad Mu, didn't the Shi family send Mr. Wei a whole feast at the end of last year?" asked Crab-face.

"Makes no difference," said Wang Degui. "Can a feast blind a man completely? If so, what happens when you send him a foreign banquet? Those scholars who know the truth will always stick up for justice. If anyone's bullied by everyone else, for instance, they will up and speak for him no matter whether there's wine to be had or not. At the end of last year, Mr Rong of our humble village came back from Beijing. He's one who has seen the great world, not like us villagers. He said that a Madame Guang there, who's the best. . . ."

"Wang Jetty!" shouted the boatmen, preparing to moor. "Any passengers for Wang Jetty?"

"Here, me!" Fatty grabbed his pipe, and darted out of the cabin, jumping ashore just as the boat drew in.

"Excuse me!" he called back with a nod to the passengers.

The boat rowed on in fresh silence, broken only by the splash of water. Basan began to doze off, facing Aigu's scythe-shaped shoes, and his mouth fell open by degrees. The two old women in the front cabin began softly chanting Buddhist prayers and telling their beads. They

looked at Aigu and exchanged significant glances, pursing their lips and nodding.

Aigu was staring at the awning above her, probably considering how best to raise such trouble that Old Beast's family would be ruined and he and Young Beast would have no way to turn. She was not afraid of Mr Wei. She had seen him twice and he was nothing but a squat, round-headed fellow — there were plenty like him in her own village, only a little darker.

Zhuang Musan had come to the end of his tobacco, and the oil in the pipe was sputtering, but still he went on puffing. He knew the stop after Wang Jetty was Pang Village. Already, in fact, you could see Literary Star Pavilion at the entrance to the village. He had been here so often it was not worth talking about, any more than Mr. Wei. He remembered how his daughter had come crying home, how badly her husband and father-in-law had behaved, and how they had worsted him. The past unfolded again before his eyes. Usually when he recalled how he had punished the evil-doers, he would give a bleak smile — but not this time. The fat form of Seventh Master had somehow intervened, and was squeezing his thoughts out of any semblance of order.

The boat went on in continued silence. Only the Buddhist prayers swelled in volume. Everyone else seemed sunk in thought like Aigu and her father.

“Here you are, Uncle Mu. Pang Village.”

Roused by the boatman's voice, they looked up to see Literary Star Pavilion before them.

Zhuang jumped ashore, and Aigu followed him. They passed the pavilion and headed for Mr. Wei's house. After passing thirty houses on their way south, they turned a corner and reached their destination. Four boats with black awnings were moored in a row at the gate.

As they stepped through the great, black-lacquered gate, they were asked into the gatehouse. It was full

of boatmen and farmhands, who were seated at two tables. Aigu dared not stare at them, but she took one hasty look round, and saw there was not a sign of Old Beast and Young Beast

When a servant brought in soup containing sweet New Year cakes, without knowing why, she felt even more uncomfortable and uneasy "Just because he exchanges cards with the magistrate doesn't mean he can't talk our language, does it?" she thought. "These scholars who know the truth will always stick up for justice. I must tell Seventh Master the whole story, beginning from the time I married at the age of fifteen. . . ."

When she finished the soup, she knew the time was at hand. Sure enough, before long she found herself following one of the farmhands, who ushered her and her father across the great hall, and round a corner into the reception room.

The room was so crammed with things she could not take in all it contained. There were many guests as well, whose short jackets of red and blue satin were shimmering all around her. And in the midst of them was a man who she knew at once must be Seventh Master. Though he had a round head and a round face too, he was a great deal bigger than Mr. Wei and the others. He had narrow slits of eyes in his great round face, and a wispy black moustache; and though he was bald his head and face were ruddy and glistening. Aigu was quite puzzled for a moment, then concluded he must have rubbed his skin with lard.

"This is an anus-stop,* which the ancients used in burials."

Seventh Master was holding something which looked like a corroded stone, and he rubbed his nose twice with

* It was the custom for small pieces of jade to be inserted in a dead man's orifices, for people believed this prevented the corpse from decaying

this object as he spoke "Unfortunately, it comes from a recent digging. Still, it's worth having. It can't be later than Han.* Look at this 'mercury stain' . . ."

The "mercury stain" was at once surrounded by several heads, one of which, of course, was Mr. Wei's. There were several sons of the house as well, whom Aigu had not yet noticed, for so awed were they by Seventh Master that they looked like flattened bedbugs.

She did not understand all he had just said; she was not interested in this "mercury stain," nor did she dare investigate it; so she took this chance instead to look round. Standing behind her by the wall, close to the door, were both Old Beast and Young Beast. She saw at a glance that they looked older than when she had met them by chance half a year ago.

Then everybody drifted away from the "mercury stain." Mr. Wei took the anus-stop and sat down to stroke it, turning to ask Zhuang Musan:

"Did just the two of you come?"

"Just the two of us."

"Why have none of your sons come?"

"They hadn't time."

"We wouldn't have troubled you to come at New Year, if not for this business. . . . I'm sure you've had enough of it yourself. It's over two years now, isn't it? Better to remove enmity than keep it, I say. Since Aigu's husband didn't get on with her, and his parents didn't like her . . . better take the advice I gave you before and let them separate. I haven't enough face to convince you. But Seventh Master, you know, is a champion of justice. And Seventh Master's view is the same as mine. However, he says both sides must make some concessions,

* The Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.)

** The jade and metal objects found in tombs are often stained with mercury, which was placed in corpses to prevent them from decaying too rapidly.

and he's told the Shi family to add another ten dollars to the settlement, making it ninety dollars!"

" . . . "

"Ninety dollars! If you took the case right up to the emperor, you couldn't get such favourable terms. Nobody but Seventh Master would make such a handsome offer!"

Seventh Master widened his slits of eyes to nod at Zhuang Musan

Aigu saw that the situation was critical and marvelled that her father, of whom all the coastal families stood in awe, should have not a word to say for himself here. This was quite uncalled for, she thought. Although she could not follow all Seventh Master said, he somehow struck her as a kindly old soul, not nearly as frightening as she had imagined

"Seventh Master's a scholar who knows the truth," she said boldly. "He's not like us country folk. I had no one to complain to of all the wrong that's been done me; but now I'll tell Seventh Master. All the time I was married I tried to be a good wife — I bowed my head as I went in and out, and I didn't fail in a single wifely duty. But they kept finding fault with me — each one was a regular bully. That year the weasel killed that big cock, how could they blame me for not closing the coop? It was that mangy cur — curse it! — who pushed open the door of the coop to steal some rice mixed with husks. But that Young Beast wouldn't distinguish black from white. He gave me a slap on the cheek. . . ."

Seventh Master looked at her.

"I knew there must be a reason. This is something Seventh Master will not fail to notice, for scholars who know the truth know everything. He was bewitched by that bitch, and wanted to drive me away! I married him with the proper ceremonies — three lots of tea and six presents — and was carried to his house in a bridal sedan! Is it so easy for him to toss me aside? . . . I mean to show

them, I don't mind going to court. If it can't be settled at the district court, we'll go to the prefecture . . ."

"Seventh Master knows all this," said Mr Wei, looking up. "If you persist in this attitude, Aigu, it won't be to your advantage. You haven't changed in the least. Look, how sensible your father is! It's a pity you and your brothers aren't like him. Suppose you do take this matter to the prefect, won't he consult Seventh Master? But then the case will be dealt with publicly, and nobody's feelings will be spared . . . That being so. . ."

"I'll stake my life if need be, even if it ruins both families!"

"There's no need for such desperate measures," put in Seventh Master slowly. "You're still young. We should all keep the peace. 'Peace breeds wealth.' Isn't that true? I've added a whole ten dollars: that's more than generous. For if your father-in-law and mother-in-law say 'Go', then go you must. Don't talk about the prefecture, this would be the same in Shanghai, Beijing or even abroad. If you don't believe me, ask *him*! He's just come back from the foreign school in Beijing." He turned towards a sharp-chinned son of the house. "Isn't that so?" he asked.

"Ab-so-lutely," Sharp-chin hastily straightened up to answer in low, respectful tones.

Aigu felt completely isolated. Her father refused to speak, her brothers had not dared come, Mr. Wei had always been on the other side, and now Seventh Master had failed her, while even this young sharp-chin, with his soft talk and air of a flattened bug, was simply saying what was expected of him. But confused as she was, she resolved to make a last stand.

"What, does even Seventh Master. . . ." Her eyes showed surprise and disappointment. "Yes . . . I know, we rough folk are ignorant. My father's to blame for not even understanding how to deal with people — he's lost his old wits completely. He let Old Beast and Young

Beast have their way in everything They stoop to every means, however foul, to fawn on those above them . . .”

“Look at her, Seventh Master!” Young Beast, who had been standing silently behind her, suddenly spoke up now. “She dares act like this even in Seventh Master’s presence. At home she gave us simply no peace at all She calls my father Old Beast and me Young Beast or Bastard ”

“Who the devil is calling you a bastard?” Aigu rounded on him fiercely, then turned back to Seventh Master “I’ve something else I’d like to say in public. He was always mean to me. It was ‘slut’ and ‘bitch’ all the time. After he started carrying on with that whore, he even cursed my ancestors Judge between us, Seventh Master. . . .”

She gave a start, and the words died on her lips, for suddenly Seventh Master rolled his eyes and lifted his round face From the mouth framed by that wispy moustache issued a shrill, trailing cry:

“Come here! . . .”

Her heart, which had missed a beat, suddenly started pounding. The battle was lost, the tables were turned it seemed She had taken a false step and fallen into the water, and she knew it was all her own fault

A man in a blue gown and black jacket promptly came in, and stood like a stick with his arms at his side in front of Seventh Master

There was not a cheep in the room. Seventh Master moved his lips, but nobody could hear what he was saying. Only his servant heard, and the force of this order entered his very marrows, for twice he twitched as if overcome by awe And he answered:

“Very good, sir ”

Then he backed away several paces, turned and went out.

Aigu knew that something unexpected and completely unforeseen was about to happen — something

which she was powerless to prevent. Only now did she realize the full power of Seventh Master. She had been mistaken before, and acted too rashly and rudely. She repented bitterly, and found herself saying

“I always meant to accept Seventh Master’s decision . . .”

There was not a cheep in the room. Although her words were as soft as strands of silk, they carried like a thunder-clap to Mr Wei.

“Good!” he exclaimed approvingly, leaping up. “Seventh Master is truly just, and Aigu is truly reasonable. In that case, Musan, you can’t have any objection, since your daughter’s consented herself. I’m sure you’ve brought the wedding certificates as I asked you. So let both sides produce them now.”

Aigu saw her father fumble in his girdle for something. The stick-like servant came in again to hand Seventh Master a small, flat, jet-black object shaped like a tortoise. Aigu was afraid something dreadful was going to happen. She darted a look at her father; but he was opening a blue cloth package at the table, and taking out silver dollars.

Seventh Master removed the tortoise’s head, poured something from its body into his palm, then returned the flat-looking object to the stick-like servant. He rubbed one finger in his palm, then stuffed it up each nostril, staining his nose and upper lip a bright yellow. Then he wrinkled his nose as if about to sneeze.

Zhuang Musan was counting the silver dollars. Mr Wei extracted a few from a pile which had not been counted, and handed them to Old Beast. He also changed the position of the red and green certificates, restoring them to their original owners.

“Put them away,” he said. “You must see if the amount is correct, Musan. This is no joking matter — all this silver. . . .”

“Ah — tchew!”

Though Aigu knew it was only Seventh Master sneezing, she could not help turning to look at him. His mouth was wide open and his nose was twitching. In two fingers he was still clutching the small object "used by the ancients in burials." Indeed, he was rubbing the side of his nose with it.

With some difficulty Zhuang Musan finished counting the money, and both sides put away the red and green certificates. Then they all seemed to draw themselves up, and tense expressions relaxed. Complete harmony prevailed.

"Good! This business has been settled satisfactorily," said Mr. Wei. Seeing that they looked on the point of leaving, he breathed a sigh of relief. "Well, there's nothing more to be done now. Congratulations on unravelling this knot! Must you be going? Won't you stay to share our New Year feast? This is a rare occasion."

"We mustn't stay," said Aigu. "We'll come to drink with you next year."

"Thank you, Mr. Wei. We won't drink just now. We have other business. . . ." Zhuang Musan, Old Beast and Young Beast withdrew most respectfully.

"What? Not a drop before you go?" Mr. Wei looked at Aigu who brought up the rear.

"Really we mustn't. Thank you, Mr. Wei."

November 6, 1925

THE FLIGHT TO THE MOON

I

It is a fact that intelligent beasts can divine the wishes of men. As soon as their gate came in sight the horse slowed down and, hanging its head at the same moment as its rider, let it jog with each step like a pestle pounding rice.

The great house was overhung with evening mist, while thick black smoke rose from the neighbours' chimneys. It was time for supper. At the sound of hoofs, retainers had come out and were standing erect with their arms at their sides before the entrance. As Yi* dismounted listlessly beside the rubbish heap, they stepped forward to relieve him of his reins and whip. At the moment of crossing the threshold, he looked down at the quiverful of brand-new arrows at his waist and the three crows and one shattered sparrow in his bag, and his heart sank within him. But he strode in, putting a bold face on things, the arrows rattling in his quiver.

Reaching the inner courtyard, he saw Chang E** looking out from the round window. He knew her sharp eyes must have seen the crows, and in dismay he came to a sudden stop — but he had to go on in. Serving-maids came out to greet him, unfastened his bow and quiver

* Yi or Hou Yi was a heroic archer in ancient Chinese legends

** A goddess in ancient Chinese mythology, supposed to be Yi's wife. She took some drug of immortality and flew to the moon to become a goddess there

and took his game bag. He noticed that their smiles were rather forced

After wiping his face and hands he entered the inner apartment, calling, "Madam . . ."

Chang E had been watching the sunset from the round window. She turned slowly and threw him an indifferent glance without returning his greeting.

He had been used to this treatment for some time, for over a year at least. But as usual he went on in and sat down on the old, worn leopard skin over the wooden couch opposite. Scratching his head, he muttered:

"I was out of luck again today. Nothing but crows. . . ."

"Pah!"

Raising her willowy eyebrows, Chang E sprang up and swept from the room, grumbling as she went, "Noodles with crow sauce again! Noodles with crow sauce again! I'd like to know who else eats nothing but noodles with crow sauce from one year to the next? How ill-fated I was to marry you and eat noodles with crow sauce the whole year round!"

"Madam!" Yi leaped to his feet and followed her "It wasn't so bad today," he continued softly. "I shot a sparrow too, which can be dressed for you . . . Nuxin!" he called to the maid. "Bring that sparrow to show your mistress."

The game had been taken to the kitchen, but Nuxin ran to fetch the sparrow and held it out in both hands to Chang E.

"That!" With a disdainful glance she reached slowly out to touch it. "How disgusting!" she said crossly. "You've smashed it to pieces! Where's the meat?"

"I know," admitted Yi, discomfited "My bow is too powerful, my arrow-heads are too large."

"Can't you use smaller arrows?"

"I haven't any. When I shot the giant boar and the huge python. . . ."

“Is this a giant boar or a huge python?” She turned to Nuxin and ordered, “Use it for soup!” Then she went back to her room

Left alone at a loss, Yi sat down with his back to the wall to listen to the crackling of firewood in the kitchen. He remembered the bulk of the giant boar which had loomed like a small hillock in the distance. If he hadn’t shot it then but left it till now, it would have kept them in meat for half a year and spared them this daily worry about food. And the huge python! What soups it could have made!

Nuyi lit the lamp. The vermilion bow and arrows, the black bow and arrows, the crossbow, the sword and the dagger glimmered on the opposite wall in its faint rays. After one look, Yi lowered his head and sighed. Nuxin brought supper in and set it on the table in the middle: five large bowls of noodles on the left, two large bowls of noodles and one of soup on the right, in the centre one large bowl of crow sauce.

While eating, Yi had to admit that this was not an appetizing meal. He stole a glance at Chang E. Without so much as looking at the crow sauce, she had steeped her noodles in soup, and she set down her bowl half finished. Her face struck him as paler and thinner than before — suppose she were to fall ill?

By the second watch, in a slightly better mood, she sat without a word on the edge of the bed to drink some water. Yi sat on the wooden couch next to her, stroking the old leopard skin which was losing its fur.

“Ah,” he said in a conciliatory tone. “I bagged this spotted leopard on the Western Hill before we married. It was a beauty — one glossy mass of gold.”

That reminded him of how they had lived in the old days. Of bears they ate nothing but the paws, of camels nothing but the hump, giving all the rest to the serving-maids and retainers. When the big game was finished

they ate wild boars, rabbits and pheasants. He was such a fine archer, he could shoot as much as he pleased

A sigh escaped him.

"The fact is I'm too good a shot," he said "That's why the whole place is cleaned out. Who could have guessed we'd be left with nothing but crows?"

Chang E gave the ghost of a smile.

"Today I was luckier than usual." Yi's spirits were rising "At least I caught a sparrow. I had to go an extra thirty li to find it."

"Can't you go a little further still?"

"Yes, madam. That's what I mean to do. I'll get up earlier tomorrow morning. If you wake first, call me. I mean to go fifty li further to see if I can't find some roebucks or rabbits. . . . It won't be easy, though. Remember all the game there was when I shot the giant boar and the huge python? Black bears used to pass in front of your mother's door, and she asked me several times to shoot them. . . ."

"Really?" It seemed to have slipped Chang E's memory.

"Who could have foreseen they would all disappear like this? Come to think of it, I don't know how we're going to manage. *I'm* all right. I've only to eat that elixir the priest gave me, and I can fly up to heaven. But I must think of you first. . . . That's why I've decided to go a little further tomorrow."

"Um."

Chang E had finished the water. She lay down slowly and closed her eyes

The lamp, burning low, lit up her fading make-up. Much of her powder had rubbed off, there were dark circles beneath her eyes and one of her eyebrows was blacker than the other, still her mouth was as red as fire, and though she wasn't smiling you could see faint dimples on her cheeks.

“Ah, no! How can I feed a woman like this on nothing but noodles and crow sauce!”

Overcome by shame, Yi flushed up to his ears.

II

Night passed, a new day dawned

In a flash Yi opened his eyes. A sunbeam aslant the western wall told him it could not be early. He looked at Chang E, who was lying stretched out fast asleep. Without a sound he threw on his clothes, slipped down from his leopard-skin couch and tiptoed into the hall. As he washed his face he told Nugeng to order Wang Sheng to saddle his horse.

Having so much to do, he had long since given up breakfast. Nuyi put five baked cakes, five stalks of leek and a package of paprika in his game bag, fastening this firmly to his waist with his bow and arrows. He tightened his belt and strode lightly out of the hall, telling Nugeng whom he met:

“I mean to go further today to look for game. I may be a little late back. When your mistress has had her breakfast and is in good spirits, give her my apologies and ask her to wait for me for supper. Don't forget — my apologies!”

He walked swiftly out, swung into the saddle and flashed past the retainers ranged on either side. Very soon he was out of the village. In front were the sorghum fields through which he passed every day. These he ignored, having learned long ago that there was nothing here. With two cracks of his whip he galloped forward, covering sixty li without a pause. In front was a dense forest, and since his horse was winded and in a lather it naturally slowed down. Another ten li and they were in the forest, yet Yi could see nothing but wasps, butterflies, ants and locusts — not a trace of birds or beasts.

The first sight of this unexplored territory had raised hopes of catching at least a couple of foxes or rabbits but now he knew that had been an idle dream. He made his way out and saw another stretch of green sorghum fields ahead, with one or two mud cottages in the distance. The breeze was balmy, the sun warm, neither crow nor sparrow could be heard.

“Confound it!” he bellowed to relieve his feelings

A dozen paces further on, however, and his heart leaped with joy. On the flat ground outside a mud hut in the distance there was actually a fowl. Stopping to peck at every step, it looked like a large pigeon. He seized his bow and fitted an arrow to it, drew it to its full extent and then let go. His shaft sped through the air like a shooting star.

With no hesitation, for he never missed his quarry, he spurred after the arrow to retrieve the game. But as he approached it an old woman hurried towards the horse. She had picked up the large pigeon transfixed by his arrow and was shouting.

“Who are you? Why have you shot my best black laying hen? Have you nothing better to do? . . .”

Yi’s heart missed a beat. He pulled up short.

“What! A hen?” he echoed nervously. “I thought it was a wood pigeon.”

“Are you blind? You must be over forty too.”

“Yes, ma’am. Forty-five last year.”

“No fool like an old fool, they say. Imagine mistaking a hen for a wood pigeon! Who are you anyway?”

“I am Yi.” While saying this he saw that his arrow had pierced the hen’s heart, killing it outright. So his voice trailed away on his name as he dismounted.

“Yi? . . . Never heard of him!” She peered into his face.

“There are those who know my name. In the days of good King Yao I shot wild boars and serpents. . . .”

"Oh, you liar! Those were shot by Lord Feng Meng* and some others. Maybe you helped. But how can you boast of doing it all yourself? For shame!"

"Why, ma'am, that fellow Feng Meng has just taken to calling on me during the last few years. We never worked together. He had no part in it."

"Liar! Everybody says so. I hear it four or five times a month."

"All right. Let's come down to business. What about this hen?"

"You must make it up! She was my best. She laid me an egg every day. You'll have to give me two hoes and three spindles in exchange."

"Look at me, ma'am — I neither farm nor spin. Where would I get hoes or spindles? I've no money on me either, only five baked cakes — but they're made of white flour. I'll give you these for your hen with five stalks of leek and a package of paprika into the bargain. What do you say? . . ."

Taking the cakes from his bag with one hand, he picked up the hen with the other.

The old woman was not averse to taking cakes of white flour, but insisted on having fifteen. After haggling for some time they agreed on ten, and Yi promised to bring the rest over by noon the next day at the latest, leaving the arrow there as security. Then, his mind at rest, he stuffed the dead hen in his bag, sprang into his saddle and headed home. Though famished, he was happy. It was over a year since they last tasted chicken soup.

It was afternoon when he emerged from the forest, and he plied his whip hard in his eagerness to get home. His horse was exhausted, though, and not till dusk did they reach the familiar sorghum fields. He glimpsed a shadowy figure some way off, and almost at once an arrow sang through the air towards him.

* Yi's pupil and another good archer.

Without reining in his horse, which was trotting along, Yi fitted an arrow to his bow and let fly. Zing! Two arrow-heads collided, sparks flew into the air and the two shafts thrust up to form an inverted V before toppling over and falling to the ground. No sooner had the first two met than both men loosed their second, which collided again in mid air. They did this nine times, till Yi's supply was exhausted, and now he could see Feng Meng opposite, gloating as he aimed another arrow at his throat

"Well, well" thought Yi "I imagined he was fishing at the seaside, but he's been hanging about to play dirty tricks like this. Now I understand the old woman talking as she did . . ."

In a flash, his enemy's bow arched like a full moon and the arrow whistled through the air towards Yi's throat. Perhaps the aim was at fault, for it struck him full in the mouth. He tumbled over, transfixed, and fell to the ground. His horse stood motionless *

Seeing Yi was dead, Feng Meng tiptoed slowly over. Smiling as if drinking to his victory, he gazed at the corpse's face.

He stared long and hard till Yi opened his eyes and sat up.

"You've learned nothing in a hundred visits or more to me" He spat out the arrow and laughed "Don't you know my skill in 'biting the arrow'? That's too bad! These tricks of yours won't get you anywhere. You can't kill your boxing master with blows learned from him. You must work out something of your own."

"I was trying to 'pay you out in your own coin' . . ."

mumbled the victor.

Yi stood up, laughing heartily. "You're always quoting some adage. Maybe you can impress old women that

* This is a thrust at Gao Changhong, a young writer who was Lu Xun's pupil but later attacked him in his articles. The story of Feng Meng shooting Yi suggests Gao's attack on Lu Xun

way, but you can't impose on *me* I've always stuck to hunting, never taken to highway robbery like you ."

Relieved to see that the hen in his bag was not crushed, he remounted and rode away

"Curse you " An oath carried after him

"To think he should stoop so low Such a young fellow, and yet he's picked up swearing No wonder that old woman was taken in "

Yi shook his head sadly as he rode along

III

Before he came to the end of the sorghum fields, night fell. Stars appeared in the dark blue sky, and the evening star shone with unusual brilliance in the west. The horse picked its way along the white ridges between the fields, so weary that its pace was slower than ever. Fortunately, at the horizon the moon began to shed its silver light

"Confound it!" Yi, whose belly was rumbling now, lost patience. "The harder I try to make a living, the more tiresome things happen to waste my time" He spurred his horse, but it simply twitched its rump and jogged on as slowly as before.

"Chang E is sure to be angry," he thought. "It's so late! She may fly into a temper Thank goodness I've this little hen to make her happy. I'll tell her, 'Madam, I went two hundred li there and back to find you this' No, that's no good. sounds too boastful "

Now to his joy he saw lights ahead and stopped worrying And without any urging the horse broke into a canter. A round, snow-white moon lit up the path before him and a cool wind soothed his cheeks — this was better than coming home from a great hunt!

The horse stopped of its own accord beside the rubbish heap. Yi saw at a glance that something was amiss. The

whole house was in confusion. Zhao Fu alone came out to meet him.

"What's happened? Where's Wang Sheng?" he demanded.

"He's gone to the Yao family to look for our mistress."

"What? Has your mistress gone to the Yao family?" Yi was too taken aback to dismount.

"Yes, sir." Zhao took the reins and whip.

Then Yi got down from his horse and crossed the threshold. After a moment's thought he turned to ask.

"Are you sure she didn't grow tired of waiting and go to a restaurant?"

"No, sir. I've asked in all three restaurants. She isn't there."

His head lowered in thought, Yi entered the house. The three maids were standing nervously in front of the hall. He cried out in amazement:

"What! All of you here? Your mistress never goes alone to the Yao family."

They looked at him in silence, then took off his bow, the quiver and the bag holding the small hen. Yi had a moment of panic. Suppose Chang E had killed herself in anger? He sent Nugeng for Zhao Fu, and told him to search the pond in the back and the trees. Once in their room, though, he knew his guess had been wrong. The place was in utter disorder, all the chests were open and one glance behind the bed showed that the jewel-case was missing. He felt as if doused with cold water. Gold and pearls meant nothing to him, but the elixir given him by the priest had been in that case too.

After walking twice round the room, he noticed Wang Sheng at the door.

"Please, sir, our mistress isn't with the Yaos. They're not playing mahjong today."

Yi looked at him and said nothing. Wang Sheng withdrew.

"Did you call me, sir?" asked Zhao Fu, coming in.

Yi shook his head and waved him away

He walked round and round the room, then went to the hall and sat down. Looking up he could see on the opposite wall the vermilion bow and arrows, the black bow and arrows, the crossbow, the sword and the dagger. After some reflection, he asked the maids who were standing there woodenly

“What time did your mistress disappear?”

“She wasn’t here when I brought in the lamp,” said Nuyi. “But no one saw her go out.”

“Did you see her take the medicine in that case?”

“No, sir. But she did ask me for some water this afternoon.”

Yi stood up in consternation. He suspected that he had been left alone on earth!

“Did you see anything flying to heaven?” he asked

“Oh!” Nuxin was struck by a thought. “When I came out after lighting the lamp, I did see a black shadow flying this way. I never dreamed it was our mistress . . .” Her face turned pale.

“It must have been!” Yi clapped his knee and sprang up. He started out, turning back to ask Nuxin, “Which way did the shadow go?”

Nuxin pointed with one finger. But all he could see in that direction was the round, snow-white moon suspended in the sky, with its hazy pavilions and trees. When he was a child his grandmother had told him of the lovely landscape of the moon; he still had a vague recollection of her description. As he watched the moon floating in a sapphire sea, his own limbs seemed very heavy.

Fury took possession of him. And in his fury he felt the urge to kill. With eyes starting from his head, he roared at the maids:

“Bring my bow! The one with which I shot the suns! And three arrows!”

Nuyi and Nugeng took down the huge bow in the middle of the hall and dusted it. They handed it to him with three long arrows.

Holding the bow in one hand, with the other he fitted the three arrows to the string. He drew the bow to the full, aiming straight at the moon. Standing there firm as a rock, his eyes darting lightning, his beard and hair flying in the wind like black tongues of flame, for one instant he looked again the hero who had long ago shot the suns.

A whistling was heard, one only. The three shafts left the string, one after the other, too fast for eye to see or ear to hear. They should have struck the moon in the same place, for they followed each other without a hair's breadth between them. But to be sure of reaching his mark he had given each a slightly different direction, so that the arrows struck three different points, inflicting three wounds.

The maids gave a cry. They saw the moon quiver and thought it must surely fall — but still it hung there peacefully, shedding a calm, even brighter light, as if completely unscathed.

Yi threw back his head to hurl an oath at the sky. He watched and waited. But the moon paid no attention. He took three paces forward, and the moon fell back three paces. He took three paces back, and the moon moved forward.

They looked at each other in silence.

Listlessly, he leaned his bow against the door of the hall. He went inside. The maids followed him.

He sat down and sighed. "Well, your mistress will be happy on her own for ever after. How could she have the heart to leave me and fly up there alone? Did she find me too old? But only last month she said, 'You're not old. It's a sign of mental weakness to think of yourself as old. . . .'"

“That couldn’t be it,” said Nuyi. “Folk still describe you as a warrior, sir.”

“Sometimes you seem like an artist,” put in Nuxin.

“Nonsense! The fact is, those noodles with crow sauce were uneatable. I can’t blame her for not being able to stomach them. ”

“That leopard skin is worn out on one side. I’ll cut a piece of the leg facing the wall to mend it. That will look better.” Nuxin walked inside.

“Wait a bit!” said Yi and reflected. “There’s no hurry for that. I’m famished. Make haste and cook me a dish of chicken with paprika, and make five catties of flapjacks. After that I can go to bed. Tomorrow I’m going to ask that priest for another elixir, so that I can follow her. Tell Wang Sheng, Nugeng, to give my horse four measures of beans!”

December 1926

FORGING THE SWORDS

I

Mei Jian Chi had no sooner lain down beside his mother than rats came out to gnaw the wooden lid of the pan. The sound got on his nerves. The soft hoots he gave had some effect at first, but presently the rats ignored him, crunching and munching as they pleased. He dared not make a loud noise to drive them away, for fear of waking his mother, so tired by her labours during the day that she had fallen asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow

After a long time silence fell. He was dozing off when a sudden splash made him open his eyes with a start. He heard the rasping of claws against earthenware

"Good! I hope you drown!" he thought gleefully and sat up quietly.

He got down from the bed and picked his way by the light of the moon to the door. He groped for the fire stick behind it, lit a chip of pine wood and lighted up the water vat. Sure enough, a huge rat had fallen in. There was too little water inside for it to get out. It was just swimming round, scrabbling at the side of the vat.

"Serves you right!" the boy exulted. This was one of the creatures that kept him awake every night by gnawing the furniture. He stuck the torch into a small hole in the mud wall to gloat over the sight, till the beady eyes revolted him and reaching for a dried reed he pushed

the creature under the water. After a time he removed the reed and the rat, coming to the surface, went on swimming round and scrabbling at the side of the vat, but less powerfully than before. Its eyes were under water — all that could be seen was the red tip of a small pointed nose, snuffling desperately.

For some time he had had an aversion to red-nosed people. Yet now this small pointed red nose struck him as pathetic. He thrust his reed under the creature's belly. The rat clutched at it, and after catching its breath clambered up it. But the sight of its whole body — sopping black fur, bloated belly, worm-like tail — struck him again as so revolting that he hastily shook the reed. The rat dropped back with a splash into the vat. Then he hit it several times over the head to make it sink.

Now the pine chip had been changed six times. The rat, exhausted, was floating submerged in the middle of the vat, from time to time straining slightly towards the surface. Once more the boy was seized with pity. He broke the reed in two and, with considerable difficulty, fished the creature up and put it on the floor. To begin with, it didn't budge, then it took a breath, after a long time its feet twitched and it turned over, as if meaning to make off. This gave Mei Jian Chi a jolt. He raised his left foot instinctively and brought it heavily down. He heard a small cry. When he squatted down to look, there was blood on the rat's muzzle — it was probably dead.

He felt sorry again, as remorseful as if he had committed a crime. He squatted there, staring, unable to get up.

By this time his mother was awake.

"What are you doing, son?" she asked from the bed.

"A rat." He rose hastily and turned to her, answering briefly.

"I know it's a rat. But what are you doing? Killing it or saving it?"

He made no answer. The torch had burned out. He stood there silently in the darkness, accustoming his eyes to the pale light of the moon.

His mother sighed.

"After midnight you'll be sixteen, but you're still the same — so lukewarm. You never change. It looks as if your father will have no one to avenge him."

Seated in the grey moonlight, his mother seemed to be trembling from head to foot. The infinite grief in her low tones made him shiver. The next moment, though, hot blood raced through his veins.

"Avenge my father? Does he need avenging?" He stepped forward in amazement.

"He does. And the task falls to you. I have long wanted to tell you, but while you were small I said nothing. Now you're not a child any longer though you still act like one. I just don't know what to do. Can a boy like you carry through a real man's job?"

"I can. Tell me, Mother. I'm going to change."

"Of course. I can only tell you. And you'll have to change . . . Well, come over here."

He walked over. His mother was sitting upright in bed, her eyes flashing in the shadowy white moonlight.

"Listen!" she said gravely. "Your father was famed as a forger of swords, the best in all the land. I sold his tools to keep us from starving, so there's nothing left for you to see. But he was the best sword-maker in the whole world. Twenty years ago, the king's concubine gave birth to a piece of iron which they said she conceived after embracing an iron pillar. It was pure, transparent iron. The king, realizing that this was a rare treasure, decided to have it made into a sword with which to defend his kingdom, kill his enemies and ensure his own safety. As ill luck would have it, your father was chosen for the task, and in both hands he brought the iron home. He tempered it day and night for three whole years, until he had forged two swords.

“What a fearful sight when he finally opened his furnace! A jet of white vapour billowed up into the sky, while the earth shook. The white vapour became a white cloud above this spot, by degrees it turned a deep scarlet and cast a peach-blossom tint over everything. In our pitch-black furnace lay two red-hot swords. As your father sprinkled them drop by drop with clear well water, the swords hissed and spat and little by little turned blue. So seven days and seven nights passed, till the swords disappeared from sight. But if you looked hard, they were still in the furnace, pure blue and transparent as two icicles.

“Great happiness flashed from your father’s eyes. Picking up the swords, he stroked and fondled them. Then lines of sadness appeared on his forehead and at the corners of his mouth. He put the swords in two caskets.

“‘You’ve only to look at the portents of the last few days to realize that everybody must know the swords are forged,’ he told me softly. ‘Tomorrow I must go to present one to the king. But the day that I present it will be the last day of my life. I am afraid we shall never meet again.’

“‘Horrified, uncertain what he meant, I didn’t know what to reply. All I could say was: ‘But you’ve done such fine work.’

“‘Ah, you don’t understand! The king is suspicious and cruel. Now I’ve forged two swords the like of which have never been seen, he is bound to kill me to prevent my forging swords for any of his rivals who might oppose or surpass him.’

“I shed tears.

“‘Don’t grieve,’ he said. ‘There’s no way out. Tears can’t wash away fate. I’ve been prepared for this for some time.’ His eyes seemed to dart lightning as he placed a sheath on my knee. ‘This is the male sword,’ he told me. ‘Keep it. Tomorrow I shall take the female to the king. If I don’t come back, you’ll know I’m dead.’

Won't you be brought to bed in four or five months? Don't grieve, but bear our child and bring him up well. As soon as he's grown, give him this sword and tell him to cut off the king's head to avenge me!" "

"Did my father come back that day?" demanded the boy.

"He did not," she replied calmly. "I asked everywhere, but there was no news of him. Later someone told me that the first to stain with his blood the sword forged by your father was your father himself. For fear his ghost should haunt the palace, they buried his body at the front gate, his head in the park at the back."

Mei Jian Chi felt as if he were on fire and sparks were flashing from every hair of his head. He clenched his fists in the dark till the knuckles cracked.

His mother stood up and lifted aside the board at the head of the bed. Then she lit a torch, took a hoe from behind the door and handed it to her son with the order

"Dig!"

Though the lad's heart was pounding, he dug calmly, stroke after stroke. He scooped out yellow earth to a depth of over five feet, when the colour changed to that of rotten wood.

"Look! Careful now!" cried his mother.

Lying flat beside the hole he had made, he reached down gingerly to shift the rotted wood till the tips of his fingers touched something as cold as ice. It was the pure, transparent sword. He made out where the hilt was, grasped it, and lifted it out.

The moon and stars outside the window and the pine torch inside the room abruptly lost their brightness. The world was filled with a blue, steely light. And in this steely light the sword appeared to melt away and vanish from sight. But when the lad looked hard he saw something over three feet long which didn't seem particularly sharp — in fact the blade was rounded like a leek.

"You must stop being soft now," said his mother "Take this sword to avenge your father!"

"I've already stopped being soft. With this sword I'll avenge him!"

"I hope so. Put on a blue coat and strap the sword to your back. No one will see it if they are the same colour. I've got the coat ready here." His mother pointed at the shabby chest behind the bed. "You'll set out tomorrow. Don't worry about me."

Mei Jian Chi tried on the new coat and found that it fitted him perfectly. He wrapped it around the sword which he placed by his pillow, and lay down calmly again. He believed he had already stopped being soft. He determined to act as if nothing were on his mind, to fall straight asleep, to wake the next morning as usual, and then to set out confidently in search of his mortal foe.

However, he couldn't sleep. He tossed and turned, eager all the time to sit up. He heard his mother's long, soft, hopeless sighs. Then he heard the first crow of the cock and knew that a new day had dawned, that he was sixteen.

II

Mei Jian Chi, his eyelids swollen, left the house without a look behind. In the blue coat with the sword on his back, he strode swiftly towards the city. There was as yet no light in the east. The vapours of night still hid in the dew that clung to the tip of each fir leaf. But by the time he reached the far end of the forest, the dew drops were sparkling with lights which little by little took on the tints of dawn. Far ahead he could just see the outline of the dark grey, crenellated city walls.

Mingling with the vegetable vendors, he entered the city. The streets were already full of noise and bustle. Men were standing about idly in groups. Every now and

then women put their heads out from their doors. Most of their eyelids were swollen from sleep too, their hair was uncombed and their faces were pale as they had had no time to put on rouge.

Mei Jian Chi sensed that some great event was about to take place, something eagerly yet patiently awaited by all these people.

As he advanced, a child darted past, almost knocking into the point of the sword on his back. He broke into a cold sweat. Turning north not far from the palace, he found a press of people craning their necks towards the road. The cries of women and children could be heard from the crowd. Afraid his invisible sword might hurt one of them, he dared not push his way forward; but new arrivals were pressing up from behind. He had to move out of their way, till all he could see was the backs of those in front and their craning necks.

All of a sudden, the people in front fell one by one to their knees. In the distance appeared two riders galloping forward side by side. They were followed by warriors carrying batons, spears, swords, bows and flags, who raised a cloud of yellow dust. After them came a large cart drawn by four horses, bearing musicians sounding gongs and drums and blowing strange wind instruments. Behind were carriages with courtiers in bright clothes, old men or short, plump fellows, their faces glistening with sweat. These were followed by outriders armed with swords, spears and halberds. Then the kneeling people prostrated themselves and Mei Jian Chi saw a great carriage with a yellow canopy drive up. In the middle of this was seated a fat man in bright clothes with a grizzled moustache and small head. He was wearing a sword like the one on the boy's back.

Mei Jian Chi gave an instinctive shudder, but at once he felt burning hot. Reaching out for the hilt of the sword on his back, he picked his way forward between the necks of the kneeling crowd.

But he had taken no more than five or six steps when someone tripped him up and he fell headlong on top of a young fellow with a wizened face. He was getting up nervously to see whether the point of his sword had done any damage, when he received two hard punches in the ribs. Without stopping to protest he looked at the road. But the carriage with the yellow canopy had passed. Even the mounted attendants behind it were already some distance away.

On both sides of the road everyone got up again. The young man with the wizened face had seized Mei Jian Chi by the collar and would not let go. He accused him of crushing his solar plexus, and ordered the boy to pay with his own life if he died before the age of eighty. Idlers crowded round to gape but said nothing, till a few taking the side of the wizened youth let fall some jokes and curses. Mei Jian Chi could neither laugh at such adversaries nor lose his temper. Annoying as they were, he could not get rid of them. This went on for about the time it takes to cook a pan of millet. He was afire with impatience. Still the onlookers, watching as avidly as ever, refused to disperse.

Then through the throng pushed a dark man, lean as an iron rake, with a black beard and black eyes. Without a word, he smiled coldly at Mei Jian Chi, then raised his hand to flick the jaw of the youngster with the wizened face and looked steadily into his eyes. For a moment the youth returned his stare, then let go of the boy's collar and made off. The dark man made off too, and the disappointed spectators drifted away. A few came up to ask Mei Jian Chi his age and address, and whether he had sisters at home. But he ignored them.

He walked south, reflecting that in the bustling city it would be easy to wound someone by accident. He had better wait outside the South Gate for the king's return, to avenge his father. That open, deserted space was the best place for his purpose. By now the whole city was

discussing the king's trip to the mountain. What a retinue! What majesty! What an honour to have seen the king! They had prostrated themselves so low that they should be considered as examples to all the nation! They buzzed like a swarm of bees. Near the South Gate, however, it became quieter.

Having left the city, he sat down under a big mulberry tree to eat two rolls of steamed bread. As he ate, the thought of his mother brought a lump to his throat, but presently that passed. All around grew quieter and quieter, until he could hear his own breathing quite distinctly.

As dusk fell, he grew more and more uneasy. He strained his eyes ahead, but there was not a sign of the king. The villagers who had taken vegetables to the city to sell were one by one going home with empty baskets.

Long after all these had passed, the dark man came darting out from the city.

"Run, Mei Jian Chi! The king is after you!" His voice was like the hoot of an owl.

Mei Jian Chi trembled from head to foot. Spellbound, he followed the dark man, running as if he had wings. At last, stopping to catch breath, he realized they had reached the edge of the fir-wood. Far behind were the silver rays of the rising moon, but in front all he could see were the dark man's eyes gleaming like will-o'-the-wisps.

"How did you know me?" asked the lad in fearful amazement.

"I've always known you." The man laughed. "I know you carry the male sword on your back to avenge your father. And I know you will fail. Not only so, but today someone has informed against you. Your enemy went back to the palace by the East Gate and has issued an order for your arrest."

Mei Jian Chi began to despair.

"Oh, no wonder Mother sighed," he muttered

"But she knows only half. She doesn't know that I'm going to take vengeance for you."

"You? Are you willing to take vengeance for me, champion of justice?"

"Ah, don't insult me by giving me that title."

"Well, then, is it out of sympathy for widows and orphans?"

"Don't use words that have been sullied, child," he replied sternly. "Justice, sympathy and such terms, which once were clean, have now become capital for fiendish usurers. I have no place for these in my heart. I want only to avenge you!"

"Good. But how will you do it?"

"I want two things only from you." His voice sounded from beneath two burning eyes. "What two things? First your sword, then your head!"

Mei Jian Chi thought the request a strange one. But though he hesitated, he was not afraid. For a moment he was speechless.

"Don't be afraid that I want to trick you out of your life and your treasure," continued the implacable voice in the dark. "It's entirely up to you. If you trust me, I'll go; if not, I won't."

"But why are you going to take vengeance for me? Did you know my father?"

"I knew him from the start, just as I've always known you. But that's not the reason. You don't understand, my clever lad, how I excel at revenge. What's yours is mine, what concerns him concerns me too. I bear on my soul so many wounds inflicted by others as well as by myself, that now I hate myself."

The voice in the darkness was silent. Mei Jian Chi raised his hand to draw the blue sword from his back and with the same movement swung it forward from the nape of his neck. As his head fell on the green moss at his feet, he handed the sword to the dark man.

“Aha!” The man took the sword with one hand, with the other he picked up Mei Jian Chi’s head by the hair. He kissed the warm dead lips twice and burst into cold, shrill laughter.

His laughter spread through the fir-wood. At once, deep in the forest, flashed blazing eyes like the light of the will-o’-the-wisp which the next instant came so close that you could hear the snuffling of famished wolves. With one bite, Mei Jian Chi’s blue coat was torn to shreds; the next disposed of his whole body, while the blood was instantaneously licked clean. The only sound was the soft crunching of bones.

The huge wolf at the head of the pack hurled itself at the dark man. But with one sweep of the blue sword, its head fell on the green moss at his feet. With one bite the other wolves tore its skin to shreds, then next disposed of its whole body, while the blood was instantaneously licked clean. The only sound was the soft crunching of bones.

The dark man picked up the blue coat from the ground to wrap up Mei Jian Chi’s head. Having fastened this and the blue sword on his back, he turned on his heel and swung off through the darkness towards the capital.

The wolves stood stock-still, hunched up, tongues lolling, panting. They watched him with green eyes as he strode away.

He swung through the darkness towards the capital, singing in a shrill voice as he went:

*Sing hey, sing ho!
The single one who loved the sword
Has taken death as his reward.
Those who go single are galore,
Who love the sword are alone no more!
Foe for foe, ha! Head for head!
Two men by their own hands are dead.*

III

The king had taken no pleasure in his trip to the mountain, and the secret report of an assassin lying in wait on the road sent him back even more depressed. He was in a bad temper that night. He complained that not even the ninth concubine's hair was as black and glossy as the day before. Fortunately, perched kittenishly on the royal knee, she wriggled over seventy times till at last the wrinkles on the kingly brow were smoothed out.

But on rising after noon the next day the king was in a bad mood again. By the time lunch was over, he was furious.

"I'm bored!" he cried with a great yawn.

From the queen down to the court jester, all were thrown into a panic. The king had long since tired of his old ministers' sermons and the clowning of his plump dwarfs, recently he had even been finding insipid the marvellous tricks of rope-walkers, pole-climbers, jugglers, somersaulters, sword-swallowers and fire-spitters. He was given to bursts of rage, during which he would draw his sword to kill men on the slightest pretext.

Two eunuchs just back after playing truant from the palace, observing the gloom which reigned over the court, knew that dire trouble was impending again. One of them turned pale with fear. The other, however, quite confident, made his way unhurriedly to the king's presence to prostrate himself and announce:

"Your slave begs to inform you that he has just met a remarkable man with rare skill, who should be able to amuse Your Majesty."

"What?" The king was not one to waste words.

"He's a lean, dark fellow who looks like a beggar. He's dressed in blue, has a round blue bundle on his back and sings snatches of strange doggerel. When questioned, he says he can do a wonderful trick the like of which has never been seen, unique in the world and absolutely

new The sight will end all care and bring peace to the world But when we asked for a demonstration, he wouldn't give one He says he needs a golden dragon and a golden cauldron. . . ."

"A golden dragon? That's me. A golden cauldron? I have one."

"That's just what your slave thought. . . ."

"Bring him in!"

Before the king's voice had died away, four guards hurried out with the eunuch From the queen down to the court jester, all beamed with delight, hoping this conjuror would end all care and bring peace to the world And even if the show fell flat, there would be the lean, dark, beggarly-looking fellow to bear the brunt of the royal displeasure If they could last till he was brought in, all would be well

They did not have long to wait Six men came hurrying towards the golden throne. The eunuch led the way, the four guards brought up the rear, and in the middle was a dark man On nearer inspection they could see his blue coat, black beard, eyebrows and hair. He was so thin that his cheekbones stood out and his eyes were sunken As he knelt respectfully to prostrate himself. on his back was visible a small round bundle, wrapped in blue cloth patterned in a dark red

"Well!" shouted the king impatiently The simplicity of this fellow's paraphernalia did not augur well for his tricks.

"Your subject's name is Yan-zhi-ao-zhe, born in Wen-wen Village. I wasn't bred to any trade, but when I was grown I met a sage who taught me how to conjure with a boy's head. I can't do this alone, though It must be

* The ancient Chinese emperors, to bolster their prestige, often called themselves dragons The dragon in Chinese legend was divine

in the presence of a golden dragon, and I must have a golden cauldron filled with clear water and heated with charcoal. Then when the boy's head is put in and the water boils, the head will rise and fall and dance all manner of figures. It will laugh and sing too in a marvellous voice. Whoever hears its song and sees its dance will know an end to care. When all men see it, the whole world will be at peace."

"Go ahead!" the king ordered loudly.

They did not have long to wait. A great golden cauldron, big enough to boil an ox, was set outside the court. It was filled with clear water, and charcoal was lit beneath it. The dark man stood at one side. When the charcoal was red he put down his bundle and undid it. Then with both hands he held up a boy's head with fine eyebrows, large eyes, white teeth and red lips. A smile was on its face. Its tangled hair was like faint blue smoke. The dark man raised it high, turning round to display it to the whole assembly. He held it over the cauldron while he muttered something unintelligible, and finally dropped it with a splash into the water. Foam flew up at least five feet high. Then all was still.

For a long time nothing happened. The king lost patience, the queen, concubines, ministers and eunuchs began to feel alarmed, while the plump dwarfs started to sneer. These sneers made the king suspect that he was being made to look a fool. He turned to the guards to order them to have this oaf who dared deceive his monarch thrown into the great cauldron and boiled to death.

But that very instant he heard the water bubbling. The fire burning with all its might cast a ruddy glow over the dark man, turning him the dull red of molten iron. The king looked round. The dark man, stretching both hands towards the sky, stared into space and danced, singing in a shrill voice:

*Sing hey for love, for love heigh ho!
 Ah, love! Ah, blood! Who is not so?
 Men grope in dark, the king laughs loud,
 Ten thousand heads in death have bowed.
 I only use one single head,
 For one man's head let blood be shed!
 Blood — let it flow!
 Sing hey, sing ho!*

As he sang, the water in the cauldron seethed up like a small cone-shaped mountain, flowing and eddying from tip to base. The head bobbed up and down with the water, skimming round and round, turning nimble somersaults as it went. They could just make out the smile of pleasure on its face. Then abruptly it gave this up to start swimming against the stream, circling, weaving to and fro, splashing water in all directions so that hot drops showered the court. One of the dwarfs gave a yelp and rubbed his nose. Scalded, he couldn't suppress a cry of pain.

The dark man stopped singing. The head remained motionless in the middle of the water, a grave expression on its face. After a few seconds, it began bobbing up and down slowly again. From bobbing it put on speed to swim up and down, not quickly but with infinite grace. Three times it circled the cauldron, ducking up and down. Then, its eyes wide, the jet-black pupils phenomenally bright, it sang:

*The sovereign's rule spreads far and wide,
 He conquers foes on every side.
 The world may end, but not his might,
 So here I come all gleaming bright.
 Bright gleams the sword — forget me not!
 A royal sight, but sad my lot.
 Sing hey, sing ho, a royal sight!
 Come back, where gleams the bright blue light.*

The head stopped suddenly at the crest of the water. After several somersaults, it started plying up and down again, casting bewitching glances to right and to left as it sang once more

*Heigh ho, for the love we know!
I cut one head, one head, heigh ho!
I use one single head, not more,
The heads he uses are galore! . . .*

By the last line of the song the head was submerged, and since it did not reappear the singing became indistinct. As the song grew fainter, the seething water subsided little by little like an ebbing tide, until it was below the rim of the cauldron. From a distance nothing could be seen.

"Well?" demanded the king impatiently, tired of waiting.

"Your Majesty!" The dark man went down on one knee. "It's dancing the most miraculous Dance of Union at the bottom of the cauldron. You can't see this except from close by. I can't make it come up, because this Dance of Union has to be performed at the bottom of the cauldron."

The king stood up and strode down the steps to the cauldron. Regardless of the heat, he bent forward to watch. The water was smooth as a mirror. The head, lying there motionless, looked up and fixed its eyes on the king. When the king's glance fell on its face, it gave a charming smile. This smile made the king feel that they had met before. Who could this be? As he was wondering, the dark man drew the blue sword from his back and swept it forward like lightning from the nape of the king's neck. The king's head fell with a splash into the cauldron.

When enemies meet they know each other at a glance, particularly at close quarters. The moment the king's head touched the water, Mei Jian Chi's head came up to

meet it and savagely bit its ear. The water in the cauldron boiled and bubbled as the two heads engaged upon a fight to the death. After about twenty encounters, the king was wounded in five places, Mei Jian Chi in seven. The crafty king contrived to slip behind his enemy, and in an unguarded moment Mei Jian Chi let himself be caught by the back of his neck, so that he could not turn round. The king fastened his teeth into him and would not let go, like a silkworm burrowing into a mulberry leaf. The boy's cries of pain could be heard outside the cauldron.

From the queen down to the court jester, all who had been petrified with fright before were galvanized into life by this sound. They felt as if the sun had been swallowed up in darkness. But even as they trembled, they knew a secret joy. They waited, round-eyed.

The dark man, rather taken aback, did not change colour. Effortlessly he raised his arm like a withered branch holding the invisible sword. He stretched forward as if to peer into the cauldron. Of a sudden his arm bent, the blue sword thrust down and his head fell into the cauldron with a plop, sending snow-white foam flying in all directions.

As soon as his head hit the water, it charged at the king's head and took the royal nose between its teeth, nearly biting it off. The king gave a cry of pain and Mei Jian Chi seized this chance to get away, whirling round to cling with a vice-like grip to his jaw. They pulled with all their might in opposite directions, so that the king could not keep his mouth shut. Then they fell on him savagely, like famished hens pecking at rice, till the king's head was mauled and savaged out of all recognition. To begin with, he lashed about frantically in the cauldron; then he simply lay there groaning; and finally he fell silent, having breathed his last.

Presently the dark man and Mei Jian Chi stopped biting. They left the king's head and swam once round

the edge of the cauldron to see whether their enemy was shamming or not. Assured that the king was indeed dead, they exchanged glances and smiled. Then, closing their eyes, their faces towards the sky, they sank to the bottom of the water.

IV

The smoke drifted away, the fire went out. Not a ripple remained on the water. The extraordinary silence brought high and low to their senses. Someone gave a cry, and at once they were all calling out together in horror. Someone walked over to the golden cauldron, and the others pressed after him. Those crowded at the back could only peer between the necks of those in front.

The heat still scorched their cheeks. The water, smooth as a mirror, was coated with oil which reflected a sea of faces: the queen, the concubines, guards, old ministers, dwarfs, eunuchs.

"Heavens! Our king's head is still in there! Oh, horrors!" The sixth concubine suddenly burst into frantic sobbing.

From the queen down to the court jester, all were seized by consternation. They scattered in panic, at a loss, running round in circles. The wisest old councillor went forward alone and put out a hand to touch the side of the cauldron. He winced, snatched back his hand and put two fingers to his mouth to blow on them.

Finally regaining control, they gathered outside the palace to discuss how best to recover the king's head. They consulted for the time it would take to cook three pans of millet. Their conclusion was: collect wire scoops from the big kitchen and order the guards to retrieve the royal head.

Soon the implements were ready: wire scoops, strainers, golden plates and dusters were all placed by the cauldron.

The guards rolled up their sleeves. Some with wire scoops, some with strainers, they respectfully set about bringing up the remains. The scoops clashed against each other and scraped the edge of the cauldron, while the water eddied in their wake. After some time, one of the guards, with a grave face, raised his scoop slowly and carefully in both hands. Drops of water like pearls were dripping from the utensil, in which could be seen a snow-white skull. As the others cried out with astonishment, he deposited the skull on one golden plate.

“Oh, dear! Our king!” The queen, concubines, ministers and even the eunuchs burst out sobbing. They soon stopped, however, when another guard fished out another skull identical with the first.

They watched dully with tear-filled eyes as the sweating guards went on with their salvaging. They retrieved a tangled mass of white hair and black hair, and several spoonfuls of some shorter hair no doubt from white and black moustaches. Then another skull. Then three hairpins.

They stopped only when nothing but clear soup was left in the cauldron, and divided what they had on to three golden plates: one of skulls, one of hair, one of hairpins.

“His Majesty had only one head. Which is his?” demanded the ninth concubine frantically.

“Quite so. . . .” The ministers looked at each other in dismay.

“If the skin and flesh hadn’t boiled away, it would be easy to tell,” said one kneeling dwarf.

They forced themselves to examine the skulls carefully, but the size and colour were about the same. They could not even distinguish which was the boy’s. The queen said the king had a scar on his right temple as the result of a fall while still crown prince, and this might have left a trace on the skull. Sure enough, a dwarf discovered such a mark on one skull, and there

was general rejoicing until another dwarf discovered a similar mark on the right temple of a slightly yellower skull

"I know!" exclaimed the third concubine happily. "Our king had a very high nose."

The eunuchs hastened to examine the noses. To be sure, one of them was relatively high, though there wasn't much to choose between them; but unfortunately that particular skull had no mark on the right temple

"Besides," said the ministers to the eunuchs, "could the back of His Majesty's skull have been so protuberant?"

"We never paid any attention to the back of His Majesty's skull. "

The queen and the concubines searched their memories. Some said it had been protuberant, some flat. When they questioned the eunuch who had combed the royal hair, he would not commit himself to an answer.

That evening a council of princes and ministers was held to determine which head was the king's, but with no better result than during the day. In fact, even the hair and moustaches presented a problem. The white was of course the king's, but since he had been grizzled it was very hard to decide about the black. After half a night's discussion, they had just eliminated a few red hairs when the ninth concubine protested. She was sure she had seen a few brown hairs in the king's moustache; in which case how could they be sure there was not a single red one? They had to put them all together again and leave the case unsettled.

They had reached no solution by the early hours of the morning. They prolonged the discussion, yawning, till the cock crowed a second time, before fixing on a safe and satisfactory solution: All three heads should be placed in the golden coffin beside the king's body for interment.

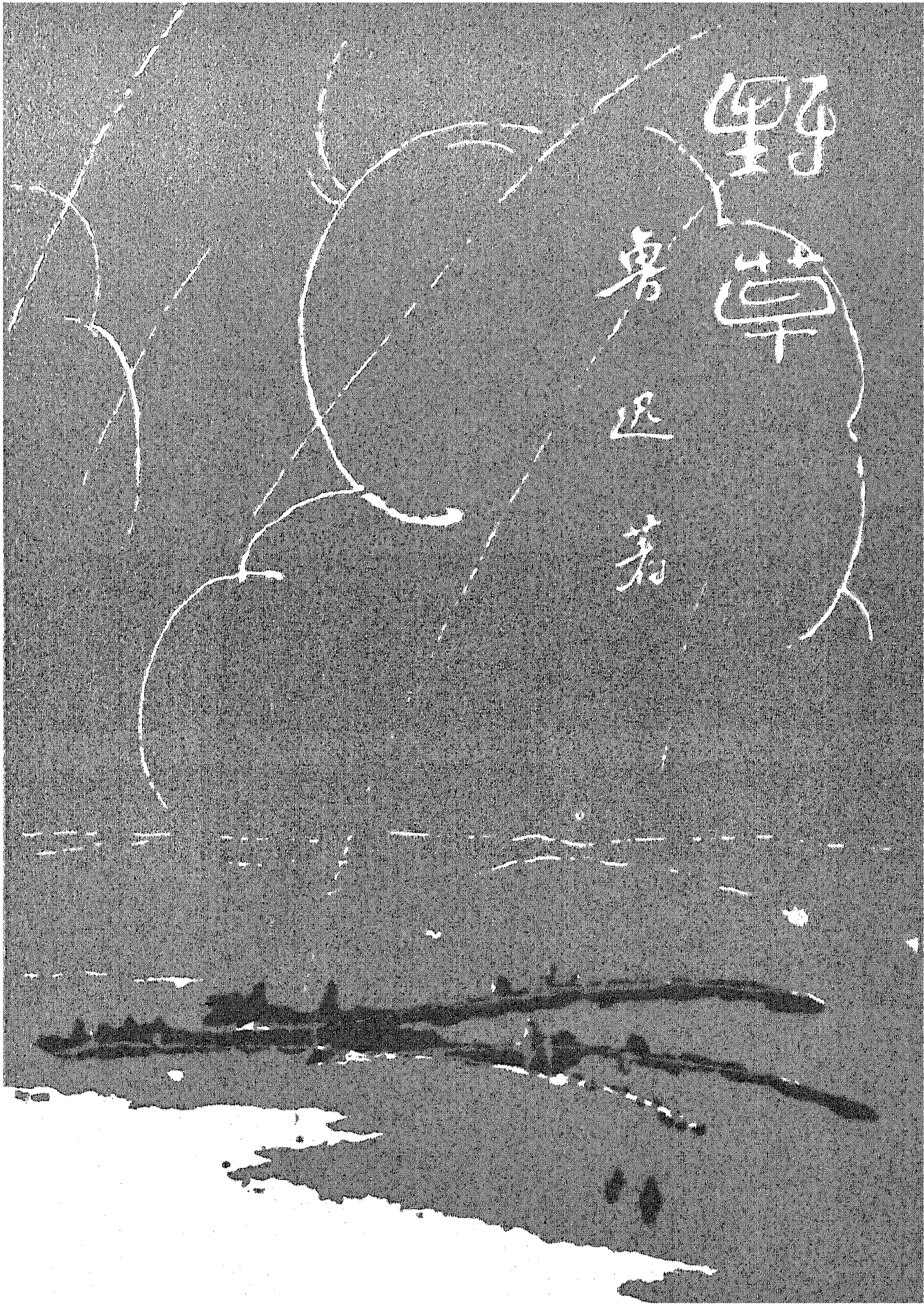
The funeral took place a week later. The whole city was agog. Citizens of the capital and spectators from

far away flocked to the royal funeral. As soon as it was light, the road was thronged with men and women. Sandwiched in between were tables bearing sacrificial offerings. Shortly before midday horsemen cantered out to clear the roads. Some time later came a procession of flags, batons, spears, bows, halberds and the like, followed by four cartloads of musicians. Then, rising and falling with the uneven ground, a yellow canopy drew near. It was possible to make out the hearse with the golden coffin in which lay three heads and one body.

The people knelt down, revealing rows of tables of offerings. Some loyal subjects gulped back tears of rage to think that the spirits of the two regicides were enjoying the sacrifice now together with the king. But there was nothing they could do about it.

Then followed the carriages of the queen and concubines. The crowd stared at them and they stared at the crowd, not stopping their wailing. After them came the ministers, eunuchs and dwarfs, all of whom had assumed a mournful air. But no one paid the least attention to them, and their ranks were squeezed out of all semblance of order.

October 1926



The original cover of *Wild Grass* designed by Sun Fuxi, with the title in Lu Xun's handwriting

AUTUMN NIGHT

Behind the wall of my backyard you can see two trees: one is a date tree, the other is also a date tree.

The night sky above them is strange and high. I have never seen such a strange, high sky. It seems to want to leave this world of men, so that when folk look up they won't be able to see it. For the moment, though, it is singularly blue; and its scores of starry eyes are blinking coldly. A faint smile plays round its lips, a smile which it seems to think highly significant; and it dusts the wild plants in my courtyard with heavy frost.

I have no idea what these plants are called, what names they are commonly known by. One of them, I remember, has minute pink flowers, and its flowers are still lingering on, although more minute than ever. Shivering in the cold night air they dream of the coming of spring, of the coming of autumn, of the lean poet wiping his tears upon their last petals, who tells them autumn will come and winter will come, yet spring will follow when butterflies flit to and fro, and all the bees start humming songs of spring. Then the little pink flowers smile, though they have turned a mournful crimson with cold and are shivering still.

As for the date trees, they have lost absolutely all their leaves. Before, one or two boys still came to beat down the dates other people had missed. But now not one date is left, and the trees have lost all their leaves as well. They know the little pink flowers' dream of spring after autumn; and they know the dream of the fallen leaves of autumn after spring. They may have lost all

their leaves and have only their branches left; but these, no longer weighed down with fruit and foliage, are stretching themselves luxuriously. A few boughs, though, are still drooping, nursing the wounds made in their bark by the sticks which beat down the dates. While, rigid as iron, the straightest and longest boughs silently pierce the strange, high sky, making it blink in dismay. They pierce even the full moon in the sky, making it pale and ill at ease.

Blinking in dismay, the sky becomes bluer and bluer, more and more uneasy, as if eager to escape from the world of men and avoid the date trees, leaving the moon behind. But the moon, too, is hiding itself in the east; while, silent still and as rigid as iron, the bare boughs pierce the strange, high sky, resolved to inflict on it a mortal wound, no matter in how many ways it winks all its bewitching eyes.

With a shriek, a fierce night-bird passes.

All of a sudden, I hear midnight laughter. The sound is muffled, as if not to wake those who sleep; yet all around the air resounds to this laughter. Midnight, and no one else is by. At once I realize it is *I* who am laughing, and at once I am driven by this laughter back to my room. At once I turn up the wick of my paraffin lamp.

A pit-a-pat sounds from the glass of the back window, where swarms of insects are recklessly dashing themselves against the pane. Presently some get in, no doubt through a hole in the window paper. Once in, they set up another pit-a-pat by dashing themselves against the chimney of the lamp. One hurls itself into the chimney from the top, falling into the flame, and I fancy the flame is real. On the paper shade two or three others rest, panting. The shade is a new one since last night. Its snow-white paper is pleated in wave-like folds, and painted in one corner is a spray of blood-red gardenias.

When the blood-red gardenias blossom, the date trees, weighed down with bright foliage, will dream once more

the dream of the little pink flowers . . . and I shall hear the midnight laughter again. I hastily break off this train of thought to look at the small green insects still on the paper. Like sunflower seeds with their large heads and small tails, they are only half the size of a grain of wheat, the whole of them an adorable, pathetic green.

I yawn, light a cigarette, and puff out the smoke, paying silent homage before the lamp to these green and exquisite heroes.

September 15, 1924

THE SHADOW'S LEAVE-TAKING

If you sleep to a time when you lose track of time, your shadow may come to take his leave with these words:

“There is something I dislike in heaven, I do not want to go there There is something I dislike in hell, I do not want to go there There is something I dislike in your future golden world; I do not want to go there

“It is you, though, that I dislike

“Friend, I'll no longer follow you; I do not want to stay here.

“I do not want to!

“Ah, no! I do not want to. I would rather wander in nothingness.

“I am only a shadow. I shall leave you and sink into darkness. Yet darkness will swallow me up, and light also will cause me to vanish.

“But I do not want to wander between light and shade; I would rather sink into darkness.

“However, I am still wandering between light and shade, uncertain whether it is dusk or dawn. I can only raise my ashen-grey hand as if to drain a cup of wine. At the time when I lose track of time, I shall go far away alone.

“Alas! If it is dusk, black night will surely engulf me, or I shall be made to vanish in the daylight if it is dawn.

“Friend, the time is at hand.

“I am going to enter darkness to wander in nothingness.

“You are still expecting some gift from me. What is there for me to give? If you insist, you shall have the same darkness and nothingness. But I would like it to be only darkness, which may be lost in your daylight. I would like it to be only nothingness, which would never take possession of your heart.

“This is what I would like, friend —

“To go far away alone to a darkness from which not only will you be excluded, but other shadows too. There will be myself alone sunk in the darkness. That world will be wholly mine.”

September 24, 1924

THE BEGGARS

I am skirting a high, mouldering wall, trudging through the fine dust. Several other people are walking alone. A breeze springs up and above the wall the branches of tall trees, their leaves still unwithered, are stirring over my head.

A breeze springs up, and dust is everywhere.

A child begs from me. He is wearing lined clothes like others and does not look unhappy, yet he blocks my way to kowtow and whines as he follows me.

I dislike his voice, his manner. I detest his lack of sadness, as if this were some game. I am disgusted by the way in which he follows me, whining.

I walk on. Several other people are walking alone. A breeze springs up, and dust is everywhere.

A child begs from me. He is wearing lined clothes like others and does not look unhappy, but he is dumb. He stretches out his hands to me in dumb show.

I detest this dumb show of his. Besides, he may not be dumb; this may just be his way of begging.

I do not give him alms. I have no wish to give alms. I stand above those alms-givers. For him I have only disgust, suspicion and hate.

I am skirting a tumble-down, mud wall. Broken bricks have been piled in the gap, and beyond the wall is nothing. A breeze springs up, sending the autumn chill through my lined gown, and dust is everywhere.

I wonder what method I should use in begging. In what voice should I speak? What dumb show should I use if pretending to be dumb? . . .

Several other people are walking alone

I shall receive no alms, not even the wish to give alms.
I shall receive the disgust, suspicion and hate of those
who consider themselves above the alms-givers

I shall beg with inactivity and silence. . .

I shall at last receive nothingness.

A breeze springs up, and dust is everywhere. Several
other people are walking alone.

Dust, dust. . .

.

Dust . . .

September 24, 1924

REVENGE (II)

Because he thinks himself the Son of God, the King of the Israelites, he is to be crucified

The soldiers put on him a purple robe, make him wear a crown of thorns, and wish him joy. Then they beat his head with a reed, spit upon him, and bow the knee before him. After they have mocked him, they strip off his purple robe and leave him wearing his own clothes as before.

See how they beat his head, spit upon him, kneel before him. . . .

He will not drink the wine mixed with myrrh. He wants to remain sober to savour the Israelites' treatment of their Son of God, and have longer to pity their future but hate their present.

All around is hate, pitiable, execrable.

Hammering is heard, and nails pierce his palms. But the fact that these pitiable creatures are crucifying their Son of God alleviates his pain. Hammering is heard, and nails pierce the soles of his feet, breaking a bone so that pain shoots through his heart and marrow. But the fact that these execrable creatures are crucifying their Son of God comforts him in his pain.

The cross is hoisted up. He is hanging in mid air.

He has not drunk the wine mixed with myrrh. He wants to remain sober to savour the Israelites' treatment of their Son of God, and have longer to pity their future but hate their present.

All the passers-by insult and curse him, the chief priests and the scribes also mock him, the two thieves being crucified with him ridicule him too.

Even those being crucified with him . . .

All around is hate, pitiable, execrable

In the pain from his hands and feet he savours the sorrow of the pitiable creatures who are crucifying the Son of God, and the joy of the execrable creatures who are crucifying the Son of God and who know that the Son of God is about to die. Sudden agony from his broken bones shoots through his heart and marrow, intoxicating him with great ecstasy and compassion.

His belly heaves in the agony of compassion and execration

There is darkness over all the earth

"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" (My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?)

God has forsaken him, and so he is the son of man after all. But the Israelites are crucifying even the son of man.

Those who reek most of blood and filth are not those who crucify the Son of God, but those who crucify the son of man

December 20, 1924

HOPE

My heart is extraordinarily lonely.

But my heart is very tranquil, void of love and hate, joy and sadness, colour and sound.

I am probably growing old. Is it not a fact that my hair is turning white? Is it not a fact that my hands are trembling? Then the hands of my spirit must also be trembling. The hair of my spirit must also be turning white.

But this has been the case for many years.

Before that my heart once overflowed with sanguinary songs, blood and iron, fire and poison, resurgence and revenge. Then suddenly my heart became empty, except when I sometimes deliberately filled it with vain, self-deluding hope. Hope, hope — I took this shield of hope to withstand the invasion of the dark night in the emptiness, although behind this shield there was still dark night and emptiness. But even so I slowly wasted my youth.

I knew, of course, that my youth had departed. But I thought that the youth outside me still existed: stars and moonlight, limp fallen butterflies, flowers in the darkness, the funereal omens of the owl, the weeping with blood of the nightingale, the vagueness of laughter, the dance of love. . . . Although it might be a youth of sadness and uncertainty, it was still youth.

But why is it now so lonely? Is it because even the youth outside me has departed, and the young people of the world have all grown old?

I have to grapple alone with the dark night in the emptiness. I put down the shield of hope, hearing the *Song of Hope* by Sándor Petöfi (1823-49).

*What is hope? A prostitute!
Alluring to all, she gives herself to all,
Until you have sacrificed a priceless treasure —
Your youth — then she forsakes you.*

It is already seventy-five years since this great lyric poet and Hungarian patriot died for his fatherland on the spears of the Cossacks. Sad though his death, it is even sadder that his poetry has not yet died

But — so wretched is life — even a man as daring and resolute as Petöfi had in the end to halt before the dark night and gaze back towards the distant Orient.

“Despair, like hope,” he said, “is but vanity.”

If I must still live in this vanity which is neither light nor darkness, then I would seek the youth of sadness and uncertainty which has departed, even though it is outside me. For once the youth outside me vanishes, my own old age will also wither away.

But now there are neither stars nor moonlight, no limp fallen butterflies, no vagueness of laughter, no dance of love. The young people are very peaceful.

So I have to grapple alone with the dark night in the emptiness. Even if I cannot find the youth outside me, I would at least have a last fling in my own old age. But where is the dark night? Now there are neither stars nor moonlight, no vagueness of laughter, no dance of love. The young people are very peaceful, and before me there is not even a real dark night.

Despair, like hope, is but vanity.

New Year's Day, 1925

SNOW

The rain of the south has never congealed into icy, glittering snowflakes. Men who have seen the world consider this humdrum; does the rain, too, think it unfortunate? The snow south of the Changjiang (Yangtze) River is extremely moist and pretty, like the first indefinable intimation of spring, or the bloom of a young girl radiant with health. In the snowy wilderness are blood-red camellias, pale, white plum blossom tinged with green, and the golden, bell-shaped flowers of the winter plum; while beneath the snow lurk cold green weeds. Butterflies there are certainly none, and whether or no bees come to gather honey from the camellias and plum blossom I cannot clearly remember. But before my eyes I can see the wintry flowers in the snowy wilderness, with bees flying busily to and fro—I can hear their humming and droning.

Seven or eight children, who have gathered to build a snow Buddha, are breathing on their little red fingers, frozen like crimson shoots of ginger. When they are not successful, somebody's father comes to help. The Buddha is higher than the children; and though it is only a pear-shaped mass which might be a gourd or might be a Buddha, it is beautifully white and dazzling. Held together by its own moisture, the whole figure glitters and sparkles. The children use fruit stones for its eyes, and steal rouge from some mother's vanity case for its lips. So now it is really a respectable Buddha. With gleaming eyes and scarlet lips, it sits on the snowy ground.

Some children come to visit it the next day. Clapping their hands before it, they nod their heads and laugh. The Buddha just sits there alone. A fine day melts its skin, but a cold night gives it another coat of ice, till it looks like opaque crystal. Then a series of fine days makes it unrecognizable, and the rouge on its lips disappears.

But the snowflakes that fall in the north remain to the last like powder or sand and never hold together, whether scattered on roofs, the ground or the withered grass. The warmth from the stoves inside has melted some of the snow on the roofs. As for the rest, when a whirlwind springs up under a clear sky, it flies up wildly, glittering in the sunlight like thick mist around a flame, revolving and rising till it fills the sky, and the whole sky glitters as it whirls and rises.

On the boundless wilderness, under heaven's chilly vault, this glittering, spiralling wraith is the ghost of rain . . .

Yes, it is lonely snow, dead rain, the ghost of rain.

January 18, 1925

THE KITE

A Beijing winter dismays and depresses me. the thick snow on the ground and the bare trees' ashen branches thrusting up towards the clear blue sky, while in the distance one or two kites are floating.

At home, the time for kites is early spring. When you hear the whirr of a wind-wheel, you raise your head to see a grey crab-kite or a soft blue centipede-kite. Or there may be a solitary tile-kite, without a wind-wheel and flown too low, looking pathetically lonely and forlorn. By this time, though, the willows on the ground are putting out shoots, and the early mountain peaches have budded. Set off by the children's fancy work in the sky, together they make up the warmth of spring. Where am I now? All round me dread winter reigns, while the long-departed spring of my long-forgotten home is floating in this northern sky.

Yet I never liked flying kites. Far from liking kites, in fact, I detested them as playthings of good-for-nothing children. My young brother was just the reverse. He must then have been about ten, often fell ill and was fearfully thin, but his greatest delight was kites. Unable to buy one and forbidden by me to fly one, he would stand for hours at a time, his small lips parted in longing, gazing raptly at the sky. If a distant crab-kite suddenly came down, he would utter a cry of dismay; if the strings of two tile-kites became disentangled, he would jump and skip for joy. This struck me as absurd and contemptible.

One day it occurred to me I had not seen much of him lately, but I had noticed him picking up bamboo sticks

in the backyard. The truth dawned on me in a flash. I ran to a small deserted storeroom and, sure enough, as I pushed open the door, I discovered him there in the midst of the dusty debris. He had been sitting on a foot-stool in front of a big square stool, but now, standing up in confusion, he changed colour and shrank back. Propped up against the big stool was the bamboo framework of a butterfly-kite, not pasted yet with paper, while on the stool lay two small wind-wheels for the butterfly's eyes, which he had just been beautifying with red paper. This work was nearly done. I was pleased to have found out his secret; but furious that he could deceive me so long, while he toiled so single-heartedly to make the toy of a good-for-nothing child. I seized the framework at once and broke one of its wings, then swept the wheels to the ground and trampled on them. In size and strength he was no match for me; so of course I came off completely victorious. Then I stalked out proudly, leaving him standing in despair in that little room. What he did after that I neither knew nor cared.

But retribution came to me at last, long after our parting, when I was already middle-aged. I was unlucky enough to read a foreign book on children, from which I learned for the first time that play is a child's best occupation, and playthings his good angels. At once this childhood tyranny over the spirit, forgotten for more than twenty years, came to my mind; and that instant my heart seemed to turn to lead and sink heavily down and down.

My heart did not break; it simply sank down and down.

I knew how I could make it up to him: give him a kite, approve of his flying it, urge him to fly it, and fly it with him. We could shout, run, laugh! . . . But by this time he, like me, had long had a moustache.

I knew another way I could make it up to him: go to ask his forgiveness, and wait for him to say: "But I didn't blame you at all." Then, surely, my heart would

grow lighter. Yes, this way was feasible. There came a day when we met. The hardships of life had left their marks on our faces, and my heart was very heavy. We fell to talking of childhood happenings, and I referred to this episode, admitting that I had been a thoughtless boy. "But I didn't blame you at all," I thought he would say. Then I should have felt forgiven, and my heart would henceforth have been lighter.

"Did that really happen?" He smiled incredulously, as if he were hearing a tale about someone else. It had slipped his mind completely.

The thing was completely forgotten, with no hard feelings. In that case, what forgiveness could there be? Without hard feelings, forgiveness is a lie.

What hope is there for me now? My heart will always be heavy.

Now the spring of my home is in the air of these strange parts again. It carries me back to my long-departed childhood, and brings with it an indefinable sadness. I had better hide in dread winter. But clearly all about me winter reigns, and is even now offering me its utmost rigour and coldness.

January 24, 1925

THE GOOD STORY

The lamp flame slowly dwindled, a sign that there was not much paraffin left; and the paraffin, which was not of the best brand, had already blackened the chimney with its smoke. Crackers exploded on all sides, and cigarette smoke hung round me. It was a dull, dark night

I closed my eyes and leaned against the back of my chair, resting the hand holding *A Beginner's Notebook** on my knee

And in this drowsy state I saw a good story.

It was a lovely, charming, enthralling story. Many beautiful people and beautiful things mingled like the cloud tapestry in the sky, flying past like a myriad shooting stars, yet stretching out into infinity.

I seem to remember rowing a small boat past an ancient highway. On both banks, reflected in the azure stream, were tallow trees and young rice plants, wild flowers, fowl, dogs, bushes and withered trees, thatched cottages, pagodas, monasteries, farmers and country women, country girls, clothes hanging out to dry, monks, coir capes, hats of bamboo splints, sky, clouds and bamboos. Following each stroke of the oar they caught the flickering sunlight and mingled with the fish and weeds in the water, till all were swaying together. Then shadows and objects shivered and scattered, expanded and merged; but as soon as they merged they contracted once more, and approached their original form. The outline of each shadow was blurred as a summer cloud fringed

* A Tang Dynasty work by Xu Jian (659-729) and others.

with sunlight, darting out quicksilver flames. All the river I passed was like this

And the story I now saw was like this too. With the blue sky in the water as a background, everything was intermingled, interwoven, ever moving, ever extending, so that I could not see any end to it.

The few sparse hollyhocks beneath the withered willows by the stream must have been planted by the country girls. Great crimson flowers and variegated red flowers, floating in the water, suddenly scattered and stretched out into streamers of crimson water, but with no aura. The thatched cottages, dogs, pagodas, country girls, clouds . . . were floating too. Each of the great crimson flowers stretched out now into rippling red silk belts. The belts interwove with the dogs, the dogs with the white clouds, and the white clouds with the country girls. . . . In a twinkling they would contract again. But the reflection of the variegated red flowers was already broken and stretching out to interweave with the pagodas, country girls, dogs, thatched cottages and clouds.

Now the story that I saw became clearer, more lovely, charming, enthralling and distinct. Above the clear sky were countless beautiful people and beautiful things. I saw them all, and I recognized them all.

I was about to look more closely at them. . . .

But as I was about to look more closely at them, I opened my eyes with a start to see the cloud tapestry wrinkle and tangle as if someone had thrown a big stone into the water, so that waves leapt up and tore the whole image to shreds. I snatched without thinking at my book, which had nearly slipped to the floor. Before my eyes still hovered a few rainbow-hued, shattered reflections.

I really loved this good story. While some shattered reflections still remained I wanted to catch them, perfect and perpetuate them. I tossed aside my book, leaned forward and reached for my pen. But now there was

not the least reflection left All I could see was dim
lamplight. I was no longer in the little boat

But I still remember seeing this good story that dull,
dark night. . . .

February 24, 1925

THE PASSER-BY

TIME· *some evening.*

PLACE· *somewhere.*

CHARACTERS·

THE OLD MAN — *about seventy, white beard and hair, a black gown.*

THE GIRL — *about ten, auburn hair, black eyes, a gown with black squares on a white background.*

THE PASSER-BY — *between thirty and forty, tired and crabbed, with a smouldering gaze, black moustache and tousled hair, ragged black jacket and trousers, bare feet in shabby shoes. A sack on his arm, he leans on a bamboo pole as tall as he is.*

To the east, a few trees and ruins; to the west, a forlorn graveyard; between them a faint track. A little mud hut has its door open facing this track. Beside the door is a dead tree stump.

(The GIRL is about to help the OLD MAN up from the stump on which he is sitting.)

OLD MAN· Hey, child! Why have you stopped?

GIRL (*looking eastward*): There's someone coming. Look!

OLD MAN: Never mind. Help me inside. The sun is setting.

GIRL: I . . . want to have a look.

OLD MAN: What a child you are! You can see heaven, earth and the wind every day; isn't that enough for you? There is nothing else so worth looking at. Yet

you want to see who's coming. Anyone who appears at sunset can't do you any good. . . We'd better go in.

GIRL: But he's already quite close. Ah, it's a beggar.

OLD MAN: A beggar? That isn't likely.

(The PASSER-BY limps out from the bushes on the east, and after a moment's hesitation walks slowly up to the OLD MAN)

PASSER-BY: Good evening, sir.

OLD MAN: Thank you. Good evening.

PASSER-BY: Sir, may I make so bold as to ask for a cup of water? I am parched after walking, and there's not a pool or water-hole to be found.

OLD MAN: Yes, that's all right. Please sit down. *(To the GIRL)* Child, fetch some water. See that the cup is clean.

(The GIRL walks silently into the hut)

OLD MAN: Please sit down, stranger. What is your name?

PASSER-BY: My name? That I don't know. Ever since I can remember, I've been on my own, so I don't know my real name. As I go on my way, people call me by this name or that as the fancy takes them. But I can't remember them, and I have never been called by the same name twice.

OLD MAN: I see. Well, where are you from?

PASSER-BY *(hesitating)*: I don't know. Ever since I can remember, I have been walking like this.

OLD MAN: All right. Then may I ask you where you are going?

PASSER-BY: Of course you may. The thing is, I don't know. Ever since I can remember, I have been walking like this, on my way to some place ahead. All I can remember is that I have walked a long way, and now I have arrived here. I shall push on that way *(he points west)* ahead!

(The GIRL carefully carries out a wooden cup of water and gives it to him.)

PASSER-BY (*taking the cup*): Thank you, lass (He drinks the water in two gulps, and returns the cup.) Thank you, lass It is rare to meet with such kindness I really don't know how to thank you

OLD MAN. There is no need to be so grateful It won't do you any good.

PASSER-BY: No, it won't do me any good But I feel much better now. I shall push on. You must have been here for quite a long time, sir. Do you know what kind of place that is ahead?

OLD MAN. Ahead? Ahead are graves

PASSER-BY (*startled*): Graves?

GIRL: No, no no! There are ever so many wild roses and lilies there. I often go there to play, to look at them

PASSER-BY (*looking west, appears to smile*) Yes, there are many wild roses and lilies there; I have often gone there myself to enjoy looking at them. But those are graves (To the OLD MAN) Sir, what lies beyond the graveyard?

OLD MAN. Beyond the graveyard? That I don't know I have never been beyond

PASSER-BY: You don't know!

GIRL: I don't know either

OLD MAN: All I know is the south, the north and the east where you come from. Those are the places I know best, and they may be the best places for such as you. Don't take offence at what I say, but you are already so tired I think you would do better to go back; because if you keep on you may never reach the end of your journey.

PASSER-BY: I may never reach the end? . . . (He thinks this over, then starts up.) Impossible! I must go on. If I go back, there's not a place without celebrities, not a place without landlords, not a place without expulsion and cages, not a place without sham smiles and hypocritical tears. I hate them. I am not going back.

OLD MAN You may be wrong. You may come across some tears that spring from the heart, some genuine compassion

PASSER-BY No I have no wish to see the tears that spring from their hearts I do not want their compassion.

OLD MAN: In that case, (*he shakes his head*) you will have to go on

PASSER-BY Yes, I have to go on. Besides, there is a voice ahead urging me on and calling me so that I cannot rest. The trouble is my feet are so gashed and cut through walking that I've lost a good deal of blood (*He raises one foot to show the OLD MAN*) I haven't got enough blood, I need to drink some. But where can I find it? Besides, I don't want to drink just anyone's blood I have to drink water instead to make up for it There is always water on the way, indeed I have never felt any lack of it. But my strength is draining away just because there is too much water in my blood And if I walked less far today it's because I found not a single small water-hole.

OLD MAN: That may not be the reason The sun has set; I think you had better rest for a while, like me.

PASSER-BY: But the voice ahead is telling me to push on.

OLD MAN: I know.

PASSER-BY: You know? You know that voice?

OLD MAN: Yes. It seems to have called to me before as well.

PASSER-BY: The same voice that is calling me now?

OLD MAN: That I can't say. It called me several times, but I ignored it, so then it stopped; that's all I can remember

PASSER-BY: Ah, you ignored it. . . . (*He thinks this over, gives a start and listens.*) No! I must go on. I can't rest. It's a pity that my feet are in such bad shape. (*He prepares to leave.*)

GIRL: Here! (*She gives him a piece of cloth.*)
Bandage your feet

PASSER-BY: Thank you, lass. (*He takes the cloth.*)
Really . . . Really such kindness is rare. With this I
can walk further (*He sits down on some rubble and is
about to bind the cloth round his ankle*) No, this won't
do (*He struggles to his feet.*) Take it back, lass It's
not enough for a bandage Besides, this is really too kind,
and I don't know how to thank you.

OLD MAN: No need to thank her; it won't do you
any good.

PASSER-BY No, it won't do me any good But to
me this is the finest alms of all. Look, can you see any-
thing comparable on me?

OLD MAN: You need not take it so seriously

PASSER-BY I know But I can't help it. I'm afraid
this is my way If I were to receive alms, I would be
like a vulture catching sight of a corpse and hovering
overhead, longing to see her destruction with my own
eyes. Or I might call down destruction on everything
except her, myself included, for I myself deserve it.
But I'm not yet strong enough for that. Even if I were,
I wouldn't want her to come to such an end, because such
an end is one they mostly dislike. I think this way is
soundest. (*To the GIRL*) This piece of cloth is perfect,
but a bit too small. So I'll give it back to you

GIRL (*falling back, frightened*): I don't want it! Take
it

PASSER-BY (*with something like a smile*): Ah. . . .
Because I've held it?

GIRL (*nods and points at his sack*): Keep it in there,
for fun.

PASSER-BY (*stepping back in dismay*): But how am
I to walk with this on my back?

OLD MAN: It's because you won't rest that you can't
carry anything. Rest a while, then you'll be all right.

PASSES-BY That's right, a rest . . . (*He reflects, then gives a start and listens*) No, I cannot! I had better go

OLD MAN. You don't want to rest?

PASSER-BY: I do

OLD MAN. Well then, rest a while

PASSER-BY But I cannot . . .

OLD MAN. You still think you had better go on?

PASSER-BY Yes, I had better go on

OLD MAN. Very well, you must go then

PASSER-BY (*stretching himself*). Good, I'll say good-bye then I am very grateful to you (*To the GIRL.*) I'll give this back to you, lass. Please take it back.

(*Frightened, the GIRL draws back her hand and wants to take refuge in the hut.*)

OLD MAN: Take it If it's too heavy, you can throw it away in the graveyard any time.

GIRL (*steps forward*). Oh no, that won't do!

PASSER-BY. No, that won't do

OLD MAN. Well then, hang it on one of the wild roses or lilies.

GIRL (*claps her hands, laughing*): Good!

PASSER-BY. Ah . . .

(*For a second there is silence.*)

OLD MAN: Good-bye then Peace be with you (*He stands up and turns to the GIRL*) Child, help me inside. Look, the sun has already set. (*He turns to the door.*)

PASSER-BY: Thank you both. May peace be with you. (*He takes a few steps, deep in thought, then starts.*) But I cannot! I must leave. I had better go. . . . (*Raising his head, he walks resolutely towards the west.*)

(*The GIRL helps the OLD MAN into the hut, then shuts the door. The PASSER-BY limps on towards the wilderness, and night falls behind him.*)

March 2, 1925

DEAD FIRE

I dreamed that I was running along the mountain of ice.

It was a huge, towering mountain, reaching to the icy sky above; and the sky was flooded with frozen clouds, each fragment like a fish scale. At the foot of the mountain was the forest of ice, with leaves and branches like the pine and cypress. And all was icy cold, pale as ashes.

But suddenly I fell into the valley of ice.

All around, above and below, was icy cold, pale as ashes. Yet over the pallid ice lay countless red shadows, interlacing like a web of coral. Looking beneath my feet, I saw a flame.

This was dead fire. It had a fiery form, but was absolutely still, completely congealed, like branches of coral with frozen black smoke at their tips which looked scorched as if fresh from a fire-place. And so, casting reflections upon the ice all around and being reflected back, it had been turned into countless shadows, making the valley of ice as red as coral.

Aha!

As a child, I always liked to watch the foam ploughed up by swift ships or the fiery flames belched out from a blazing furnace. Not only did I like to watch them, I longed to see them clearly. The pity was they kept changing all the time, and never retained a fixed form. However hard I gazed, I was never left with a clear-cut impression.

Dead flame, now at last I had you!

As I picked up the dead fire to examine it closely, its iciness seared my fingers, but enduring the pain I thrust it into my pocket. The whole valley instantly turned as pale as ashes. At the same time I wondered how to leave this place.

From my body wreathed a coil of black smoke, which reared up like a wire snake. Instantly crimson flames began flowing everywhere, hemming me in like a great conflagration. Looking down, I discovered the dead fire was burning again, had burnt through my clothes and was flowing on the icy ground.

"Ah, friend!" it said. "You awoke me with your warmth!"

I immediately hailed it, and asked its name.

"I was abandoned by men in the valley of ice," it said, ignoring my question. "Those who abandoned me have already perished and vanished. And I was nearly frozen to death by that ice. If you had not warmed me and made me burn again, before long I should have perished."

"I am glad you have awoken. I was just wondering how to leave this valley of ice, and I would like to take you with me so that you may never be frozen but go on burning for ever."

"Ah, no! Then I should burn out."

"I should be sorry if you were to burn out. I had better leave you here."

"Ah, no! I should freeze to death."

"What is to be done then?"

"What will you do yourself?" it countered

"As I told you, I mean to leave this valley of ice."

"Then I had better burn out!"

It leapt up like a red comet, and together we left the valley. Suddenly a large stone cart drove up, and I was crushed to death beneath its wheels, but not before I saw the cart fall into the valley of ice.

“Aha! You will never meet the dead fire again” I laughed with pleasure as I spoke, as if pleased that this should be so

April 23, 1925

THE DOG'S RETORT

I dreamed I was walking in a narrow lane, my clothes in rags, like a beggar

A dog started barking behind me.

I looked back contemptuously and shouted at him:

“Bah! Shut up! Lick-spittle cur!”

He sniggered.

“Oh no!” he said. “I’m not up to man in that respect.”

“What?” Quite outraged, I felt that this was the supreme insult.

“I’m ashamed to say I still don’t know how to distinguish between copper and silver, between silk and cloth, between officials and common citizens, between masters and their slaves, between. . . .”

I turned and fled.

“Wait a bit! Let us talk some more . . .” From behind he urged me loudly to stay.

But I ran straight on as fast as I could, until I had run right out of my dream and was back in my own bed.

April 23, 1925

THE GOOD HELL THAT WAS LOST

I dreamed I was lying in bed in the wilderness beside hell. The deep yet orderly wailing of all the ghosts blended with the roar of flames, the seething of oil and the clashing of iron prongs to make one vast, intoxicating harmony, proclaiming to all three regions the peace of the lower realm.

Before me stood a great man, beautiful and benign, his whole body radiant with light; but I knew he was the devil.

“This is the end of everything! The end of everything! The wretched ghosts have lost their good hell.” He spoke with indignation and grief, then sat down to tell me a story that he knew.

“It was when heaven and earth were made honey-coloured that the devil overcame god, and wielded absolute power. He held heaven, earth and hell. Then he came in person to hell and sat in the midst of it, radiating bright light over all the ghosts.

“Hell had long been neglected: the spiked trees had lost their glitter, the verge of the boiling oil no longer seethed, at times the great fires puffed out merely a little blue smoke, and far off there still bloomed some mandrake flowers, very small, pale and wretched. But that was not to be wondered at, for the earth had been fearfully burnt and had naturally lost its fertility.

“Awaking amid the cold oil and lukewarm fires, by the light of the devil the ghosts saw the small flowers of hell, so pale and wretched, and were completely bewitched. They suddenly remembered the world of men,

and after reflecting for none knows how many years, they uttered towards mankind a great cry denouncing hell.

“Man responded and arose, upholding the right he fought against the devil. Louder than thunder, the tumult of fighting filled all three regions. At last, by dint of great guile and cunning snares, he forced the devil to withdraw from hell. After the final victory, the flag of mankind was hoisted over the gate of hell.

“The ghosts were still rejoicing together when man’s emissary to reorganize hell arrived. He sat down in the middle of hell, invested with the majesty of man, and ruled over the ghosts.

“When the ghosts uttered another cry denouncing hell, they became rebels against man. Condemned to eternal damnation for this crime, they were banished to the midst of the spiked trees.

“Man then wielded absolute power over hell, his authority exceeding that of the devil. He re-established order, having given the highest post to the Ox-headed Demon. He also added fuel to the fires, sharpened the sword-hills and changed the whole face of hell, doing away with the former decadence.

“At once the mandrake flowers withered. The oil seethed as before, the swords were sharp as before, the fires blazed as before, and the ghosts groaned and writhed as before, until none of them had time to regret the good hell that was lost.

“This was man’s success, the ghosts’ misfortune . . .

“Friend, I see you mistrust me. Yes, you are a man. I must go to look for wild beasts and demons. . . .”

June 16, 1925

ON EXPRESSING AN OPINION

I dreamed I was in the classroom of a primary school preparing to write an essay, and asked the teacher how to express an opinion

“That’s hard!” Glancing sideways at me over his glasses, he said, “Let me tell you a story —

“When a son is born to a family, the whole household is delighted. When he is one month old they carry him out to display him to the guests — usually expecting some compliments, of course.

“One says, ‘This child will be rich.’ Then he is heartily thanked.

“One says, ‘This child will be an official.’ Then some compliments are made him in return.

“One says, ‘This child will die.’ Then he is thoroughly beaten by the whole family.

“That the child will die is inevitable, while to say that he will be rich or a high official may be a lie. Yet the lie is rewarded, whereas the statement of the inevitable gains a beating. You. . . .”

“I don’t want to tell lies, sir, neither do I want to be beaten. So what should I say?”

“In that case, say, ‘Aha! Just look at this child! My word . . . Oh, my! Oho! Hehe! He, hehehehehe!’ ”

July 8, 1925

AFTER DEATH

I dreamed I had died by the roadside.

Where I was, how I came to be there, or how I had died, all this was a mystery. Anyway, by the time I knew I had died, I was lying there dead.

I heard magpies cry, then crows. The air was very fresh — though it carried a tang of the soil — it must be nearly dawn. I tried to open my eyes, but the lids would not move, as if they simply did not belong to me. Then I tried to raise my hands, and it was the same.

I felt a sudden stab of fear through my heart. When I was alive it used to amuse me to think. If a man's death were simply the paralysis of his motor nerves while sensation still remained, that would be more frightful than total death. Who could tell that my prophecy would come true, or that I was to testify to its truth myself?

I heard footsteps: someone was passing by. A wheelbarrow was pushed past my head; its load was probably heavy, for its squeaking and creaking grated on my nerves and set my teeth on edge. Then everything seemed to turn crimson: the sun must have risen. So I must be facing east. Not that it mattered. A babble of human voices — curious onlookers. They raised a cloud of dust which flew up my nose and made me want to sneeze. I was unable to, though; I just wanted to.

Then came the sound of more and more footsteps, all of which stopped beside me, and there was more whispering: quite a crowd had gathered. I felt a sudden longing to hear what they were saying. But just then I remembered how in my lifetime I used to say that criticism was

not worth troubling about. Perhaps I didn't mean what I said· no sooner was I dead than I betrayed myself. But though I went on listening, I could not reach any conclusion, for the remarks seemed little more than this.

“Dead, huh? ”

“Uhhuh! . . . ”

“Well! . . . ”

“Dear me. . . Too bad. . . .”

I was delighted not to hear a single familiar voice. Otherwise, some might grieve for me, some might be glad; some might have more to gossip about after dinner, thus wasting precious time, and all this would make me feel very bad. Now no one had seen me, so no one would be affected. Good. After all I had done no one any harm!

But then an ant, I think, started crawling on my back and made me itch. Since I could not stir, I had no means of getting rid of it. Normally, just by turning over I could have made it retreat. Now there was another one on my thigh as well! What do you think you are doing, silly insects!

Things went from bad to worse: there was a buzz and a fly landed on my cheekbone. It took a few steps, then flew to lick the tip of my nose. “I am not a celebrity, sir,” I thought ruefully. “You don't have to seek me out to find material for your gossip column. . . .” But I could not speak out. It came down from the tip of my nose to lick my lips with its clammy tongue, and I wondered if this was a declaration of love. Some others gathered on my eyebrows. At each step they took, my hair was shaken to its roots. This was going too far — much too far.

With a sudden gust of wind, something covered me from above and they all flew off. As they left I heard them say:

“What a pity! . . . ”

I nearly passed out with indignation.

I was brought to myself by the thud of something wooden dropped on the ground and the shaking of the earth. On my forehead I could feel lines made by the straw matting. Then the matting was removed, and at once I felt again the burning heat of the sun.

"Why should he die *here*?" I heard someone ask.

The voice was so near that the speaker must be bending over me. But where should a man die? I used to think that although a man could not choose where to live on this earth, he could at least die wherever he pleased. Now I learned this was not the case, and it was very hard to please everyone. What a pity I had long had no pen and paper; but even if I had, I could not write; and even if I wrote, I had nowhere to publish an article. So I had to let it go.

Some men came to carry me off, but I did not know who they were. From the clashing of scabbards I guessed there were police here too, in this place where I should not have died. I was turned round several times, felt myself lifted and set down again, then heard a lid being closed and nails hammered in. But, strangely enough, they used two nails only. Did they always use two nails only in the coffins here?

"I shall be knocking into six walls this time," I thought. "I'm nailed in as well. This is really the end. It's all up with me! . . ."

"It's stuffy in here," I thought.

As a matter of fact, I was much calmer than before, though I could not be sure whether I had been buried or not. The back of my hand touched the lines on the straw matting, and I felt this type of shroud was not too bad. I was only sorry I did not know who had paid for me out of charity. But curse those wretched fellows who had put me in the coffin! One corner of my shirt was creased under my back, but they had not pulled it straight for me, and now it was sticking into me most uncom-

fortably Do you think a dead man has no feelings that you act so carelessly? Pah!

My body seemed much heavier than during life, thus its pressure on the creased shirt made me much more uncomfortable than it normally would have. However, I thought I should soon get used to it, or else I should soon rot, thus it should not prove too troublesome. In the meantime I had better meditate quietly.

“How are you, sir? Are you dead?”

The voice was most familiar. When I opened my eyes, I saw it was the messenger from Boguzhai Bookshop I had not seen him for more than twenty years, but he still looked the same as before. I examined the six sides of my coffin they were really extremely crude and completely unpolished, the sawn edges still very rough

“Never mind, that doesn’t matter,” he said, unwrapping a bundle tied in dark blue cloth. “Here is a Ming Dynasty edition of Gongyang’s *Commentaries** for you. It’s Jia Jing period,** and has black margins. Just keep it. And this . . .”

“You!” I gazed in amazement at his eyes. “Are you mad?” I asked. “Can’t you see what condition I’m in? What use do I have for Ming Dynasty editions?”

“That doesn’t matter Never mind.”

I closed my eyes at once in irritation. For some time there was not a sound, no doubt he was gone. But then it seemed another ant started crawling up my neck and finally reached my face, where it circled round my eyes.

I never imagined men could change their ideas even after death. Suddenly a force shattered the peace of my heart, and many dreams unfolded before my eyes. Some friends had wished me happy, some enemies had wished me blotted out. Yet I had been neither happy nor blotted

* Commentaries on *The Spring and Autumn Annals*.

** 1522-62.

out, but had lived on somehow obscurely, not fulfilling the expectations of either side. And now I had died like a flitting shadow, without the knowledge even of my foes, unwilling to give them a little pleasure which would cost me nothing. . . .

In my exultation I wanted to cry. These would be my first tears after death.

No tears came, though, after all. There was a sort of flash before my eyes, and I sat up.

July 12, 1925

SUCH A FIGHTER

There will be such a fighter!

No longer ignorant as the African natives shouldering well-polished Mausers, nor listless as the Chinese green-banner troops* carrying automatic pistols. He does not rely on armour made of ox-hide or of scrap-iron. He has nothing but himself, and for weapon nothing but the javelin hurled by barbarians.

He walks into the lines of nothingness, where all that meet him nod to him in the same manner. He knows that this nod is a weapon used by the enemy to kill without bloodshed, by which many fighters have perished. Like a cannon-ball, it renders ineffective the strength of the brave.

Above their heads hang all sorts of flags and banners, embroidered with all manner of titles: philanthropist, scholar, writer, elder, youth, dilettante, gentleman. . . . Beneath are all sorts of surcoats, embroidered with all manner of fine names: scholarship, morality, national culture, public opinion, logic, justice, oriental civilization. . . .

But he raises his javelin.

Together they give their solemn oath that their hearts are in the centre of their chests, unlike the case of other prejudiced people. They try to prove by their breastplates that they themselves believe their hearts are in the centre of their chests.

* During the Qing Dynasty Han troops, who were poor fighters, were distinguished by green banners.

But he raises his javelin.

He smiles and hurls his javelin to the side, and it pierces them through the heart.

All crumble and fall to the ground, leaving only a surcoat in which there is nothing. The nothingness has escaped and won the victory, because now he has become the criminal who killed the philanthropist and the rest.

But he raises his javelin.

He walks with great strides through the ranks of nothingness, and sees again the same nods, the same banners and surcoats . . .

But he raises his javelin.

At last he grows old and dies of old age in the lines of nothingness. He is not a fighter after all, and the nothingness is the victor.

In such a place no war-cry is heard, but there is peace.

Peace . . .

But he raises his javelin!

December 14, 1925

THE WISE MAN, THE FOOL AND THE SLAVE

A slave did nothing but look for people to whom to pour out his woes. This was all he would and all he could do. One day he met a wise man

“Sir!” he cried sadly, tears pouring down his cheeks “You know, I lead a dog’s life. I may not have a single meal all day, and if I do it is only husks of sorghum which not even a pig would eat. Not to say there is only one small bowl of it. . . .”

“That’s really too bad,” the wise man commiserated.

“Isn’t it?” His spirits rose. “Then I work all day and all night. At dawn I carry water, at dusk I cook the dinner; in the morning I run errands, in the evening I grind wheat; when it’s fine I wash the clothes, when it’s wet I hold the umbrella; in winter I mind the furnace, in summer I wave the fan. At midnight I boil white fungus, and wait on our master at his gambling parties; but never a tip do I get, only sometimes the strap. . . .”

“Dear me. . . .” The wise man sighed, and the rims of his eyes looked a little red as if he were going to shed tears

“I can’t go on like this, sir. I must find some way out. But what can I do?”

“I am sure things will improve . . .”

“Do you think so? I certainly hope so. But now that I’ve told you my troubles and you’ve been so sympathetic and encouraging, I already feel much better. It shows there is still some justice in the world.”

A few days later, though, he was in the dumps again and found someone else to whom to pour out his woes.

"Sir!" he exclaimed, shedding tears "You know, where I live is even worse than a pigsty. My master doesn't treat me like a human being; he treats his dog ten thousand times better . . ."

"Confound him!" The other swore so loudly that he startled the slave. This other man was a fool.

"All I have to live in, sir, is a tumble-down, one-roomed hut, damp, cold and swarming with bedbugs. They gorge on me when I lie down to sleep. The place is stinking and hasn't a single window. . . ."

"Can't you ask your master to have a window made?"

"How can I do that?"

"Well, show me what it's like."

The fool followed the slave to his hut, and began to pound the mud wall.

"What are you doing, sir?" The slave was horrified.

"I am opening a window for you."

"This won't do! The master will curse me!"

"Let him!" The fool continued to pound away.

"Help! A bandit is breaking down the house! Come quickly or he will knock down the wall! . . ." Shouting and sobbing, the slave rolled frantically on the ground. A whole troop of slaves came out and drove away the fool. Roused by the outcry, the last one to come slowly out was the master.

"A bandit tried to break down our house. I was the first one to give the alarm, and together we drove him away!" The slave spoke respectfully and triumphantly.

"Good for you!" The master praised him.

Many callers came that day to express concern, among them the wise man.

"Sir, because I made myself useful, the master praised me. When you said the other day that things would im-

prove, you were really showing foresight.” He spoke very hopefully and happily.

“That’s right . . .” replied the wise man, and seemed happy for his sake

December 26, 1925

THE BLIGHTED LEAF

Reading Satula's* poems by lamplight, I have come across a dry, pressed maple leaf.

This carries me back to late autumn of last year. There was heavy frost one night and most of the trees shed their leaves, while one small maple in my courtyard turned crimson. I paced round the tree to take a good look at the leaves, which I had never examined so closely when they were green. Not all of them had turned red; indeed, most were a pale puce, and some still had dark green spots on a crimson background. There was one in which an insect had made a hole, which, fringed with black, stared at you like some bright eye from the chequered red, yellow and green.

"This leaf has been blighted!" I thought.

So I plucked it and slipped it inside the book I had just bought. I suppose I hoped to preserve for a little time this blighted motley of colours so soon to fall, to prevent its drifting away with the other leaves.

But tonight it lies yellow and waxen before my gaze, its eye less bright than last year. In a few more years, when its former hues have faded from memory, I may even forget why I put it in the book. It seems the chequered tints of blighted leaves soon to fall can remain in my keeping for the shortest time only — to say nothing of those lush and green. Through my window I see that the trees which can best withstand cold are already de-

* Satula (1272-?), a Mongolian poet of the Yuan Dynasty.

nuded of leaves, much more so the maple. In late autumn there may have been blighted leaves like last year's; but, unhappily, this year I had no time to appreciate autumn tints.

December 26, 1925

AMID PALE BLOODSTAINS

In Memory of Some Who Are Dead, Some
Who Live, and Some Yet Unborn *

At present the creator is still a weakling.

In secret, he causes heaven and earth to change, but dares not destroy this world. In secret, he causes living creatures to die, but dares not preserve their dead bodies. In secret, he causes mankind to shed blood, but dares not keep the bloodstains fresh for ever. In secret, he causes mankind to suffer pain, but dares not let them remember it for ever.

He provides for his kind only, the weaklings among men; using deserted ruins and lonely tombs to set off rich mansions; using time to dilute pain and bloodstains; each day pouring out one cup of slightly sweetened bitter wine — not too little nor too much — to cause slight intoxication. This he gives to mankind so that those who drink it can weep and sing, seem both sober and drunk, conscious and unconscious, appear willing to live on and willing to die. He must make all creatures willing to live on. He has not the courage yet to destroy mankind.

A few deserted ruins and a few lonely tombs are scattered over the earth, reflected by pale bloodstains; and there men taste their own vague pain and sorrow, as well as that of others. They will not spurn it, however, think-

* This was written after the March 18th Incident, when the Northern warlord, Duan Qirui, ordered the police to fire on students and peaceful citizens of Beijing, who were demonstrating against Japanese, British and American imperialist provocations. Forty-seven people were killed, and a hundred and fifty injured.

ing it better than nothing; and they call themselves "victims of heaven" to justify their tasting this pain and sorrow. In apprehensive silence they await the coming of new pain and sorrow, new suffering which appals them, which they none the less thirst to meet.

All these are the loyal subjects of the creator. This is what he wants them to be.

A rebellious fighter has arisen from mankind, who, standing erect, sees through all the deserted ruins and lonely tombs of the past and the present. He remembers all the intense and unending agony; he faces squarely the whole welter of clotted blood; he understands all that is dead and all that is living, as well as all that is being born and all that is yet unborn. He sees through the creator's game. And he will arise to resuscitate or else destroy mankind, these loyal subjects of the creator.

The creator, the weakling, hides himself in shame. Then heaven and earth change colour in the eyes of the fighter.

April 8, 1926

THE AWAKENING

Like students going to school, the planes on their bombing missions fly over Beijing each morning* And each time I hear their engines attack the air I feel a certain slight tension, as if I were witnessing the invasion of Death, though this heightens my consciousness of the existence of Life.

After one or two muffled explosions, the planes drone and fly slowly off. There may be some casualties, but the world seems more peaceful than usual. The tender leaves of the poplar outside the window gleam dark gold in the sunlight; the blossom of the flowering plum is more glorious than yesterday. When I have cleared away the newspapers lying all over my bed and wiped off the light grey dust which gathered on the desk last night, my small, square study continues to live up to the description, "bright windows and spotless desk."

For some reason or other, I start to edit the manuscripts of young writers which have accumulated here. I want to go through them all. I read them in chronological order, and the spirits of these young people who scorn to use any veneer rise up in turn before me. They are fine, they have integrity — but, ah! they are so unhappy! They groan, become angry, and finally grow rough, my lovely youngsters.

Their spirits are roughened by the onslaught of wind and dust, for theirs is the spirit of man, a spirit I love.

* In April 1926, when General Feng Yuxiang was fighting the Northern warlords Zhang Zuolin and Li Jinglin, the latter's planes came several times to bomb Beijing

I would gladly kiss this roughness dripping with blood but formless and colourless. In elegant, far-famed gardens filled with rare blossoms, demure and rosy girls are leisurely whiling away the time as the stork gives a cry and dense white clouds rise up. . . . This is all extremely enthralling, but I cannot forget I am living in the world of men.

And this suddenly reminds me of an incident. Two or three years ago, I was in the staff room at Beijing University when a student whom I did not know came in. He handed me a package, then left without a word, and when I opened it, I found a copy of the magazine *Short Grass** He said not a word, yet what a speaking silence, and what a rich gift that was! I am sorry *Short Grass* is not coming out any more; it seems merely to have served as the forerunner of *The Sunken Bell*** And *The Sunken Bell* is tolling alone in the caverns of wind and dust deep at the bottom of the human sea

Though the wild thistle is virtually crushed to death, it will still bear one tiny flower. I remember how moved Tolstoy was by this, how it made him write a story. Of course, when plants in the arid desert reach out desperately with their roots to suck the water deep below the ground and form an emerald forest, they are struggling for their own survival. Yet the tired, parched travellers' hearts leap up at the sight, for they know they have reached a temporary resting place. Indeed, this evokes deep gratitude and sadness.

Under the heading "Without a Title," in lieu of an address to the reader, the editors of *The Sunken Bell* wrote:

Some people say our society is a desert. If this were really the case, though rather desolate it should give

* A literary quarterly started by young writers in 1924

** A literary weekly which appeared in the autumn of 1925.

you a sense of tranquillity, though rather lonely it should give you a sense of infinity. It should not be so chaotic, gloomy and above all so changeful as it is.

Yes, the young people's spirits have risen up before me. They have grown rough, or are about to grow rough. But I love these spirits which bleed and suffer in silence, for they make me know I am in the world of men — I am living among men.

While I have been editing the sun has set, and I carry on by lamplight. All kinds of youth flash past before my eyes, though around me is nothing but dusk. Tired, I take a cigarette, quietly close my eyes in indeterminate thought, and have a long, long dream. I wake with a start. All around is still nothing but dusk; cigarette smoke rises in the motionless air like tiny specks of cloud in the summer sky, to be slowly transformed into indefinable shapes.

April 10, 1926

ACHANG AND THE BOOK OF HILLS AND SEAS*

Mama Chang, as I have said elsewhere,** was the maid who brought me up or — to give her a grander title — my nanny. That is what my mother and many others called her, for this sounded a little more polite. Only my grandmother called her “Achang” I usually called her “Amah” without even adding the “Chang.” But when I was angry with her — upon learning that she was the one who had killed my mouse, for example — then I also called her “Achang.”

We had no one in our parts with the surname Chang; and since she was swarthy, plump and short, “Chang” (long) was not used descriptively either. Nor was it her personal name. I remember she told me her name was Something Girl. What the epithet was I have forgotten, but it certainly was not “Long.” And I never knew her surname. I recall her once telling me how she came by the name. Many, many years ago, our family had a very tall maidservant who was the real Achang. Later on, when she left, this Something Girl of mine came to take her place; but because everyone was used to the name and did not want to change it, from that time on she became Mama Chang too.

Although it is bad to tell tales behind people’s backs, if you want me to speak frankly I must admit I did not

* A collection of legends written in the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.).

** In “Dogs, Cats and Mice,” an earlier story from *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*.

think much of her. What I most disliked was her habit of gossiping: she would whisper something in people's ears, saw the air with her forefinger, or point to the tip of her hearer's nose or her own. Whenever a minor storm blew up in the house, I could not help suspecting that her tittle-tattle had something to do with it. She restricted my movements too. If I pulled up a weed or turned over a stone, she would say I was naughty and threaten to tell my mother. And in bed during the summer she would stretch out her arms and legs like a huge character 大 (*da*), squeezing me so that I had no room to turn over, and my corner of the matting became hot after much lying on. But I could neither push her over, nor could I wake her by shouting.

"You're so plump, Mama Chang, you must find the heat very trying. Isn't that an awkward position for sleeping in?"

My mother put this question after hearing me complaining many times. And I knew it was a hint to my nanny to leave me more space. Achang did not say anything. But that night when the heat woke me up, there was still a big character 大 spread-eagled over the bed, and one of her arms was thrown across my neck. It seemed to me there was really no way out.

She was most conventional in many ways, however, though most of her customs made me lose patience. The happiest time of the year was naturally New Year's Eve. After seeing the old year out, I put by my pillow the money wrapped in red paper which the grown-ups had given me. The next morning I could spend it as I pleased. I lay on my pillow eyeing the red packages, thinking of the small drum, the weapons, the clay figures and the sugar Buddha that I would buy tomorrow. Then she came in and put a Good-Luck Orange at the head of the bed.

"Remember this carefully, son!" she told me earnestly. "Tomorrow's the first day of the first month. When you

open your eyes in the morning the first thing you must say is 'Good luck, Amah!' Remember? You *must* remember, because this decides the whole year's luck. Don't say anything else, mind! And after you've said that, you must eat a piece of Good-Luck Orange." She picked up the orange and flourished it in front of me. "Then —

*The whole year through
Luck will follow you!"*

Even in my dreams I remembered it was New Year, and the next morning I woke specially early. As soon as I opened my eyes, I wanted to sit up. But at once she put out an arm to stop me. I looked at her in surprise, and saw her gazing at me anxiously.

Appealingly, as it were, she shook my shoulder. And suddenly I remembered.

"Good luck, Amah."

"Good luck! Good luck to us every one! Clever boy! Good luck!" Absolutely delighted, she laughed as she stuffed something icy cold into my mouth. When I had recovered from the shock, I realized that this must be the Good-Luck Orange. Now that all the ordeals to usher in New Year's Day were safely over, I could get up and play.

She taught me much other lore as well. For instance, if someone died, you should not say he was dead but "he has passed away." You should not enter a room where someone had died or a child had been born. If a grain of rice fell to the ground, you should pick it up, and the best thing was to eat it. On no account must you walk under the bamboo pole on which trousers or pants were hanging out to dry. . . . There was more, but I have forgotten most of it; and what I remember most clearly are the strange New Year rites. In short, these were all such niggling trifles that the thought of them today still makes me lose patience.

On one occasion, though, I felt an unprecedented respect for her. She often told me stories about the Long Hairs* And the Long Hairs she described were not only Hong Xiuquan's** troops but appeared to include all later bandits and rebels as well, with the exception of the modern revolutionaries, who did not exist then. She described the Long Hairs as most fearful beings who talked in a way that no one could understand. According to her, when the Long Hairs entered our city all my family fled to the seaside, leaving just a gatekeeper and an old woman who did the cooking to look after the property. Then, sure enough, a Long Hair came to our house. The old woman called him "Great King" — it seems this was the way to address the Long Hairs — and complained that she was starving.

"In that case," said the Long Hair with a grin, "you can have this to eat!" And he tossed over something round with a small queue still attached to it — it was the gatekeeper's head! The old woman's nerves were never the same again. Whenever people spoke of this later, she would turn the colour of earth and beat her breast "Aiya!" she would whimper. "It gave me such a turn! Such a turn it gave me. . . ."

I was not afraid, for I felt all this had nothing to do with me — I was not a gatekeeper. But Achang must have guessed my thoughts, for she said:

"The Long Hairs would carry off little boys like you as well, to make little Long Hairs out of them. They carried off pretty girls too."

"Well, you'd be all right anyway."

I was sure she would have been quite safe, for she was neither a gatekeeper, nor a little boy, nor pretty. In fact, she had several scars on her neck where sores had been cauterized.

* See footnote on p. 84 above

** (1814-64), leader of the Taiping Revolution (1851-64).

"How can you say such a thing?" she demanded sternly. "Were we no use to them then? They would carry us off as well. When government troops came to attack the city, the Long Hairs would make us take off our trousers and stand in a line on the city wall, for then the army's cannon could not be fired. If they fired then, the cannon would burst!"

This was certainly beyond my wildest dreams. I could not but be amazed. I had thought of her as nothing but a repository of irksome conventions, never guessing she had this tremendous spiritual power. After this I felt a special respect for her, for surely she was too deep for me to fathom. If she stretched out her arms and legs at night and occupied the whole bed, that was quite understandable. I ought to make room for her.

Although this kind of respect for her wore off by degrees, I believe it did not disappear completely till I discovered it was she who had killed my mouse. I cross-examined her sternly on that occasion, and called her "Achang" to her face. Since I was not a little Long Hair and would not attack a city or let off a cannon, I need not be afraid of the cannon exploding — so why, thought I, need I be afraid of her?

But while mourning for my mouse and avenging him, I was also longing for an illustrated copy of the *Book of Hills and Seas*. This longing had been aroused by a distant great-uncle of ours. A fat and kindly old man, he liked to grow plants such as chloranthus, and the rare silk tree said to have come from the north. His wife was just the reverse: she was an ignoramus as regards flowers. Once she broke a branch of chloranthus by propping the bamboo for hanging out clothes on it; but her only reaction was to swear at the branch for breaking. The old man was a lonely soul with no one to talk to, so he liked children's company and often even called us his "young friends." In the compound where several branches of our clan lived, he was the only one with

many books, and unusual ones at that. He had volumes of the essays and poems written for the examinations,* of course; but his was the only study where I could find Lu Ji's *Commentaries on the Flora and Fauna in the "Book of Songs,"*** and many other strange titles. My favourite in those days was *The Mirror of Flowers**** with all its illustrations. He told me there was an illustrated edition of the *Book of Hills and Seas* with pictures of man-faced beasts, nine-headed snakes, three-footed birds, winged men, and headless monsters who used their teats as eyes.

. . . Unfortunately he happened to have mislaid it.

Eager as I was to look at pictures of this kind, I did not like to press him to find the book for me. He was very indolent. And none of the people I asked would give me a truthful answer. I had several hundred coppers of New Year money, but no opportunity to buy that book. The main street where books were sold was a long way from our house, and the New Year holiday was the only time in the year when I was able to go there to look around; but during that period the doors of both bookshops were firmly closed.

As long as I was playing it was not so bad, but the moment I sat down I remembered the illustrated *Book of Hills and Seas*.

Probably because I harped on the subject so much, even Achang started asking what this *Book of Hills and Seas* was. I had never mentioned it to her, for I knew she was no scholar, so telling her would serve no purpose. Since she asked me, however, I told her.

* Refers to the *bagu* ("eight-legged") essays based on phrases taken from Confucian classic, and the poems based on a line from some ancient poem, which usually had eight lines with five characters in each.

** This third-century work was a study of the flora and fauna mentioned in the *Book of Songs*.

*** A manual for gardeners by Chen Haozi of the seventeenth century.

About a fortnight or a month later, as I remember, four or five days after she had gone home on leave, she came back wearing a new blue cloth jacket. The moment she saw me she handed me a package.

"Here, son!" she said cheerfully. "I've bought you that *Book of Holy Seas* with pictures."

This was like a thunderbolt. I was struck all of a heap. I hastened to take the package and unwrap the paper. There were four small volumes and, sure enough, when I flipped through the pages, the man-faced beast, the nine-headed snake . . . all of them were there

This inspired me with a new respect. What others would not or could not do, she had been able to accomplish. She really did have tremendous spiritual power. My resentment against her for killing my mouse vanished for good and all.

These four volumes were the first I ever possessed, and my most treasured book.

I can still see them today. But now it seems to me that both the printing and the engraving were extremely crude. The paper was yellow and the drawings very poor, consisting almost entirely of straight lines joined together — even the animals' eyes were oblong. Nevertheless this was my most treasured book. There you could really find the man-faced beast, the nine-headed snake, the one-footed ox, the sack-like monster Di Jiang, Xing Tian who had no head but "used his teats as eyes and his navel as mouth" and "danced with spear and shield"!

After this I began seriously collecting illustrated books. I acquired the *Phonetics and Illustrations for "Er Ya"** and *Illustrations to the "Book of Songs."*** I also had the

* One of the many annotated editions of the *Er Ya*, a lexicon written about the second century B.C.

** An eighteenth-century Japanese work.

*Paintings Collected by Dianshizhai** and *A Shipload of Painting and Poetry.*** I bought another lithographed edition of the *Book of Hills and Seas* too, with illustrations and concluding verses to each chapter. The pictures were green and the characters red — much more handsome than my woodblock edition — and I had this book till the year before last. It was a small edition with Hao Yixing's*** commentary. As for the woodblock edition, I cannot remember now when that was lost.

My nurse, Mama Chang or Achang, must have departed this life a good thirty years ago. I never found out her name or history. All I know is that she had an adopted son, so she was probably left a widow very early.

Dark, kindly Mother Earth, may her spirit ever rest peacefully in your bosom!

March 10, 1926

* A collection of paintings by Chinese and Japanese artists printed in 1885

** A collection of paintings with poems attached to each, compiled in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century.

*** Hao Yixing (1757-1825), a Qing Dynasty scholar

THE FAIR OF THE FIVE FIERCE GODS

In addition to New Year and other festivals, we children looked forward to the temple fairs in honour of certain gods. But because my home was rather out of the way, not till the afternoon did the processions pass our door, by which time the retinue had dwindled away until there was almost nothing left of it. Often, after hours of craning our necks and waiting, all we saw was some dozen men running hastily past carrying an effigy of a god with a golden, blue or crimson face. And that was all.

I always hoped that *this* procession would be bigger and better than the last, but the result was invariably more or less the same. And all I was left with was a souvenir bought for one copper before the god passed by — a whistle made of a bit of clay, a scrap of coloured paper, a split bamboo, and two or three cock's feathers. This whistle, known as a "tootle-toot," produced a piercing blast, and I blew it lustily for two or three days.

Now when I read Zhang Dai's* *Reminiscences*, I am struck by the splendour of temple fairs in his time, even if these Ming Dynasty writers do tend to exaggerate. The practice of welcoming the dragon king in praying for rain still continues, but it is very simply done, with only some dozen men carrying a dragon and making it twist and coil, while village boys dress up as sea monsters. In

* Zhang Dai was a seventeenth-century scholar

the old days they acted plays, and it was most spectacular. Here is Zhang Dai's description of a pageant with characters from *Shui Hu Zhuan* (*Outlaws of the Marsh*)*

They went out in all directions to find one fellow who was short and swarthy, another who was tall and hefty, a mendicant friar, a fat monk, a stout woman and a slender one. They looked for a pale face too and a head set askew, a red moustache and a handsome beard, a strong dark man and one with ruddy cheeks and a long beard. They searched high and low in the town, and if they failed to find any character they went outside the city walls, to the villages and hamlets in the hills, even to neighbouring prefectures and counties. A high price was paid to the thirty-six men who played the heroes of Liangshan; but each looked his part to the life, and they went out in force on horseback and on foot.

Who could resist watching such a lifelike pageant of the men and women of days gone by? The pity is that such brave shows disappeared long ago along with the Ming Dynasty

Though these processions were not prohibited by the authorities — unlike women's long gowns in Shanghai today or the discussion of politics in Beijing — still, women and children, were not allowed to watch them, and educated people or the so-called literati seldom went to look on either. Only layabouts and idlers would gather before the temple or yamen to watch the fun; and since most of my knowledge of these festivities comes from their accounts it is not the firsthand observation so much valued by researchers. I do, however, remember once witnessing a rather fine show myself. First came a boy on horseback called the Announcer. Then, after a considerable interval, the High Pole arrived. This was a

* A famous fourteenth-century Chinese novel by Shi Nai'an, describing the peasant revolt of Liangshan in the twelfth century.

great bamboo pole to which a long banner was attached, and it was carried in both hands by a huge fat man dripping with perspiration. When in the mood he would balance the pole on his head or teeth, or even on the tip of his nose. He was followed by stilt-walkers, children on platforms carried by men, and other children on hobbyhorses. There were people dressed in red like felons too, loaded with cangues and chains, some of whom were also children. To me each part was glorious and each participant extremely lucky — I very likely envied them this chance to show off. I used to wish I could have some serious illness, so that my mother would go to the temple to promise the god that I would masquerade as a felon. . . . So far, though, I have failed to have any association with these processions.

Once I was to go to Dongguan Village for the Fair of the Five Fierce Gods. This was a great occasion in my childhood, for this fair was the grandest in the whole county and Dongguan Village was very far from my home, more than sixty li by boat from the town. There were two remarkable temples there. One was the Temple to Lady Mei, the virgin mentioned in the *Tales of Liao Zhai** who remained unmarried after the death of her betrothed and became a goddess after she died, but then appropriated someone else's husband. On the shrine, sure enough, the images of a young man and woman were smiling at each other, counter to all the laws of propriety. The other was the Temple to the Five Fierce Gods, the very name of which was strange enough. According to those with a passion for research, these were the Wu Tong Gods.** There is no conclusive proof of this, however. The images were five men who did not look particularly fierce, and behind them sat five wives

* *Tales about fairies, ghosts and fox-spirits* by Pu Songling (1640-1715).

** Evil spirits worshipped in the south China countryside in early times.

in a row, this intermingling of sexes falling far short of the strict segregation practised in Beijing theatres. In fact, this was counter to all the laws of propriety too, but since these were the Five Fierce Gods, nothing could be done about it. They were obviously an exception to the rule

Since Dongguan Village was a long way from the town, we all got up at dawn. The big boat with three windows fitted with shell-panes booked the night before was already moored in the harbour, and to it our men started carrying the chairs, food, a stove for brewing tea, and a hamper of cakes. Laughing and skipping, I urged them to get a move on. Suddenly from their respectful expression I knew there was something up. I looked round and saw my father standing behind me.

"Go and fetch your book," he said slowly.

The book he meant was the *Rhymed History** which served as my primer. I had no other book. In our district children started school when their years were odd, not even: that is how I know I must have been seven at the time.

With trepidation I fetched the book. He made me sit beside him at the table in the centre of the hall and read to him sentence by sentence. Inwardly quaking, I read to him sentence by sentence.

Two sentences made one line, and I must have read twenty or thirty lines.

"Learn them by heart," he said. "If you cannot recite them correctly, you will not be allowed to go to the fair."

This said, he stood up and walked into his room.

I felt as if someone had doused me with icy water. But what could I do? Naturally I had to read and re-read, and force myself to memorize — I would have to recite it too.

* Written by Wang Shiyun in the Qing Dynasty.

*In the beginning was Pan Gu,
Born of primeval void,
He was the first to rule the world,
The chaos to divide.*

That is the kind of book it was. The first four lines are all I can remember. I have forgotten the rest, including of course the twenty or thirty lines I was forced to memorize that day. I remember hearing it said at the time that studying the *Rhymed History* was more useful than studying the *Thousand Characters* or the *Hundred Surnames*,* for from it you could learn the outline of all history past and present. It is naturally a very good thing to know the outline of all history past and present. My trouble was that I couldn't understand a word. "In the beginning was Pan Gu" — to me this was mere gibberish. I read on and learned it by heart.

*In the beginning was Pan Gu,
Born of primeval void. . . .*

Everything needed had been carried to the boat. The noise and bustle at home had turned to silence. The morning sun shone on the western wall. The weather was clear and fine. Mother, the servants, my nanny Mama Chang or Achang — none of them could rescue me. They had to wait in silence till I had learned my lesson and could recite it. In the utter stillness it seemed as if iron pincers would thrust out from my head to seize that "Born of primeval void" and all the other lines. And I could hear my voice quaver as I read desperately on, quaver like a cricket's chirping on a late autumn night.

Everybody was waiting. The sun had risen even higher.

Suddenly I felt a surge of confidence. I stood up, picked up the book, and went to my father's study to

* Two elementary texts for school-children in the old society.

recite all those lines in one breath I recited as if in a dream

“Good You may go.” Father nodded his head as he spoke

At once everyone sprang into action, breaking into smiles as we set out for the harbour. A servant carried me high as if to congratulate me on my success as he strode ahead of the rest.

I was not as happy as they were, though. After the boat cast off, the riverside scenery, the cakes in the hamper, the bustle of the fair when we reached Dongguan Village — none of these seemed to me very interesting.

Now everything else is forgotten, vanished without a trace. Only my recitation from the *Rhymed History* is as clear in my mind as if it happened yesterday

Even now, when I think of it, I still wonder why my father made me learn a lesson by heart at a time like that.

May 25, 1926

WU CHANG OR LIFE-IS-TRANSIENT

If the gods who parade at temple fairs have power of life and death — no, this is wrongly put, for all gods in China seem able to kill men at will — if their task rather, like that of the guardian deity of a city or the Emperor of the East Mountain, is to control human fate, in their retinue you will find some unusual figures: ghostly attendants, the ghostly king, and Wu Chang or Life-Is-Transient.

These spirits are usually impersonated by stout fellows or country folk. The ghostly attendants and their king wear red and green and go barefoot, while on their blue faces are painted fish scales — perhaps the scales of a dragon or some other creature — I am not quite clear on this point. The ghostly attendants carry steel tridents with rings attached which clang when shaken, and the ghostly king carries a small tiger-head tally. According to tradition, the king should walk with one foot, but since after all he is simply a countryman, even though he has painted his face with the scales of a fish or some other creature, he still has to walk with two feet. Hence spectators are not much impressed by these ghosts and pay scant attention to them, with the exception of some devout old women and their grandchildren, who treat all spirits with proper trepidation and reverence in order that none of them may feel left out.

As for the rest of us — I believe I am speaking for others as well as myself — what we most enjoy watching is Wu Chang. Not only is he lively and full of fun; the mere fact of his being completely in white among that

gaudy throng makes him stand out like a stork in a flock of fowls. A distant glimpse of his tall white paper hat and his tattered palm-leaf fan makes everyone feel pleasantly excited

Of all spirits he is the nearest and dearest to men, and we often come across him. In the temple to the guardian deity of a city or the Emperor of the East Mountain, for example, behind the main hall is a dark room called the Court of Hell; and barely perceptible through the gloom are the images of ghosts: one who died by hanging, one who fell to his death, one who was killed by a tiger, one who expired in the examination cell . . . but the long white figure you see as you enter is Wu Chang. Though I once paid a visit to the Court of Hell, I was much too timid then to take a good look. I have heard that he carries an iron chain in one hand, because he is the summoner of dead men's spirits. Tradition has that the Court of Hell in the temple of the Emperor of the East Mountain in Fanjiang* was strangely constructed with a movable plank just inside the threshold. When you entered and stepped on one end of this plank, Wu Chang would fly over from the other end and throw his iron chain neatly round your neck; but after a man had been frightened to death in this way they nailed the plank down. Even in my young days it no longer moved

If you want to take a good look at him, you will find his picture in the *Records of the Jade Calendar*. It may not be in the abridged version, but in the complete version you are sure to find it. He is wearing deep mourning and straw sandals, with a straw belt round his waist and a string of paper money round his neck. He holds the tattered palm-leaf fan, a chain and an abacus; his shoulders are slightly hunched, his hair is dishevelled; and his eyebrows and eyes tilt down at the sides like the Chinese character 八 (ba). He wears a peaked, rectangular hat,

*A town to the east of Shaoxing.

which, reckoned in proportion to the portrait as a whole, must be about two feet high. In front of the hat, where relicts old and young of the Qing Dynasty would fasten a pearl or jewel on their melon-shaped caps, is the vertical inscription. Good luck to you! According to another version, the words are. So you are here too. This is the same phrase sometimes found on the horizontal tablet over the Court of the Venerable Bao.* Whether Wu Chang wrote these words on his hat himself or the King of Hell wrote them for him I have not yet been able to ascertain in the course of my researches.

In the *Jade Calendar* can also be found Life-Is-Transient's opposite number, a ghost similarly equipped whose name is Death-Is-Predestined. He also appears in temple fairs, where he is wrongly known as Death-Is-Transient. Since his face and clothes are black, nobody cares to look at him. He too appears in the Court of Hell, where he stands facing the wall with a funereal air about him — a genuine case of "knocking against the wall"**. All who come in to worship and burn incense are supposed to rub his back, and this is said to rid you of bad luck. I rubbed his back too when I was small, but I never seem to have been free of bad luck. Perhaps if I hadn't rubbed it my luck would have been still worse. This again I have not yet been able to ascertain in the course of my researches.

I have made no study of the canons of Hinayana Buddhism, but I hear that in Indian Buddhist lore you have the god Yama and the ox-headed devil, both of whom reign in hell. As for Mr. Transient, who summons spirits, his origin cannot be traced to ancient times, yet

* Bao Zheng (999-1062), Prefect of Kaifeng in the Northern Song Dynasty. It was believed that after his death he became one of the ten Kings of Hell.

** In 1925 Lu Xun wrote the essay "After 'Knocking Against the Wall'" in which he said, "In China there are walls everywhere but they are invisible, like 'ghost walls,' so that you knock into them all the time."

the saying "life is transient" is a common one. I suppose once this concept reached China, it was personified. So Wu Chang is actually a Chinese invention.

But why is everyone pleasantly excited to see him?

When a great scholar or famous man appears anywhere, he has only to flourish his pen to make the place a "model county."* At the end of the Han Dynasty Yu Fan†* praised my native place, but that after all was too long ago, for later this county gave birth to the notorious "Shaoxing pettifoggers."*** Of course, not all of us — old and young, men and women — are pettifoggers in Shaoxing. We have quite a few other "low types" too. And you cannot expect these low types to express themselves in such wonderful gibberish as this: "We are traversing a narrow and dangerous path, with a vast and boundless marsh-land on the left and a vast and boundless desert on the right, while our goal in front looms darkly through the mist"† Yet in some instinctive way they see their path very clearly to that darkly looming goal: betrothal, marriage, rearing children, and death. Of course, I am speaking here of my native place only. The case must be quite different in model counties. Many of them — I mean the low types of my unworthy county — have lived and suffered, been slandered and blackmailed so long that they know that in this world of men there is only one association which upholds justice,†† and even that looms

* Professor Chen Xiying had described his home town Wuxi as a "model county."

** Yu Fan (164-233) was a late-Han scholar who wrote in praise of Shaoxing.

*** Many secretaries in yamens dealing with lawsuits came from Shaoxing. Chen Xiying attacked Lu Xun by saying that he had the temperament of a pettifogger.

† Quotation from a letter from Chen Xiying to Xu Zhimo

†† Refers to the Association for the Upholding of Justice Among Educational Workers, organized by Chen Xiying and others in 1925 to oppress the students of the Women's Normal College and other progressives.

darkly; inevitably, then, they look forward to the nether regions. Most people consider themselves unjustly treated. In real life "upright gentlemen" can fool no one. And if you ask ignorant folk they will tell you without reflection: Fair judgements are given in Hell!

Of course, when you think of its pleasures life seems worth living; but when you think of its sorrows Wu Chang may not be unwelcome. High or low, rich or poor alike, we must all appear empty-handed before the King of Hell, who will right all wrongs and punish evil-doers. Even low types sometimes stop to reflect. What sort of life have I led? Have I "leapt into mid air"? Have I "stabbed other people in the back"?* In Wu Chang's hand is a big abacus, and no amount of superior airs will do a man any good. We demand undiluted justice from others, yet even in the infernal regions we hope to find some mercy for ourselves. But when all is said, this is hell. And the King of Hell, the ox-headed devil, and the horse-faced devil invented by the Chinese are all working away at one job and honestly administer justice, though they have published no significant articles in the papers. Before becoming ghosts, honest people, when thinking of the future, have to search for fragments of mercy in the sum total of justice and to them Mr. Life-Is-Transient appears rather lovable. "One chooses the greater profit and the lesser evil."** This is what our ancient philosopher Mo Di preached.

You cannot see Wu Chang's charm from the clay figure in the temple or the printed picture in the book. The best way is to see him in the opera. And ordinary opera will not do: it must be the Great Drama or Maudgalyayana Drama.*** Zhang Dai has described in his

* Quotations from Chen Xiyang.

** From *Mo Zi*, compiled by the disciples of Mo Di (c. 478-392 B.C.), the founder of the Mohist school.

*** This depicts how the Buddhist saint Maudgalyayana went to Hell to rescue his mother.



Wu Chang, drawn and inscribed by Lu Xun

Reminiscences what a fine spectacle the Maudgalyayana Drama was when it took two to three days to stage the whole play. It was already not nearly so grand in my young days, but just like an ordinary Great Drama, starting in the evening and ending at dawn the next day. Such operas were performed to honour the gods and avert calamities, and each one had an evil-doer who met his end at dawn, when the cup of his sins was full and the King of Hell issued a warrant for his arrest. This was the point at which Wu Chang appeared on the stage.

I remember sitting in a boat below such a stage, with the audience in a different mood from usual. Generally, as the night wore on the crowd grew listless, but at this point they showed fresh interest. Wu Chang's tall paper hat which had been hanging in one corner of the stage was now carried inside, and the musicians took up a peculiar instrument and prepared to blow it lustily. This instrument looked like a trumpet, being long and slender, seven or eight feet in length; and it must have been a favourite with ghosts, for it was played only when there were ghosts on the stage. When you blew it, it blared: *Nhatu, nhatu, nhatututuu!* And we called it the Maudgalyayana trumpet.

As the crowd watched eagerly for the fall of the evil-doer, Wu Chang made his appearance. His dress was simpler than in the paintings, and he had neither chain nor abacus; he was simply an uncouth fellow all in white, with white face, red lips and knitted jet-black eyebrows, making it hard to tell whether he was laughing or crying. Upon his entrance he had to sneeze a hundred and eight times and break wind a hundred and eight times before introducing himself. I am sorry I cannot remember all he said, but one passage went something like this:

*The King of Hell issued a warrant
And ordered me to arrest the scabby head next door.*

*When I asked who he was, I found he was my
cousin's son.*

His illness? Typhoid and dysentery.

*His doctor? The son of Chen Nianyi at Xiafang
Bridge.*

His medicine? Aconite, hyssop and cinnamon.

The first dose brought on a cold sweat,

At the second his legs stretched stark,

I said: His mother is weeping piteously,

Why not restore him to life for a little while?

But the king accused me of accepting a bribe;

He had me bound and given forty strokes! . . .

Chen Nianyi was a famous doctor in Shaoxing, described as an immortal in the novel *Suppressing the Bandits** by Yu Zhonghua. But his son does not seem so brilliant in his job

The King of Hell also does not cut too good a figure in this description, doubting Wu Chang's honesty as he did. Still, the fact that he detected that Wu Chang's nephew had "come to life for a little while" shows him not to fall short of a "just and intelligent god." However, the punishment left our Wu Chang with an ineradicable sense of injustice. As he spoke of it he knitted his brows even more and, firmly grasping his tattered palm-leaf fan, his head hanging, he started to dance like a duck swimming in the water.

Nhatu, nhatu, nhatu-nhatu-nhatututuu! The Maudgal-yayana trumpet also wailed on in protest against this unendurable wrong.

So Wu Chang made up his mind:

Now I shall let no man off,

Not though he is behind a wall of bronze or iron,

Not though he is a kinsman of the emperor! . . .

* A reactionary novel by Yu Zhonghua (1794-1849) describing how the peasant insurgents of Liangshan were suppressed by government troops

“Though he has resentment in his heart, he does not blame the unexpected blow”^{*} He shows no mercy now. But only against his will, as a result of the King of Hell's reprimand. Of all the ghosts, he is the only one with any human feeling. If we don't become ghosts, well and good, if we do, he will naturally be the only one with whom we can be on relatively close terms.

I still remember distinctly how in my home town, together with “low types,” I often enjoyed watching this ghostly yet human, just yet merciful, intimidating yet lovable Wu Chang. We enjoyed too the grief or laughter on his face, the bravado and the quips that fell from his lips.

The Wu Chang in temple fairs was somewhat different from the one on the stage. He went through certain motions but did not speak, and tagged after a sort of clown who carried a plate of food, wanting to eat but denied food by the latter. There were two additional characters as well — what “upright gentlemen” call the “spouse and offspring.” All “low types” have this common failing: they like to do to others as they would be done by. Hence they will not allow even a ghost to be lonely, but pair all ghosts and deities off. And Wu Chang was no exception. His better half was a handsome though rather countrified woman called Sister-in-Law Wu Chang. Judging by this mode of address, Wu Chang must belong to our own generation, so no wonder he gives himself no professorial airs. Then there was a boy in a smaller tall hat and smaller white clothes. Though only a child, his shoulders were already slightly hunched while the tips of his eyebrows drooped. Obviously he was Master Wu Chang, yet everyone called him Aling and showed him little respect — perhaps because he was Sister-in-Law Wu Chang's son by a former husband. In that case, though, how could he look so like Wu Chang? Well, the ways of

* A quotation from *Zhuang Zi*.

ghosts and spirits are hard to fathom, and we shall simply have to leave it at that. As for why Wu Chang had no children of his own, by this year that is easy to explain. Spirits can foresee the future. He must have feared that if he had many children those liable to gossip would try to prove in a devious way that he had accepted Russian roubles. So he not only studies birth control but practises it as well.

The scene with the food is called "The Send Off." Because Wu Chang is the summoner of spirits, the relatives of anyone who dies have to give him a farewell feast. As for not allowing him to eat, this is just a bit of fun in the temple fairs and not the case in fact. But everyone likes to have a bit of fun with Wu Chang, because he is so frank, outspoken and human. If you want a true friend, you will find few better than him.

Some say he is a man who goes to the spirit world, in other words, a human being whose spirit serves in hell while he is asleep. That is why he looks so human. I remember a man who lived in a cottage not far from my home, who claimed to be an "ambulant Wu Chang," outside whose door incense and candles were often burnt. I noticed, though, he had an unusually ghostly expression. Could it be that when he became a ghost in the nether regions his expression became more human? Well, the ways of ghosts and spirits are hard to fathom, and we shall simply have to leave it at that.

June 23, 1926

FROM HUNDRED-PLANT GARDEN TO THREE-FLAVOUR STUDY

Behind our house was a great garden known in our family as Hundred-Plant Garden. It has long since been sold, together with the house, to the descendants of Zhu Xi;* and the last time I saw it, already seven or eight years ago. I am pretty sure there were only weeds growing there. But in my childhood it was my paradise.

I need not speak of the green vegetable plots, the slippery stone coping round the well, the tall honey-locust tree, or the purple mulberries. Nor need I speak of the long shrilling of the cicadas among the leaves, the fat wasps couched in the flowering rape, or the nimble skylarks who suddenly soared straight up from the grass to the sky. Just the foot of the low mud wall around the garden was a source of unfailing interest. Here field crickets droned away while house crickets chirped merrily. Turning over a broken brick, you might find a centipede. There were stink-beetles as well, and if you pressed a finger on their backs they emitted puffs of vapour from their rear orifices. Milkwort interwove with climbing fig which had fruit shaped like the calyx of a lotus, while the milkwort had swollen tubers. Folk said that some of these had human shapes and if you ate them you would become immortal, so I kept on pulling them up. By uprooting one I pulled out those next to it, and

* Here Lu Xun only means that the family name of the purchasers was Zhu. They were not actually descendants of the Song Dynasty scholar Zhu Xi.

in this way destroyed part of the mud wall, but I never found a tuber shaped like a man. If you were not afraid of thorns you could pick raspberries too, like clusters of little coral beads, sweet yet tart, with a much finer colour and flavour than mulberries.

I did not venture into the long grass, because a huge brown snake was said to inhabit the garden.

Mama Chang had told me a story:

Once upon a time a scholar was staying in an old temple to study. One evening while enjoying the cool of the courtyard he heard someone call his name. Responding he looked round and saw, over the wall, the head of a beautiful woman. She smiled, then disappeared. He was very pleased, till the old monk who came to chat with him each evening discovered what had happened. Detecting an evil influence on his face, he declared that the scholar must have seen the Beautiful-Woman Snake — a monster with a human head and snake's body who was able to call a man's name. If he answered, the snake would come that night to devour him.

The scholar was nearly frightened to death, of course; but the old monk told him not to worry and gave him a little box, assuring him that if he put this by his pillow he could go to sleep without fear.

But though the scholar did as he was told, he could not sleep — and that is hardly surprising. At midnight, to be sure, the monster came! There sounded a hissing and rustling, as if of wind and rain, outside the door. Just as he was shaking with fright, however — whizz — a golden ray streaked up from beside his pillow. Then outside the door utter silence fell, and the golden ray flew back once more to its box.

And after that? After that the old monk told him that this was a flying centipede which could suck out the brains of a snake — the Beautiful-Woman Snake had been killed by it

The moral of this was: If a strange voice calls your name, on no account answer.

This story brought home to me the perils with which human life is fraught. When I sat outside on a summer night I often felt too apprehensive to look at the wall, and longed for a box with a flying centipede in it like the old monk's. This was often in my thoughts when I walked to the edge of the long grass in Hundred-Plant Garden. To this day I have never got hold of such a box, but neither have I encountered the brown snake or Beautiful-Woman Snake. Of course, strange voices often call my name, but they have never proved to belong to Beautiful-Woman Snakes.

In winter the garden was relatively dull; as soon as it snowed, though, that was a different story. Imprinting a snowman (by pressing your body on the snow) or building snow Buddhas required appreciative audiences, and since this was a deserted garden where visitors seldom came, such games were out of place here. I was therefore reduced to catching birds. A light fall of snow would not do the ground had to be covered for one or two days, so that the birds had gone hungry for some time. You swept a patch clear of snow, propped up a big bamboo sieve on a short stick, sprinkled some rice husks beneath it, then tied a long string to the stick and retired to a distance to hold it, waiting for birds to come. When they hopped under the sieve, you tugged the string and trapped them. Most of those caught were sparrows, but there were white-throated wagtails too, so wild that they died in less than a day of captivity.

It was Runtu's* father who taught me this method, but I was not adept at it. Birds hopped under my sieve all right, yet when I pulled the string and ran over to look there was usually nothing there, and after long efforts I

* Runtu, whose real name was Zhang Yunshui, is mentioned in Lu Xun's story "My Old Home." He was a peasant's son and Lu Xun's childhood playmate.

caught merely three or four Runtu's father in only half the time could catch dozens which, stowed in his bag, would cheep and jostle each other. I asked him once the reason for my failure. With a quiet smile he said:

"You're too impatient. You don't wait for them to get to the middle"

I don't know why my family decided to send me to school, or why they chose the school reputed to be the strictest in the town. Perhaps it was because I had spoiled the mud wall by uprooting milkwort, perhaps because I had thrown bricks into the Liangs' courtyard next door, perhaps because I had climbed the well coping to jump off it. . . . There is no means of knowing. At all events, this meant an end to my frequent visits to Hundred-Plant Garden. Adieu, my crickets! Adieu, my raspberries and climbing figs!

A few hundred yards east of our house, across a stone bridge, was where my teacher lived. You went in through a black-lacquered bamboo gate, and the third room was the classroom. On the central wall hung the inscription Three-Flavour Study, and under this was a painting of a portly fallow deer lying beneath an old tree. In the absence of a tablet to Confucius, we bowed before the inscription and the deer. The first time for Confucius, the second time for our teacher.

When we bowed the second time, our teacher bowed graciously back from the side of the room. A thin, tall old man with a grizzled beard, he wore large spectacles. And I had the greatest respect for him, having heard that he was the most upright, honourable and erudite man in our town.

I forget where it was that I heard that Dongfang Shuo* was another erudite scholar who knew of an insect called *guai-zai*, the incarnation of some unjustly slain man's

* (154-93 B.C.), the witty courtier and persuasive adviser of Emperor Wu Di of the Han Dynasty who reigned from 140 to 87 B.C.

ghost, which would vanish if you doused it with wine I longed to learn the details of this story, but Mama Chang could not enlighten me, for she after all was not an erudite scholar. Now my chance had come. I could ask my teacher

“What is this insect *guai-zai*, sir?” I asked hastily at the end of a new lesson, just before I was dismissed.

“I don’t know.” He seemed not at all pleased. Indeed, he looked rather angry.

Then I realized that students should not ask questions like this, but concentrate on studying. Being such a learned scholar, of course he must know the answer. When he said he did not know, it meant he would not tell me. Grown-ups often behaved like this, as I knew from many past experiences.

So I concentrated on studying. At midday I practised calligraphy, in the evening I made couplets.* For the first few days the teacher was very stern, later he treated me better, but by degrees he increased my reading assignment and the number of characters in each line of the couplets I was set to write, from three to five, and finally to seven.

There was a garden behind Three-Flavour Study too. Although it was small, you could climb the terrace there to pick winter plum, or search the ground and the fragrant osmanthus tree for the moulted skins of cicadas. Best of all was catching flies to feed ants, for that did not make any noise. But it was no use too many of us slipping out into the garden at the same time or staying out too long, for then the teacher would shout from the classroom:

“Where has everybody gone?”

Then everyone would slip back one after the other: it was no use all going back together. He had a ferule which he seldom used, and a method of punishing students by making them kneel which again he seldom used. In

* The first step in learning to write poems in classical metres.

general, he simply glared round for a while and shouted
 "Get on with your reading!"

Then all of us would read at the top of our voices, with
 a roar like a seething cauldron

We all read from different texts:

"Is humanity far? When I seek it, it is here."*

"To mock a toothless man, say: The dog's kennel gapes
 wide."**

"On the upper ninth the dragon hides itself and bides
 its time."***

"Poor soil, with good produce of the inferior sort inter-
 spersed with superior produce; its tribute, matting,
 oranges, pomelos."†

.

The teacher read aloud too. Later, our voices grew
 lower and faded away. He alone went on declaiming as
 loudly as ever:

"At a sweep of his iron sceptre, all stand amazed. . . .
 The golden goblet brims over, but a thousand cups will
 not intoxicate him"

I suspected this to be the finest literature, for whenever
 he reached this passage he always smiled, threw back
 his head a little and shook it, bending his head further
 and further back.

When our teacher was completely absorbed in his read-
 ing, that was most convenient for us. Some boys would
 then stage puppet shows with paper helmets on their
 fingers. I used to draw, using what we called "Jing-
 chuan paper" to trace the illustrations to various novels
 just as we traced calligraphy. The more books I read,

* From *The Analects* of Confucius

** From the school text *Jade Forest of Sayings for the Young*

*** From the *Book of Changes*.

† From the *Book of History*.

†† From a Qing Dynasty narrative poem describing the arro-
 gance of a late Tang Dynasty prince, Li Keyong (856-908), at a
 feast.

the more illustrations I traced. I never became a good student but I made not a little progress as an artist, the best sets I copied being two big volumes of illustrations, one from *Suppressing the Bandits*,* the other from *Xi You Ji (Pilgrimage to the West)*** Later, needing ready money, I sold these to a rich classmate whose father ran a shop selling the tinsel coins used at funerals. I hear he is now the shop manager himself and will soon have risen to the rank of one of the local gentry. Those tracings of mine must have vanished long ago.

September 18, 1926

* See footnote on p. 386.

** A sixteenth-century mythological novel by Wu Cheng'en.

FATHER'S ILLNESS

It is probably over ten years now since this story of a well-known doctor was the talk of the town in S—

He charged one dollar forty a visit, ten dollars for an emergency call, double the amount for a night call, and double again for a trip outside the city. One night the daughter of a family living outside the city fell dangerously ill. They sent to ask him out there and, because he had more money at the time than he knew what to do with, he refused to go for less than a hundred dollars. They had to agree to this. Once there, though, he simply gave the girl a perfunctory looking over.

"It isn't serious," he said

Then he made out a prescription, took his hundred dollars, and left.

Apparently the patient's family were very rich, for the next day they asked him out there again. The master of the house met him at the door with a smile

"Yesterday evening we gave her your medicine, Doctor," he said, "and she's much better. So we've asked you to have another look at her."

He took him as before into the bedroom, and a maid drew the patient's hand outside the bed curtain. The doctor placed his fingers on the wrist and found it icy cold, without any pulse.

"Hmm" He nodded. "I understand this illness"

Quite calmly he walked to the table, took out a prescription form, and wrote on it. "Pay the bearer one hundred silver dollars."

Beneath he signed his name and affixed his seal.

"This illness looks rather serious, Doctor," said the master of the house, behind him. "I think the medicine should be a little more potent."

"Very well," said the doctor. And he wrote another prescription. "Pay the bearer two hundred silver dollars."

Beneath he signed his name and affixed his seal again.

This done, the master of the house put away the prescription and saw him politely out.

I had dealings with this famous physician for two whole years, because he came every other day to attend my father. Although by that time very well known, he had not yet more money than he knew what to do with; still, his fee was already one dollar forty a visit. In large towns today a ten-dollar fee is not considered exorbitant; but in those days one dollar forty was a great sum, by no means easy to raise — especially when it fell due every other day.

He probably *was* unique in some respects. It was generally agreed that his prescriptions were unusual. I know nothing about medicine: what struck me was how hard his "adjuvants" were to find. Each new prescription kept me busy for some time. First I had to buy the medicine, then look for the adjuvant. He never used such common ingredients as two slices of fresh ginger, or ten bamboo leaves minus the tips. At best it was reed roots, and I had to go to the river to dig them up; and when it came to sugar-cane which had seen three years of frost, I would have to search for two or three days at the least. But, strange to say, I believe my quest was always successful in the end.

It was generally agreed that herein lay his magic. There once was a patient whom no drugs could cure, but when he met a certain Dr. Ye Tianshi, all this doctor did was to add phoenix-tree leaves as the adjuvant to the old prescription. With only one dose the patient was cured. "Medicine is a matter of the mind." Because it was autumn then, and the phoenix tree is the first to feel

the approach of autumn, where all other drugs had failed, Dr. Ye could now use the spirit of autumn. When spirit reacted on spirit, the patient was thus. . . . Although this was not clear to me, I was thoroughly impressed and realized that all efficacious drugs must be difficult to get. Those who want to become immortals even have to risk their lives to go deep into the mountains to pluck the herb of long life.

After two years of his visits, I gradually came to know this famous physician fairly well; indeed we were almost friends. Father's dropsy grew daily worse, till it looked as if he would have to keep to his bed, and by degrees I lost faith in such remedies as sugar-cane which had seen three years of frost, and was not nearly as zealous as before in finding and preparing adjuvants. One day just at this time, when the doctor called, after inquiring after my father's illness he told us very frankly:

"I've used all the knowledge I have. There is a Dr. Chen Lianhe here, who knows more than I do. I advise you to consult him. I'll write you a letter of introduction. This illness isn't serious, though. It's just that he can cure it much more quickly . . ."

The whole household seemed rather unhappy that day, but I saw him out as respectfully as ever to his sedan-chair. When I went in again, I found my father looking very put out, talking it over with everyone and declaring that there was probably no hope for him. Because this doctor had treated the illness for two years to no purpose, and knew the patient too well, he could not help feeling rather embarrassed now that things had reached a crisis: that was why he had recommended someone else, washing his hands of the whole affair. But what else could we do? It was a fact that the only other well-known doctor in our town was Chen Lianhe. So the next day we engaged his services.

Chen Lianhe's fee was also one dollar forty. But whereas our first well-known doctor's face was plump and

round, his was plump and long: this was one great difference between them. Their use of medicine was different too. Our first well-known doctor's prescriptions could be prepared by one person, but no single person could cope satisfactorily with Dr. Chen's because his prescriptions always included a special pill or powder or an extra-special adjuvant.

Not once did he use reed roots or sugar-cane that had seen three years of frost. Most often it was "a pair of crickets," with a note in small characters at the side: "They must be an original pair, from the same burrow." So it seems that even insects must be chaste; if they marry again after losing their mates they forfeit even the right to be used as medicine. This task, however, presented no difficulties to me. In Hundred-Plant Garden I could catch ten pairs easily. I tied them with a thread and dropped them alive into the boiling pan, and that was that. But then there was "ten ardisia berries." Nobody knew what these were. I asked the pharmacy, I asked some peasants, I asked the vendor of herb medicines, I asked old people, I asked scholars, I asked a carpenter but they all simply shook their heads. Last of all I remembered that distant great-uncle of mine, the old fellow who liked to grow flowers and trees, and hurried over to ask him. Sure enough, he knew: the ardisia was a shrub which grew at the foot of trees deep in the mountain. It had small red berries like coral beads, and was usually known as Never-Grow-Up.

*You wear out iron shoes in hunting round,
When all the time it's easy to be found!*

Now we had the adjuvant, but there was still a special pill: broken-drum bolus. Broken-drum boluses were made from the leather of worn-out drums. Since one name for "dropsy" is "Drum-tight," the leather from worn-out drums can naturally cure it. Gangyi of the Qing Dy-

nasty who hated "foreign devils," acted on the same principle when he prepared to fight them by training a corps of "tiger angels," for the tigers would be able to eat the sheep, and the angels could subdue the devils.* Unfortunately there was only one shop in the whole town which sold this miraculous drug, and that was nearly six li from our house. However, this was not like the case of the ardisia which we groped in the dark to find. After making out his prescription Dr. Chen Lianhe gave me earnest and detailed instructions as to where to obtain it.

"I have one medicine," Dr. Chen told my father once, "which applied to the tongue would do you good, I'm sure. For the tongue is the intelligent sprout of the heart. . . . It is not expensive either, only two dollars a box. . . ."

My father thought for some time, then shook his head.

"This present treatment may not prove too effective," said Dr. Chen another day. "I think we might ask a diviner if there is not some avenging spirit behind this. . . . A doctor can cure diseases but not fate, isn't that correct? Of course, this may be something that happened in a previous existence . . ."

My father thought for some time, then shook his head.

All the best doctors can bring the dead to life, as we know from the placards hanging outside their houses which we see when we walk past. But now a concession has been made, for physicians themselves admit: "Western doctors are best at surgery, while Chinese doctors are best at internal medicine." But there was no Western-trained doctor in S — at that time. Indeed it had never occurred to anyone that there was such a thing in the world as a

* The corps of "tiger angels" was actually trained by the Manchu official Zaiyi, not Gangyi. The Chinese character 羊 for "sheep" and that for "foreign" (洋) are homophones, so by using the symbol of tigers which eat sheep he meant that this corps could destroy the foreigners.

Western doctor Hence, whenever anyone fell ill, all we could do was ask the direct descendants of the Yellow Emperor and Qi Bo* to cure him. In the days of the Yellow Emperor, wizards and doctors were one, thus right down to the present his disciples can still see ghosts and believe that "the tongue is the intelligent sprout of the heart" This is the "fate" of Chinese, which not even famous physicians are able to cure.

When he would not apply the efficacious remedy on his tongue and could not think of any avenging spirit he had wronged, naturally it was no use my father simply eating broken-drum boluses for over a hundred days. These drum pills proved unable to beat the dropsy, and finally my father lay at his last gasp on the bed. We invited Dr. Chen Lianhe once more — an emergency call this time, for ten silver dollars Once more, he calmly wrote out a prescription He discontinued the broken-drum boluses, however, and the adjuvant was not too mysterious either, so before very long this medicine was ready But when we poured it between my father's lips, it trickled out again from one side of his mouth.

That ended my dealings with Dr. Chen Lianhe; but I sometimes saw him in the street being carried swiftly by in his fast sedan-chair with three carriers. I hear he is still in good health, practising medicine and editing a paper on traditional Chinese medicine, engaging in a struggle with those Western-trained doctors who are good for nothing but surgery.

There is indeed a slight difference between the Chinese and Western outlook. I understand that when a filial son in China knows that his parents' end is approaching, he buys several catties of ginseng, boils it, and gives it to them, in the hope of prolonging their lives a few more days or even half a day. One of my professors, whose

* Legendary figures regarded as the inventors of medicine, to whom the earliest medical books in China are attributed

subject was medicine, told me that a doctor's duty was to cure those who could be cured, and see to it that those who could not died without suffering. But this professor, of course, was Western-trained.

Father's breathing became very laboured, until even I could scarcely bear to hear it; but nobody could help him. Sometimes the thought flashed into my mind, "Better if it could all be over quickly . . ." At once I knew I should not think of such a thing, in fact I felt guilty. But at the same time I felt this idea was only proper, for I loved my father dearly. Even today, I still feel the same about it.

That morning Mrs. Yan, who lived in the same compound, came in. An authority on etiquette, she told us not to wait there doing nothing. So we changed his clothes, burnt paper coins and something called the *Gao-wang Sutra*,* and put the ashes, wrapped in paper, in his hand . . .

"Call him!" said Mrs. Yan. "Your father's at his last gasp. Call him quickly!"

"Father! Father!" I called accordingly.

"Louder. He can't hear. Hurry up, can't you?"

"Father! Father!"

His face, which had been composed, grew suddenly tense again; and he raised his eyelids slightly, as if in pain.

"Call him!" she insisted. "Hurry up and call him!"

"Father!!!"

"What is it? . . . Don't shout. . . . Don't. . . ."

His voice was low, and once more he started panting for breath. It was some time before he recovered his earlier calm.

* According to an old superstition, if this sutra was burnt and the dying man made to grasp the ashes, he would suffer less torment in Hell.

“Father!!!”

I went on calling until he breathed his last

I can still hear my voice as it sounded then. And each time I hear those cries, I feel this was the greatest wrong I ever did my father.

October 7, 1926

MR. FUJINO

Tokyo was not so extraordinary after all. When cherry-blossom shimmered in Ueno,* from the distance it actually resembled light, pink clouds; but under the flowers you would always find groups of short-term "students from the Qing Empire," their long queues coiled on top of their heads upraising the crowns of their student caps to look like Mount Fuji. Others had undone their queues and arranged their hair flat on their heads, so that when their caps were removed it glistened for all the world like the lustrous locks of young ladies; and they would toss their heads too. It was really a charming sight.

In the gatehouse of the Chinese students' hostel there were always some books on sale, and it was worth going there sometimes. In the mornings you could sit and rest in the foreign-style rooms inside. But towards the evening the floor of one room would often be shaken by a deafening tramp of feet, and dust would fill the whole place. If you questioned those in the know, the answer would be: "They are learning ballroom dancing."

Then why not go somewhere else?

So I went to the Medical College at Sendai. Soon after leaving Tokyo I came to a station called Nippori; somehow or other, even now I remember the name. The next place I remember was Mito, where Zhu Shunshui** who was loyal to the Ming Dynasty after its downfall died in

* A park in Tokyo

** Zhu Shunshui (1600-82) was a scholar who after the fall of the Ming Dynasty went to Japan to plan its restoration and remained there as a teacher

exile. Sendai was a small market town, very cold in the winter, with as yet no Chinese students studying there.

No doubt the rarer a thing the higher its value. When Beijing cabbage is shipped to Zhejiang, it is hung upside-down in the greengrocer's by a red string tied to its root, and given the grand title "Shandong Vegetable." When the aloe which grows wild in Fujian comes to Beijing, it is ushered into a hothouse and given the beautiful name "Dragon-Tongue Orchid." In Sendai I too enjoyed such preferential treatment; not only did the school not ask for fees, but several members of the staff even showed great concern over my board and lodging. At first I stayed in an inn next to the jail, where although the early winter was already quite cold, there were still a good many mosquitoes, so I learned to cover myself completely with the quilt and wrap my clothes round my head, leaving only two nostrils exposed through which to breathe. In this area, shaken by my continuous breathing, mosquitoes could find no place to bite; thus I slept soundly. The food was not bad either. But one of our staff thought that since this inn also catered for the convicts, it was not fitting for me to stay there; and he pleaded with me earnestly time and again. Though I considered the fact that this inn also catered for the convicts had nothing to do with me, I could not ignore his kindness, so I had to look for a more fitting place. Thus I moved to another house a long way from the jail, where unfortunately I had to drink taro tuber soup every day, which I found rather hard to swallow.

After this I met many new teachers and attended many new lectures. The anatomy course was taught by two professors. First came osteology. There entered a dark, lean instructor with a moustache, who was wearing glasses and carrying under his arm a pile of books, large and small. Having set the books on the table, in slow and most measured tones he introduced himself to the class:

“My name is Genkuro Fujino. . . .”

Some students at the back started laughing. He went on to outline the history of the development of anatomical science in Japan, those books, large and small, being works published on this subject from the earliest time till then. There were first a few books in old-fashioned binding, then some Chinese translations reprinted in Japan. So they had not started translating and studying new medical science any earlier than in China.

Those sitting at the back and laughing were students who had failed the previous term and been kept down, who after one year in the college knew a great many stories. They proceeded to regale the freshmen with the history of every professor. This Mr. Fujino, they said, dressed so carelessly that he sometimes even forgot to put on a tie. Because he shivered all winter in an old overcoat, once when he travelled, by train the conductor suspected him of being a pickpocket and warned all the passengers to be on their guard.

What they said was probably true. I myself saw him come to class once without a tie.

A week later, on a Saturday I think, he sent his assistant for me. I found him sitting in his laboratory among skeletons and a number of separate skulls — he was studying skulls at the time and later published a monograph on the subject in the college journal.

“Can you take notes of my lectures?” he asked.

“After a fashion.”

“Let me see them.”

I gave him the notes I had taken, and he kept them, to return them a day or two later with the instruction that henceforth I should hand them in every week. When I took them back and looked at them, I received a great surprise, and felt at the same time both embarrassed and grateful. From beginning to end my notes had been supplemented and corrected in red ink. Not only had he added a great deal I had missed, he had even corrected

every single grammatical mistake. And so it went on till he had taught all the courses for which he was responsible: osteology, angiology, neurology

Unfortunately, I was not in the least hard-working, and was sometimes most self-willed. I remember once Mr Fujino called me to his laboratory and showed me a diagram in my notes of the blood vessels of the forearm. Pointing at this, he said kindly:

“Look, you have moved this blood vessel a little out of place. Of course, when moved like this it does look better; but anatomical charts are not works of art, and we have no way of altering real things. I have corrected it for you, and in future you should copy exactly from the blackboard.”

I was very stubborn, however. Though I assented, I was thinking:

“My diagram was a good drawing. As for the true facts, of course I can remember them.”

After the annual examination I spent the summer enjoying myself in Tokyo. By early autumn, when I went back to the college, the results had long since been published. I came halfway down the list of more than a hundred students, but I had not failed. This term Mr. Fujino's courses were practical anatomy and topographic anatomy.

After roughly a week of practical anatomy he sent for me again and, looking very gratified, said, still in the most measured tones:

“Having heard what respect the Chinese show to spirits, I was afraid you might be unwilling to dissect corpses. Now my mind is at rest, since this is not the case.”

Yet sometimes too, inadvertently, he embarrassed me very much. He had heard that Chinese women had bound feet, but did not know the details; so he wanted to learn from me how it was done, how the bones in the feet were deformed. And he said with a sigh, “I should have to see it to understand. What can it really be like?”

One day the executives of the students' union of my class came to my hostel and asked to borrow my lecture notes. I found them and handed them over, but they merely looked through the notes without taking them away. As soon as they left, however, the postman delivered a bulky envelope, and when I opened it, the first line read:

“Repent!”

This was probably a quotation from the New Testament, but it had recently been used by Tolstoy. It was then the time of the Russo-Japanese War, and Count Tolstoy wrote to both the Russian tsar and the Japanese mikado, opening his letter with this word. The Japanese papers denounced him roundly for his presumption; patriotic youths were most indignant too, though they had been influenced by him without knowing it. The rest of the letter was to the effect that the questions for our anatomy test the previous year had been marked by Mr. Fujino on my lecture notes, and it was because I knew them beforehand that I was able to pass. The letter was unsigned.

Then I recalled an incident a few days earlier. Because there was to be a meeting of our whole class, the students' executive had written an announcement on the blackboard, concluding with the words: “Please come without fail, and let there be no *leakage*.” The word “leakage” was underlined. Though I thought at the time that this underlining was funny, I paid no attention to it; now I realized it was directed against me too, implying that I had got hold of the questions through some leakage on the part of our teacher.

I reported this to Mr. Fujino. A few students who knew me well were indignant too, and we protested to the executives against their rudeness in examining my notes under another pretext, and demanded that they publish the results of their investigation. So finally the rumour died, the executives tried by every means to re-

cover that anonymous letter, and in the end I returned them their Tolstoyan missive.

China is a weak country, therefore the Chinese must be an inferior people, and for a Chinese to get more than sixty marks could not be due simply to his own efforts. No wonder they suspected me. But soon after this it was my fate to watch the execution of some Chinese. In our second year we had a new course, bacteriology. All the bacterial forms were shown in slides, and if we completed one section before it was time for the class to be dismissed, some news in slides would be shown. Naturally at that time they were all about the Japanese victories over the Russians. But in these lantern slides there were also scenes of some Chinese who had acted as spies for the Russians and were captured by the Japanese and shot, while other Chinese looked on. And there was I, too, in the classroom.

"*Banzai!*" the students clapped their hands and cheered.

They cheered everything we saw; but to me the cheering that day was unusually jarring to my ear. Later when I came back to China I saw idlers watching criminals being shot, who also cheered as if they were drunk. Alas, there is nothing one can do about it. At that time and in that place, however, it made me change my mind.

At the end of my second year I called on Mr Fujino to tell him I was going to stop studying medicine and leave Sendai. A shadow crossed his face and he seemed on the point of speaking, but then thought better of it.

"I want to study biology, so what you have taught me, sir, will still be useful." As a matter of fact, I had no intention of studying biology; but seeing he looked rather sad I told this lie to comfort him.

"I fear subjects like the anatomy taught to medical students will not be of much help to you in the study of biology," he said with a sigh.

A few days before I left he called me to his house, gave me a photograph on the back of which he had written "Farewell," and said he hoped I would give him one of mine. Since I had no photographs at that time, he told me to send him one later when I had taken one, and to write to him regularly to tell him how I was doing.

After leaving Sendai I did not have a photograph taken for many years, and since there was nothing gratifying in my life and telling him would only disappoint him, I did not even dare write to him. As the months and years slipped by, there was so much to tell that I felt more perplexed for words, so though sometimes I wanted to write I found it hard to begin, and I have not yet written him a single letter nor sent him a photograph. As far as he is concerned, he must think I have disappeared for good.

But somehow or other I still remember him from time to time, for of all those whom I consider as my teachers he is the one to whom I feel most grateful and who gave me the most encouragement. And I often think the keen faith he had in me and his indefatigable help were in a limited sense for China, for he wanted China to have modern medical science; but in a larger sense they were for science, for he wanted modern medical knowledge to spread to China. In my eyes he is a great man, and I feel this in my heart, though his name is not known to many people.

I had the lecture notes he corrected bound into three thick volumes and kept them as a permanent souvenir. Unfortunately seven years ago when I was moving house, a case of books broke open on the road and half the contents were lost including these notes. I asked the transport company to make a search, but to no effect. So all I have left is his photograph which hangs on the east wall of my Beijing lodging, opposite my desk. At night if I am tired and want to take it easy, when I look up and see his thin, dark face in the lamplight, as if about to speak in

measured tones, my better nature asserts itself and my courage returns Then I light a cigarette, and write some more of those articles so hated and detested by "just minds and gentlemen."

October 12, 1926

FAN AINONG

In our lodgings in Tokyo, we usually read the papers as soon as we got up. Most students read the *Asahi Shimbun* and the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, while those with a passion for tittle-tattle read the *Niroku Shimbun*. One morning, the first thing our eyes lit on was a telegram from China, much as follows.

“Enming, Governor of Anhui, has been assassinated by Jo Shiki Rin. The assassin has been captured”

After the initial shock, all the students brightened up and started chatting away. They also tried to work out who the assassin was, and what were the three Chinese characters translated as Jo Shiki Rin. But everyone from Shaoxing who read anything more than textbooks had understood at once. This was Xu Xilin* who, after finishing his studies and returning to China, had been in charge of police administration as commissioner designate of Anhui — he was just in the position to assassinate the governor.

Everybody went on to prophesy that he would receive the extreme penalty, and his whole clan would be involved. Not long after this, news also reached us that Miss Qiu Jin** had been executed in Shaoxing, and Xu

* A native of Shaoxing, Xu (1873-1907) studied in Japan and carried on revolutionary activities. In 1906 he returned to China and together with Qiu Jin planned to start a revolt in Anhui and Zhejiang. In the summer of 1907 he assassinated the governor of Anhui, Enming, then occupied the munitions depot with a few students; but the uprising was crushed and he was killed.

** Qiu Jin (1875-1907) also came from Shaoxing and studied in Japan. She was captured soon after Xu's arrest.

Xilin's heart had been torn out, fried and eaten by Enming's bodyguards. We were furious. Some of us held a secret meeting to raise passage money, for this was where a Japanese ronin would come in useful. When he was in a jovial mood, after tearing up cuttlefish to go with his wine, he set out to fetch Xu's family.

As usual, we also held a meeting of fellow-provincials to mourn for the revolutionary martyrs and abuse the Manchu government. Then someone proposed sending a telegram to Beijing to inveigh against the Manchu government's inhumanity. At once the meeting divided into two camps: those in favour of sending a telegram, and those against it. I was in favour, but after I had expressed my opinion, a deep, gruff voice declared:

"Those killed have been killed, those dead have died — what's the use of sending a stinking telegram?"

The speaker was a tall, burly fellow with long hair and more white than black to his eyes, who always seemed to be looking at people contemptuously. Squatting on the mat, he opposed almost all I said. This had struck me before as strange, and I had my eyes on him, but only now did I ask:

"Who was that last speaker, who's so cold?"

Someone who knew him told me, "That's Fan Ainong, one of Xu Xilin's students."

This was outrageous — the fellow was simply not human! His teacher had been murdered, yet he did not even dare send a telegram. Thereupon I absolutely insisted on sending one, and began to argue with him. The result was that those in favour of sending a telegram were in the majority, and he had to give way. The next thing was to vote for someone to draft it.

"Why bother to vote?" he asked. "Of course it should be the one who proposed sending a telegram."

I was sure this remark was also aimed at me, though it was not unreasonable. However, I declared it was essential that a composition of such a tragic nature be writ-

ten by someone thoroughly familiar with the life of the martyr, for the fact that he had a closer relationship and felt more distressed and indignant than other people would certainly make his writing much more moving. So I began to argue with him again. The result was that neither he nor I drafted it. I forget who consented to draft it. The next thing was that everyone left except the man drawing up the telegram and one or two helpers who would send it off when it was written.

After that I always found this Fan Ainong unnatural, and most detestable. I had formerly thought the most detestable people in the world were the Manchus, but now I realized they were still secondary: the primary offender was Fan Ainong. If China had no revolution, no more need be said on the matter. If there was a revolution, the first thing to do was to root out Fan Ainong.

Later, however, my views on this subject seem by degrees to have weakened, to be finally forgotten, and after that we never met again. Not till the year before the revolution, when I was teaching in my home town. There at the end of the spring, I think, I suddenly saw a man in a friend's house whose face looked very familiar. After staring at each other for not more than two or three seconds, we both exclaimed:

“Why, you're Fan Ainong!”

“Why, you're Lu Xun!”

I don't know why, but we both started laughing at that — laughing at ourselves and regretting the days that had gone. His eyes were still the same; but strangely enough, though only a few years had passed, he already had some white hairs. Or maybe his hair had been white all the time, only I had never noticed. Wearing a very old cloth jacket and worn-out cloth shoes, he looked extremely shabby. Speaking of his experiences, he told me he had run out of money later, so that he could not continue his studies but had to come home. After his return he had been despised, rejected and persecuted — virtually no

place would have him. Now he was taking refuge in the country, making a meagre living by teaching a few small boys. But he sometimes felt so depressed that he took a boat to town.

He told me also that he now liked drinking, so we drank. After that, whenever he came to town he would look me up, till we knew each other very well. In our cups we often said such crazy, senseless things that even my mother would laugh when she happened to hear us. One day I suddenly remembered that meeting of our fellow-provincials in Tokyo.

“Why did you do nothing but oppose me that day, as if deliberately?” I asked him.

“Don’t you know? I always disliked you — not just I, but all of us.”

“Did you know who I was before that?”

“Of course. When we arrived at Yokohama, didn’t you come with Chen Ziying to meet us? You shook your head over us contemptuously — don’t you remember that?”

After a little thought I remembered, although it had happened seven or eight years ago. Chen Ziying had called for me, saying we must go to Yokohama to meet some fellow-provincials who were coming to study in Japan. As soon as the steamer arrived I saw a large group of probably more than a dozen of them. Once ashore, they took their baggage to the custom house, and while looking through their cases the customs officer suddenly found a pair of embroidered slippers for a woman with bound feet, and set aside his public duties to pick these up and examine them curiously. I was very annoyed, and thought, “What fools these fellows must be, to bring such things with them.” Without knowing what I was doing, I must have shaken my head disapprovingly. The inspection over, we sat for a short time in a hotel, then boarded the train. To my surprise, this flock of students started deferring to each other in the railway carriage. A

wanted B to take this seat, B insisted on giving it up to C; and before they were through with this ceremonial the train started with a lurch, so that three or four of them promptly fell over. I was very annoyed again, and thought to myself, "Even the seats on trains they have to divide according to precedence. . . ." Without knowing what I was doing, I must have shaken my head disapprovingly again. But one of that deferential group, I realized now, was Fan Ainong. And in addition to Fan, I am ashamed to say, were the revolutionary martyrs Chen Boping, who was killed in battle in Anhui, and Ma Zonghan, who was murdered* There were one or two others as well, who were thrown into dark cells not to see the light of day till after the revolution, and who still bear the scars of their torture. But I did not know them; shaking my head I shipped them all to Tokyo. Though Xu Xilin had travelled on the same boat, he was not on this train, for he and his wife had landed at Kobe to go on by land.

I believed I must have shaken my head twice, and did not know which time they had noticed it. Since all was bustle and noise while they offered seats to each other, while all was quiet during the customs inspection, it must surely have been in the custom house. When I questioned Ainong, I found this was the case.

"I really can't understand why you took such things with you. Whose were they?"

"They belonged to Mrs. Xu, of course" He fixed me with his eyes, which were mostly whites.

"In Tokyo she'd have to pretend to have big feet. So why take them?"

"How would I know? Ask her."

As winter approached we grew more hard up; still, we went on drinking and joking. Then suddenly came the

* Chen Boping (1882-1907) and Ma Zonghan (1884-1907) both studied in Japan and on their return to China joined the uprising organized by Xu Xilin.

Wuchang Uprising,* and after that Shaoxing was liberated. The following day Ainong came to town in a felt cap of the type worn by peasants. I had never seen him with such a beaming face.

“Let’s not drink today, Xun. I want to see liberated Shaoxing. Come on”

So we walked through the streets, and saw white flags everywhere. But though outwardly all was changed, beneath the surface all went on as before, for this was a military government organized by a few of the old-style gentry. The chief shareholder in the railway company was head of the administration, the money-lender had become director of the arsenal. . . . And this military government did not last long, for as soon as a few youngsters raised an outcry, Wang Jinfu** came in with his troops from Hangzhou. In fact, he might have come even without the outcry. After his arrival, he was surrounded by a crowd of idlers and new members of the revolutionary party, and reigned supreme as Military Governor Wang. In less than ten days most of his men in the yamen, who had arrived in cotton clothes, were wearing fur-lined gowns although it was not yet cold.

My new rice bowl was the job of principal of the normal school, and Governor Wang gave me two hundred dollars to run the school. Ainong was supervisor of studies. He still wore his cloth gown, but did not drink very much, and seldom had time to chat. Since he gave classes in addition to his administrative duties, he worked very hard indeed.

“Wang Jinfu and his lot are no good either,” indignantly announced a young visitor who had attended my lectures the previous year. “We want to start a news-

* This took place on October 10, 1911, and was the beginning of the 1911 Revolution.

** Leader of a secret society in Zhejiang who joined the revolutionary Guang Fu Hui and, during the 1911 Revolution, led his men to Shaoxing and made himself military governor.

paper to keep a check on them. But we'll have to use your name, sir, as one of the sponsors. Another is Mr Chen Ziyang, and another is Mr Sun Deqing* We know you won't refuse, since it's for the public good."

I gave my consent. Two days later I saw a leaflet announcing the appearance of this paper, and sure enough there were three sponsors. Five days later the newspaper came out. It began by denouncing the military government and its members, after which it denounced the governor and his relatives, fellow-provincials and concubines. . . .

After more than ten days of such abuse, word came to my house that because we had tricked money out of the governor and denounced him, he was going to send a gunman to shoot us.

Nobody took this seriously except my mother, who was very worried and begged me not to go out. I went out as usual, however, explaining to her that Wang Jinfa would not be coming to shoot us; for although he came out of the bandits' school, he didn't kill people lightly. Besides, the money I took from him was to run the school — he should at least know that — he didn't mean what he said.

Sure enough, no one came to shoot us. When I wrote and asked for more funds, I received another two hundred dollars. But Governor Wang seemed to be rather offended, for he informed me, "This is the last time!"

Ainong heard some fresh news, however, which did upset me. The reference to "tricking" money had not meant the school funds but a separate sum given to the newspaper office. After the paper had come out for several days filled with abuse, Wang Jinfa sent a man there to pay them five hundred dollars. Then our youngsters held a meeting.

* An enlightened landlord who joined the anti-Qing revolutionary movement.

The first question was: "Shall we accept this or not?"

The decision was: "Accept it."

The second question was. "Shall we go on denouncing him after accepting this?"

The decision was: "We shall."

The reason was "Once we have accepted his money, he becomes a shareholder; and if a shareholder behaves badly, of course we must denounce him."

I went straight to the newspaper office to find out whether this was true or not. It was. I reproached them mildly for accepting the governor's money, but the one called the accountant was offended.

"Why shouldn't a newspaper accept shares?" he demanded.

"These aren't shares . . ."

"If they aren't shares, what are they?"

I did not say any more. I had enough experience of the world for that. If I had pointed out that this was involving us, he would have abused me for caring so much for my worthless life that I was unwilling to sacrifice myself for the public good; or the next day the paper might have carried an account of how I had trembled in my fear of death.

But then, by a fortunate coincidence, Xu Jifu sent me a letter urging me to go at once to Nanjing. Ainong was all in favour, though extremely depressed as well.

"Things have grown so bad again, you can't stay here," he said. "You'd better leave at once. "

I understood what he left unsaid, and decided to go to Nanjing. First I went to the governor's yamen to tender my resignation, which was naturally accepted, then a snivelling functionary was sent to the school to take over. Having handed over the accounts and the ten cents and two coppers in hand, I ceased to be the principal. My successor was Fu Lichen, head of the Confucian League.

I heard the end of the newspaper affair two or three weeks after reaching Nanjing — the office had been

smashed up by the soldiery. Since Chen Ziying was in the country, he was all right; but Sun Deqing, who happened to be in town, received a bayonet wound in his thigh. He flew into a fury. Of course, one could hardly blame him — it was rather painful. After his fury subsided, he took off his clothes and had a photograph taken to show the wound which was about an inch across; he also wrote an account of what had happened, which he circulated everywhere, to expose the tyranny of this military government. I doubt if anyone has kept that photograph. It was so small that the wound was practically invisible, and without an explanation anyone seeing it would be bound to take it for a nudist photograph of some rather eccentric and romantic fellow. Indeed, if it came to the notice of the warlord general Sun Chuanfang,* it would very likely be banned.

By the time I moved from Nanjing to Beijing, the principal who was head of the Confucian League had contrived to remove Ainong from his post as supervisor of studies. He was once more the Ainong of pre-revolutionary days. I wanted to find a small post for him in Beijing, which was what he longed for, but there was no opening. Later he went to live on a friend, and I often heard from him. He grew poorer and poorer, and sounded more and more bitter. At last he was forced to leave this friend's house and drift from place to place. Before long I heard from a fellow-provincial that he had fallen into the river and been drowned.

I suspected he had committed suicide. For he was an excellent swimmer: it would not be easy for him to drown.

At night, sitting in the hostel feeling thoroughly depressed, I doubted whether this news could be true; but somehow I still felt it must be reliable, although I had

* A Northern warlord who prohibited the use of human models in art schools in Shanghai on the grounds of preserving Confucian morality.

received no confirmation. There was nothing I could do but write four poems which were printed later in some paper, but which I have now nearly forgotten. All I can remember are six lines of one poem. The first four were.

*How often I discussed our times over wine
With you who drank but little;
In a world blind drunk
A mere tippler might well drown. . . .*

The two lines in the middle have slipped my memory, but the last two were:

*Like scattering clouds my friends have gone,
And I am but a grain of dust in the wind.*

Later, when I went home, I learned more details of the story. First, Ainong could find no work of any description, because everybody disliked him. He was very hard up indeed, but he went on drinking whenever friends treated him. He had very little to do with other people by this time, and the only ones he saw much of were a few rather young men he had got to know afterwards; but they did not want to hear his complaints all the time — they liked his jokes better.

“I may get a telegram tomorrow,” he used to say. “When I open it, I’ll find Lu Xun has sent for me.”

One day, a few new friends invited him to go by boat to watch an opera. It was after midnight by the time they started back, and there was high wind and rain. He was drunk, yet he insisted on standing on the bulwarks. And when his friends protested, he would not listen to them. He assured them he could not fall. Fall he did, though, and although he could swim he did not come to the surface.

The next day they recovered his body. They found him standing upright in a creek where water chestnuts grew.

To this day I do not know whether he lost his balance or committed suicide.

He had no money at all when he died, but he left behind a widow with a young daughter. Some people thought of starting a fund for his daughter's future schooling; but as soon as this was proposed, various members of his clan started squabbling as to who should control this sum, although it had not yet been collected. Then everyone was so disgusted that the scheme just came to nothing.

I wonder how his only daughter is faring now? If she is studying, she ought to have graduated from secondary school by this time.

November 18, 1926

MY FIRST TEACHER

I cannot remember in what old book I read of a Confucian moralist — a celebrity, of course — who thundered against Buddhism all his life, yet gave his son the name Monk. One day he was asked the reason. "This is just to show my contempt," he replied. His interrogator was silenced and withdrew.

In fact, this moralist was prevaricating; for he named his son Monk for superstitious reasons. China abounds in monsters and ghosts who like to murder people of promise, especially children, while the second-rate they pass over quite placidly. As for people like monks, from the monks' point of view since they may become bodhisattvas—though not in every case—they certainly rank very high, but from the literati's point of view, since monks have no homes and cannot become officials they should rank as second-rate. The monsters and ghosts conceived by the literati naturally hold the same views as the literati; hence they do not trouble monks. The idea is the same as calling children by such names as Pussy or Puppy: it helps to keep them alive.

Another way of warding off ghosts is to take a monk as teacher, which means that a child is dedicated to a monastery, although not sent to live there. I was the first boy in the Zhou family, and since "what is rare is prized" my father feared that I might show promise and die young, therefore before I was one year old I was carried to Changqing Monastery and a monk was chosen as my master. Whether presents were given to the master or contributions made to the monastery I do not know

at all. All I know is that this is how I received my Buddhist name Changgeng, which I later used occasionally as a pen-name, and in that short story "In the Tavern" gave to the ne'er-do-well who bullied his niece. There was also a priestly garment, the "coat of many patches," which should have been sewn out of all sorts of rag. Mine, however, was made of olive-shaped pieces of different coloured silk, and I could wear it only on special occasions. There was something else called a "halter," on which were suspended various little objects like a calendar, a mirror, a silver sieve and so forth. This was supposed to have power to ward off evil.

Indeed, these precautions appear to have had some effect. so far I have not died.

But though I still have my Buddhist name, my coat and halter have long since disappeared. A few years ago when I went back to Beijing, my mother gave me the silver sieve, the only memento left of my childhood days. When I looked at it carefully, the sieve was little more than an inch across; in the middle was a *yin* and *yang* design,* on top there was a book, below a scroll, and appended to the two sides were a tiny ruler, scissors, abacus and balance. The truth suddenly dawned on me. evil spirits in China fear precise and clear-cut things which admit of no ambiguity. Out of curiosity last year I asked at a silversmith's in Shanghai and bought two of these talismans. They were almost identical with the one I had, only the number of small appendages varied. It is very odd indeed that, though more than half a century has passed, the nature of evil spirits still has not changed, and the same talismans are used against them today. I realize, however, that grown-up people cannot use these clear-cut things. In fact, to do so would be dangerous.

* A design symbolizing the universe. *Yin* represents the female or negative element, and *yang* the male or positive element in nature

But all this reminds me of my first teacher half a century ago. Even today I do not know his Buddhist name, but one and all addressed him as Master Long. A tall, thin man with a thin, long face, he had high cheekbones and almond-shaped eyes. A monk should not grow a moustache, yet he had a small moustache which drooped at each end. He was pleasant to everyone including me, for he did not make me chant a single sutra nor did he teach me any Buddhist precepts. As for him, when he wore the chief monk's mantle or put on the vairochana headdress* to chant "Let all lonely spirits who have no sacrifice come to receive sweet dew," he was thoroughly dignified. Usually, though, he did not chant sutras, for he was the abbot in charge of all administrative matters in the monastery. In point of fact—of course this was merely my view—he was simply one of the laity with a shaven head.

This being the case, my teacher had a wife. As a rule, monks should not have wives, but my teacher had one. In the middle of the hall at home we had a tablet inscribed in gilt letters with the five dignitaries to whom we owe absolute respect and obedience: "Heaven, Earth, the Sovereign, the Parents, and the Teacher." As I was the disciple and he the teacher, I was not in a position to censure him. Indeed, at that time I did not dream of censuring him; I simply thought his conduct a little odd. Still I was very fond of my teacher's wife. As far as I can remember, she must have been about forty when first I saw her, a portly matron in black gauze jacket and trousers enjoying the cool breeze in her courtyard, whose children came to play with me; and sometimes there were fruit and cakes to eat — of course that was one of my chief reasons for liking her. In the words of that eminent professor, Chen Yuan,** it was a case of "she

* Vairochana is the name of an arhat. This type of headdress is worn during sacrifice to spirits.

** Also called Chen Xiying, a bourgeois scholar.

who feeds me is my mother." Such an attitude is most despicable.

But my teacher's wife had a rather unusual romance. "Romance" is the modern expression; in those days in our out-of-the-way part of the world we called it "pairing off" Since this expression appears in the *Book of Songs*, its origin is most ancient, dating from not long after the days of King Wen, King Wu and the Duke of Zhou* Later, it seems to have lost some of its pristine dignity, but that need not concern us. At all events, it seems that when Master Long was young he was a most handsome and competent monk, who was very well connected and knew all sorts of people. One day a religious drama was performed in the village, and since he knew the actors he went up to the stage to play the gong for them. With his well-shaved head and brand-new robe, he must have looked magnificent. But country folk are, generally speaking, rather conservative. Since they considered the function of monks was simply to chant sutras and perform masses, some of the audience started swearing, and my teacher, who would not accept an insult in silence, began swearing back at them. Then a battle began, a hail of sugar-cane stumps assailed the stage, some brave fellows made as if to launch an attack, and as he was one against many he had to withdraw. But as he retreated the others were bound to pursue; thus he had to take refuge hastily in a house. And that house was occupied by a young widow. I am not quite clear as to what happened after; but later, at any rate, she became my teacher's wife.

Though the magazine *Wind of the Universe* has been published for some time, I had no opportunity of reading it till a few days ago when I saw the Special Spring Number. In this there is an essay by Mr. Zhutang entitled "Heroes cannot be judged by their success or failure,"

* That is, the eleventh century B.C.

which I found most interesting. The writer believes that the Chinese refusal to judge heroes by their failure or success "undoubtedly shows a lofty idealism . . . yet in human society this is very harmful. . . . If we support the weak and resist the strong, it means we never want to have any strong men; while the worship of the defeated is a refusal to recognize successful heroes. . . . Recently it has often been said that the Chinese are adepts at assimilating others, hence the Liao, Jin, Yuan and Qing dynasties never really conquered China; but actually this is simply a type of inertia and reluctance to accept new institutions."

I shall not discuss here the way to reform this inertia, for plenty of people are finding solutions for us. I wish merely to affirm that the reason the young widow became my master's wife is because she too was guilty of refusing to judge heroes by their success or failure. Since the countryside had no living heroes like Yue Fei or Wen Tianxiang,* when a handsome monk fled from the stage under a hail of sugar-cane stumps, he was a bona fide defeated hero. Then, discovering in herself the traditional inertia, she began to admire him. She felt towards his pursuers as our ancestors felt towards the mighty forces of the Liao, Jin, Yuan and Qing dynasties, and would not recognize successful heroes. The result in history, as Mr. Zhutang has pointed out, was that "without a display of might the Chinese would not submit." Hence the "ten days' terror at Yangzhou" and the "three massacres at Jiading"** simply served them right. It seems, however, the country folk this time scattered without any display of might. Of course, they may not have known he was hiding in her house.

So it came to pass that I had three elder brothers in religion and two younger. Brother Number One was a

* Patriotic generals of the Song Dynasty.

** These were bloody massacres of the people by the Qing army in 1645.

poor man's son who had either been given or sold to the monastery. The other four were all my master's sons, and it did not strike me as strange at the time that a big monk should beget small monks. Brother Number One was a bachelor, but Number Two had a wife and children of his own, though he tried to keep this from me, from which we can see that his religious attainments were far below those of his father, my teacher. In any case, these brothers were so much older than I that we practically never mixed

Third Brother was probably my senior by some ten years, yet we became the best of friends and I often felt concerned for him. I remember the time when he took the priestly vows. As he did not read many sutras, I feared he could not have a profound understanding of the Mahayana doctrine, and when two rows of moxa punk were placed on his freshly shaven forehead and he was cauterized I was sure he would shout with pain. Since there would be many pious believers at the ceremony, this would look extremely bad, and I as his younger brother in religion would also lose face. That simply would not do! The thought of this preyed on my mind as much as if I were taking the vows myself. But my master after all proved the profundity of his religious attainment. He summoned Third Brother that same morning and, instead of lecturing him on discipline or doctrine, he simply said to him sternly:

"You must stick it out at all costs, and be sure not to cry or call out. If you do, your head will burst open and you will die!"

This fearful warning was in truth more effective than the Saddharmapundarika Sutra or the Mahayana Sraddhotpada Sastra, for who wants to die? The ceremony was solemnly carried out. Though his eyes were moister than usual, it was a fact that not a sound did Third Brother utter all the time the two rows of moxa punk were burning on his head. This tremendous load lifted from my mind,

I gave a sigh of relief, while those pious believers put their palms together in admiration, praising Buddha and joyfully making their donations before they prostrated themselves and left.

When a man in holy orders takes priestly vows and is promoted from acolyte to monk, it is like our laymen's ceremony of coming of age, when a boy becomes a man. A man likes to "take a wife," and a monk cannot help but think of women too. A common fallacy among those who have never had a Buddhist teacher or made friends with monks is to imagine that monks think only of Sakyamuni or Maitreya. The monasteries certainly contain monks who practise religion, do without women and eat no meat, my Number One Brother being a case in point. But monks like this are queer, cold misanthropists, who always look unhappy and are angry if you touch their fans or books, so people dare not approach them. Thus all my monkish friends either had women or declared they wanted them, either ate meat or declared they wanted to eat it.

I was not surprised then that Third Brother longed for a woman, and I knew what sort of woman was his ideal. You may think he was longing for some nun, but such was not the case. It is doubly difficult for a monk to pair off with a nun. Nō, he was longing for the daughter or young wife in a wealthy family; and the go-between in this love affair, or one-sided love affair, was a "knot." When rich folk in our district had a funeral they held a mass every seven days, and on one of these days the ceremony of "undoing the knots" was performed. For since the deceased must have made enemies during his lifetime and some of their enmity towards him must remain, after his death all knots of enmity had to be untied. This was done in the following manner: After the chanting of sutras and the performance of rituals that evening, before the shrine they set plates of food and

flowers, as well as one plate of knots. These were made of hemp or white string threaded with a dozen coppers then fastened together in the shape of butterflies, geometric designs or other intricate forms very hard to untie. The monks sat round a table chanting sutras as they undid these knots, and when the knots were undone, the coppers found their way into the pockets of the monks while all the dead man's knots of enmity were untied. It seems an odd idea, but that was the general custom and no one thought it strange. I suppose that was a kind of inertia too.

But not all these knots were untied as a layman might expect. If a monk thought some were specially well made, he might fall in love with them; or if some were fastened so tight they were difficult to untie, he might take a dislike to them. In either case, the whole thing might be slipped into the monk's big sleeves, leaving the unhappy deceased with his knots of enmity still tied to suffer in hell. When the monks brought such treasures back to the monastery, they kept them and fondled them from time to time, just as some of us take a special interest in the work of women writers. As they enjoyed the handiwork it was natural they should think of the maker. Who could have tied this knot? A man could not have done it, nor a servant; only the daughter of the house or the young wife would be so skilful. Since monks are not as sublime as men of letters, when they looked at the object they could not help thinking of its maker and indulging in certain vain and frivolous thoughts. But though a monk was my teacher I am still a layman myself; hence I cannot fully understand their psychology.

I merely remember that, as a result of considerable pressure, Third Brother gave me a few of these knots. Some of them were really most intricately fashioned, while others after being tied had been soaked in water and beaten hard with scissor handles or the like, so that

no monk could possibly undo them. To undo these knots was to help the deceased, but here things were made hard for the monks. I really could not understand what was in the minds of those daughters and young wives. Not till twenty years afterwards, when I had studied a little medicine, did I realize that they derived some kind of sadistic satisfaction from this cruelty to monks. That the frustration of women confined to the inner chambers should be transmitted as if by radio to monks is something, I suspect, which our Confucian moralists never foresaw.

Later Third Brother also took a wife. Whether she was daughter of a wealthy family, nun or maid "of low degree" I do not know, for he kept this a secret too, his religious attainments falling far short of his father's. By that time I was growing up myself and had picked up somewhere such ancient sayings as. "A monk should observe the rules of the monastery" I quoted these to tease him. To my surprise, he was not in the least embarrassed, but glared at me like a Buddhist guardian angel.

"If a monk has no wife," he roared, "whence come the small bodhisattvas?"

This is known in Buddhist lore as "the roar of the lion." It made me see the truth and silenced me. Of course I had seen great Buddhas over ten feet high in the monasteries, as well as small bodhisattvas a few feet or few inches high; but I had never wondered at this discrepancy in size. After this roar I thoroughly understood the need for monks to have wives, and no longer entertained doubts as to the origin of those small bodhisattvas. But after that it became rather difficult to find Third Brother, for this holy man now had three homes: the monastery, the house of his parents, and the house where he kept his wife.

My master died about forty years ago. Most of my brothers in religion have become abbots, and though

still friends we have long been out of touch. However, I am sure they must have produced a great many small bodhisattvas, some of whom must have also produced small bodhisattvas of their own

April 1, 1936

THE HANGING WOMAN

I believe it was Wang Siren at the end of the Ming Dynasty who said, "Kuaiji* is the home of revenge, not a place that tolerates filth." This reflects great credit on us Shaoxing people, and it gives me great pleasure to hear or quote these words. It is not strictly true, however, for really any description can be applied to our district.

It is a fact, none the less, that the average citizen of Shaoxing does not hate revenge as much as those "progressive" writers in Shanghai. Just look at our art, for example. In our opera we have created an avenging spirit, lovelier and stronger than all other ghosts. This is the Hanging Woman. To my mind Shaoxing can boast two unique ghosts. One is Wu Chang, so helpless yet careless in the face of death, whom I had the honour of introducing to my fellow-countrymen in *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*.** Today I will speak of the other.

The Hanging Woman may be a local name, which would have to be expressed in standard speech as "the ghost of a woman who died by hanging." The truth is, when we talk of ghosts who died by hanging we naturally assume they are females, for there have always been more women than men who met their death in this way. There is a spider which suspends itself in mid air from one thread which is called the Hanging Woman in *Er Ya*.*** This shows that as early as the Zhou or Han Dynasty

* The ancient name for Shaoxing.

** See pp 380-388 above

*** A lexicon compiled about the second century B.C.

most of those who hanged themselves belonged to the feminine sex, hence the spider was not called the Hanging Man nor given a neuter gender and called the Hanging Creature. But during the performance of a Great Drama or Maudgalyayana Drama¹ you hear the name Hanging Woman from the audience, as well as the name Hanging Goddess. I know of no other case in which a ghost who died an unnatural death has been deified; and this shows how much the people love and respect her. Why do they call her the Hanging Woman then? The reason for this is simple: in the opera there is also a Hanging Man.

The Shaoxing I knew was the Shaoxing of forty years ago. Since there were no high officials there at that time, there were no private performances in the houses of the great. All performances were a kind of religious drama. The gods in their shrines were the guests of honour, while we mortals owed them thanks for this opportunity to watch. For the Great Drama or Maudgalyayana Drama, a yet more comprehensive audience was invited. That the gods came goes without saying; but ghosts were invited too, especially those avenging spirits who had died unnatural deaths. This made the occasion more exciting and solemn. I think it very interesting that the presence of these avenging spirits should make the occasion more exciting and solemn.

I may have mentioned elsewhere that though the Great Drama and the Maudgalyayana Drama were both performed for gods, mortals and spirits, they were none the less very different. One difference lay in the actors: in the former they were professionals, in the latter amateurs—peasants and workers assembled for the occasion. Another difference lay in the repertoire, the former consisting of many operas, the latter of just the one *Maudgalyayana Rescues His Mother*. Both types, however, opened with the same "Summoning of the Spirits,"

* See footnote on p. 156 above

ghosts put in an appearance from time to time, and in the end the good men went to heaven and the evil-doers to hell.

Before the performance started you could see this was no ordinary religious opera, for on both sides of the stage hung paper hats for the gods and ghosts to wear. So when an old stager had leisurely had his supper, drunk his tea, and strolled across to watch, he need only look at the hats left hanging there to know which gods or ghosts had already appeared. Since these operas started rather early, the "Summoning of the Spirits" would be played at sunset; hence by the time supper was over the performance would be fairly well advanced; but the beginning was by no means the best. Actually, the only spirits summoned were those who had died unnatural deaths. Of course this included all those fallen in battle, as we see from the ode by Qu Yuan:*

*Their spirits deathless, though their bodies slain,
Proudly as kings among the ghosts shall reign.*

When the Ming Dynasty fell, many Shaoxing people revolted against the invaders and were killed, and they were called rebels in the Qing Dynasty. Their gallant spirits too were summoned on this occasion. In the gloaming, some dozen horses stood at the foot of the stage while an actor masqueraded as the ghostly king with a blue face painted with lines resembling scales, and a steel prong in his hand. There were also about a dozen ghostly soldiers, and for these parts ordinary boys could volunteer. In my teens I served as such a volunteer ghost. We scrambled up the stage to offer our services; then they smeared some colours on our faces and handed each of us a steel prong. When we numbered about a dozen, we rushed to the horses and galloped to the many deserted graves in the open country. There we described

* An ancient poet, believed to have lived from 340 to 278 B.C.

three circles, alighted and cried aloud, then lunged at the grave mounds again and again with our prongs. This done we seized the prongs and galloped back, mounted the stage, gave a great shout together, and hurled the prongs to stand transfixed in the floor. Our work now at an end, we washed our faces, left the stage and were free to go home. Of course, if we were found out by our parents we could hardly escape a beating with the split bamboo (the most common implement in Shaoxing for beating children), to punish us for mixing with ghosts and to vent the parental relief that we had not fallen off the horses and killed ourselves. Luckily I was never found out. I may have been protected by evil spirits.

This ceremony signified that the manifold lonely ghosts and avenging spirits had now come with the ghostly king and his ghostly soldiers to watch the performance with the rest of us. There was no need to worry, though. These ghosts were on their best behaviour, and would not make the least trouble all this night. So the opera started and slowly unfolded, the human beings interspersed with apparitions: the ghost of one who died by fire, one who was drowned, one who expired in an examination cell, one eaten by a tiger. . . . Boys could have these parts too if they wanted, but few boys cared to play these insignificant ghosts, nor was the audience much impressed by them. When the time came for the Hanging Ghost Dance, however, the atmosphere grew much more tense. As the trumpet wailed on the stage, a noose of cloth about two-fifths the height of the stage was let down from the central beam. The spectators held their breath, and out rushed a man with a painted face wearing nothing but short pants. This was the Hanging Man. He dashed to the pendent cloth and, like a spider clinging to its thread or weaving its web, swung himself to and fro, worming in and out of the noose. He used the cloth to suspend himself by various parts of his body: the waist, the sides, the thighs, the elbows, the knees, the nape of the

neck . . . in forty-nine (seven times seven) different places. Last of all he came to the neck. But he did not actually fasten his neck in the noose; instead he gripped the cloth with both hands and stretched his neck through it, then jumped down and made off. This dance was most difficult, and the Hanging Man's was the only part in the Maudgalyayana Drama for which a professional had to be engaged.

The old folk told me then this dance was extremely dangerous, for it might cause the genuine Hanging Man to appear. So behind the scenes there had to be someone dressed as Wang the Controller of Ghosts, who held up one hand in a magic sign, grasped a mace in the other, and fixed his eyes on a mirror reflecting the stage. If he saw two Hanging Men in the mirror, one must be the real ghost. In that case, he had to leap out at once and beat the false one with his mace so that he fell off the stage. As soon as the false one fell off the stage he had to run to the river and wash the paint off his face, then squeeze his way into the crowd to watch the performance before going slowly home. If beaten down too slowly, he would hang to death on the stage. If he washed off his paint too slowly, the real ghost would recognize him and follow him. This squeezing into the crowd and watching his own people playing on the stage is like the case of a high official who resigns and must embrace Buddhism or go abroad to study foreign conditions — a ceremony of transition which cannot be dispensed with.

After this came the Hanging Woman Dance. Of course this too was preceded by mournful trumpeting. The next moment, the curtain was raised and she emerged. She wore a red jacket and a long black sleeveless coat, her long hair was in disorder, two strings of paper coins hung from her neck, and with lowered head and drooping hands she wound her way across the stage. According to the old stagers, she was tracing out the heart sign; but why she should do this I do not know. I do know, though,

why she wore red. From Wang Chong's *Lun Heng** I learned that the ghosts of the Han Dynasty were red. In later pictures or descriptions, however, ghosts do not seem to have any definite colour, while in drama the only one to wear red is this Hanging Goddess. This is easy to understand. When she hanged herself she intended to become an avenging spirit, and red, as one of the more vital colours, would make it easier for her to approach living creatures. . . . Even today, some of the women of Shaoxing powder their faces and change into red gowns before hanging themselves. Of course, suicide is an act of cowardice, and to speak of avenging spirits is unscientific; but these are all foolish women who cannot even read or write, so I hope our "progressive" writers and "fighting" heroes will not be too angry with them. I fear you may make utter fools of yourselves.

Only when she shook back her dishevelled hair could people see her face clearly: a round, chalk-white face, thick, pitch-black eyebrows, dark eyelids, crimson lips. I have heard that in the opera of some prefectures in eastern Zhejiang the Hanging Goddess also has a false tongue several inches long lolling out; but we do not have this in Shaoxing. It is not that I want to favour my own district, but I do think it is better without the tongue. And compared with the present fashion of slightly darkening the eyelids, we can say her make-up is more thoroughgoing and charming. Only her lower lip should curve slightly upwards to form a triangular mouth, and this is not bad-looking either. If in the dim light after midnight a woman with a powdered face and red lips like this appeared faintly in the distance, old as I am I might still run over to look at her; though I doubt if I would be tempted to hang myself. She shrugged her shoulders slightly, looked around and listened as if

* A collection of essays written during the first century A.D.

startled, happy or angry. At last in mournful tones she began singing slowly:

*I was a daughter of the Yang family,
Ah me, unhappy me! . . .*

What followed I do not know. Even these lines I have just learned from Keshi* At any rate, the drift of her song was that she had become a child-bride and been so cruelly treated that she was forced to hang herself. As her song ended there was the sound of distant wailing from another woman who was weeping bitterly over her wrongs and preparing to kill herself. The Hanging Woman was overjoyed to hear this, and wanted to make this woman take her place. Just then, however, out jumped the Hanging Man and declared the new ghost must take *his* place instead. From words they fell to blows, and naturally the weaker sex was outmatched; but luckily at this juncture Wang the Controller of Ghosts appeared on the scene. Though not a handsome man, he was a fervent supporter of the feminine cause; so with one blow of his mace he killed the Hanging Man, setting the Hanging Woman free to go about her business.

The old folk told me that in ancient times the same number of men hanged themselves as women; but after the Controller of Ghosts killed the Hanging Man, few men committed suicide in this way. Again, in ancient times there were forty-nine (seven times seven) different places on the body by which you could hang yourself; it was only after the Controller of Ghosts killed the Hanging Man that the neck became the single fatal spot. Chinese ghosts are peculiar this way: after becoming ghosts they can die again. In our district we call this sort the ghosts of ghosts. But if the ghostly Hanging Man was already killed, why need we fear his appearing during the dance?

* Zhou Jianren, Lu Xun's younger brother.

I cannot understand the logic of this, and when I asked the old folk they could give no satisfactory explanation either.

I must say Chinese ghosts have one bad habit, that is this practice of finding substitutes. This is pure selfishness. If not for this, we could mix with them quite at our ease. This being the custom, however, even the Hanging Woman is no exception, and sometimes in her search for a successor she forgets to take revenge. In Shaoxing we cook rice in iron pans over firewood or straw. When the soot beneath the pan becomes too thick, the heat will not penetrate; thus we often find the soot scraped off on the ground. It always lies scattered, though, for no country woman will take the easy way of setting the pan upside-down on the ground and scraping the soot off round it to form a black circle. This is because the Hanging Goddess makes her noose to lure folk to death out of just such soot. To scatter the soot is some sort of passive resistance, aimed merely at preventing her finding a substitute, not for any fear of her taking revenge. Even if the oppressed are not bent on taking revenge, at least they do not fear lest others take revenge on them. Only those assassins and their stooges who secretly suck men's blood and devour their flesh will give such advice as "Do not take revenge," or "Forgive past injuries." This year I have seen more clearly into the secret thoughts of these creatures with human faces.

September 19 and 20, 1936