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THE PLAINS ARE ABLAZE

Hsu Kuang-yao

When the Japanese started their big "Mop Up" in North China on May First 1942, I was with a county guerilla battalion operating south of the Shihchiachuang-Tehchow highway in central Hopei Province near the city of Ningchin. We were having a pretty tough time then. The enemy had set up a network of bases and roads. Whenever they reinforced any of these bases it immediately constituted a direct threat to your personal safety. The fighting never let up. There was sure to be a clash every couple of days. Sometimes you had two or three in one day. And you were constantly being surrounded. The moment a battle started, all of us, from the battalion commander to the cooks, had to join in the fighting. I was only eighteen at the time. Everything I saw, every person, his every move—all made a very deep impression on me.

In 1947 I was temporarily relieved of my duties in the People's Liberation Army and given a chance of studying literature at the North China University for eight months. There, I began to find out a few things about literature and to get an inkling of what was meant by "creative writing." I felt a strong urge to record the heroic deeds of the people by whose side I had fought. Thinking back, scenes and incidents again came alive to me, and I jotted them down in a notebook.

Of course I didn't make use of all this material. Some of it remained there; other material I could visualize in a more vivid and expanded form. Gradually several characters began to take shape. What was only an outline of a person became a complete whole. The characters now excited me tremendously. I decided to portray them in a novel.

By fortunate coincidence, after I left the university I was sent to work in the rear where it was peaceful and we spent our time drilling. Able to stay put at last for a fairly long period, I took up my pen and wrote The Plains Are Ablaze. *That I was able to finish writing this novel was due to the education and training given me by the Communist Party and to the inspiration given me by my comrades in battle. They gave the flower of their youth, performing countless gallant deeds. I am deeply conscious that many of the pages of* The Plains Are Ablaze *are written with their blood.*

—Abridged from the author's notes on *The Plains Are Ablaze*, which, for reasons of space, is presented here with a number of chapters omitted.

I

In July, the main drive of the Japanese "Mop Up" rolled south of the highway that cuts across the waist of Hopei Province from the city of Tsanghsien in the east to Shihchiachuang in the west. Fortified posts, big and small, were filled with Japanese troops. All the resistance bases in the counties of the Sixth Region were locked in hoops of iron.

The Ningchin County guerilla battalion was caught in the encirclement one cloudy misty morning. The men discovered that Japanese soldiers were moving up across the wide Hopei plain, slowly closing in on the village where the guerillas had spent the night. Rifle fire came first from the east, then bullets also began flying from the north and the south. Far off to the west, more Japanese could be seen advancing, shooting as they came. The guerillas were in a bad spot. If they stayed and fought, they'd all be killed. Their only hope was to break through.

Chou Tieh-han, leader of Company One, received the order of the battalion commander—before the enemy closes the circle tight, make a dash to get out! A sturdy youth of twenty-five, Tieh-han was ruddy-faced, with broad shoulders and a thick waist. Though not very tall, he looked large and powerful. He pressed a fresh clip into his pistol, snapped off the safety, and turned toward his men standing beside a wall.

"Comrades!" he shouted stridently. "Today is the day to show if you've got any guts! This is the time that decides whether it's shame or glory!"

Ting Hu-tse, his bare torso sunburnt to the shade of a black pagoda, stepped forward. He was also a Communist.

"Let me take the lead!"

Tieh-han pointed his pistol toward the northwest.

"Right! Get going! Second Platoon follow the First!" (There were only two platoons in a guerilla company.)

The guerillas sped west out of the village like an arrow and entered a sunken road. Behind Tieh-han's Company One came the battalion headquarter's command, with Company Two covering the rear—altogether 140 men. Except for the rhythmic panting of the trotting guerillas and the distant sound of rifle fire, all was silent. Tieh-han had been through dozens of battles. He knew well the meaning of this ominous lull. Today there would be a fight to the finish. And they didn't have a chance in the world of tricking the enemy and breaking out of the encirclement!

Things had been very tense the last few days. Too much had happened in a hurry. Yesterday alone twenty-eight trucks filled with Japanese soldiers from Chaohsien County came rolling into the city of Ningchin, not counting the reinforcements that had arrived before. The Japanese in Yakouchai now numbered nearly seven hundred. It was even worse in Shulu and Chinhsien Counties. There the enemy built five or six new fortified posts every day. Japanese vehicles and cavalry, travelling back

and forth, were on all the roads. Tieh-han had felt for a long time that a nasty battle was looming up. Today, from all appearances, this was going to be it!

And for that very reason, Tieh-han suddenly became calm. He made up his mind to fight.

He looked over the column of guerillas. Squad Two was in the lead, headed by Hu-tse carrying a big-nosed Czech rifle. The men followed close behind, most of them veterans of two years' experience. All had fought in dozens of battles. To Tieh-han's own rear were Squads One and Three and the Second Platoon, every man of them a bold, young stalwart. Though things were very tight, not one showed any sign of wavering. Just looking at them increased Tieh-han's confidence. A bunch of steel warriors like these—and nearly half of them Communists besides!

The battalion commander's plan was to shake off the enemy—closing in on the guerillas from the north, east and south—and steal along the sunken road toward the northwest. The other Japanese advancing from the west had not yet discovered them. The commander wanted to get as close as possible to the latter enemy without being seen. Then make a quick dash through their lines. But in the first place the Japanese were too many. Secondly, for about fifty yards the road rose to the level of the surrounding plain, and the running guerillas were spotted. At once, the enemy fanned out. A group on the left flank rushed toward a point on the sunken road further ahead, intending to cut the guerillas off there.

Tieh-han saw that it was too late to out-run the Japanese. He shouted an order to the First Platoon.

"Charge through! Don't let the enemy stop you. You must get through!" He stood to one side of the gully and waited for the battalion commander.

Chien Wan-li, leader of the battalion, was short in stature. He trotted up with calm, even steps, intermittently mopping the perspiration glistening on his shaven pate with a coarse cloth kerchief. His revolver was still in its holster. From his tranquil manner, you could never tell there was a battle going on. Close behind him, hugging a carbine to his chest, was Chin Shan, Chien's orderly.

"Commander, the enemy's going to cut off our road. Let's push through them with the whole battalion!" Tieh-han's both fists thrust forward in accompaniment to his plea.

"Where are your men? What's happening ahead?" Chien asked evenly. He stood with his legs apart.

"The First Platoon has moved up. I told them to fight their way through!"

"Very good."

Tieh-han took this for consent, wheeled and started to run off. Chien called to him.

"Wait a moment." Shading his eyes with his hand, Chien carefully

examined the enemy-held terrain. He took so long Tieh-han nearly burst with impatience. At last, Chien lowered his hand. He shook his head slightly.

"It won't do. We can't push through. . . ."

"We have to!" Tieh-han interrupted. "We can't just stay here and let them wipe us out!"

Chien's deep-set eyes were thoughtful. He pointed a finger at Tieh-han's chest.

"We'll do it this way. Your First Platoon can keep advancing down the sunken road. At that line of willows, climb out and occupy those two cemetery plots. Let your platoon pull the main enemy force over to the road. That will make an opening in the southwest, and the rest of the battalion will charge through there."

Chien watched Tieh-han's face. The latter stood without a change of expression. The battalion commander continued.

"This is a very dangerous task. Your job is first to pin down the enemy and cover the battalion as it breaks out of the encirclement. Then you have to shake free of the enemy and bring your men out with you!"

"Right!" Tieh-han replied. He turned and ran forward after his men.

By then the enemy in the west had opened fire. Bullets were flying overhead. The Japanese on the other three sides had formed a semi-circle and were closing in. Behind Company Two, which was bringing up the rear, enemy rifles were firing in volleys of ever shorter intervals. At times they popped wildly, like a pan of roasting beans.

From the head of the guerilla column came an ear-splitting chorus of "Charge!" Chien could see Tieh-han, waving his tightly-clasped pistol like a flag, leap out of the sunken road. Tieh-han swung his arm forward again and again, and his men rushed past him. A moment later, they had taken the two cemetery plots near the line of willows.

About seventy per cent of the enemy on the west had been drawn to the gully road now. They were putting everything into trying to cut it off. An opening appeared in the southwestern part of their line. Commander Chien saw that the moment had come. He swung his both hands in signal, clambered out of the road with the three remaining platoons, and dashed at full speed through the break in the enemy line.

II

As expected, the platoon that had kept the enemy busy was itself pinned down when it tried to withdraw. When the Japanese at the line of willows realized that most of the guerilla battalion had escaped, they waved their red-ball flag furiously. Nearly sixty of them rushed toward the cemetery plots, yelling. The platoon was forced to concentrate itself

behind the grave mounds in one of the cemeteries. A storm of machine-gun and mortar fire came raining down so heavily that the men of the platoon couldn't even raise their heads to fire back. Half of Squad One had been put out of action in the first Japanese charge. It looked as though there was "No way out!"—the worst phrase in a soldier's vocabulary.

The second enemy charge would be coming any minute. Tieh-han lay hugging the ground, his bushy eyebrows knit in a straight line, his eyes flashing fire. He thought hard. To pull out now would be no good. The enemy would be sure to scatter the guerillas and run them down. Before they could withdraw, they would have to smash back the enemy's next charge, knock the wind out of the Japanese's sails! He told the men to get all their hand grenades ready. They were to hook their fingers through the firing pin loops and throw together when he gave the order! He himself gripped the strings of his three remaining grenades in his teeth.

Almost immediately, there was a stir among the willows and a pack of yellow-uniformed Japanese came pounding out, their bayonets flashing in the sunlight. The Japanese were launching their second charge. When they were less than forty yards away, Tieh-han leaped to his feet, yanked the string with his teeth. His right arm whirled, and a grenade trailing white smoke sailed through the air.

"Throw your grenades!" he roared.

A flock of "black crows" took flight. There was a burst of flame, and thick smoke mushroomed up to cover the sky. This was something the Japanese hadn't expected. The seven or eight in the lead were flung sprawling to the ground. Those in the rear turned tail and fled back to the willows. Taking advantage of the confusion, the men of the First Platoon swept around like a whirlwind, and streaked south.

They hadn't run more than about eighty yards when the Japanese machine-guns opened up behind them with a vengeance. Ahead was only a flat open field with a young crop less than a foot high, its leaves already withered by the long dry spell. There was no shelter in sight. Chang Tse-chin, leader of Squad Two, was mowed down by the chattering machine-gun, his leg fractured. Another man was just bending over to pick him up, when he too was felled—shot dead. Hu-tse rushed to get the man's rifle. Slinging it around his neck, he reached out his hand to lift Chang. The squad leader warded him off.

"I'm finished. You better get going!"

"Nothing doing. We're not leaving anybody behind."

Chang twisted around to clamp his hands on the bleeding leg. He clenched his teeth.

"Get going! I can't live through this day anyhow. Dragging me along will only slow the rest of you down for nothing!"

"Even if it kills me, I'm not going to leave you behind!"

Hu-tse gripped Chang under the arms. Chang could already see the bobbing helmets of the pursuing Japanese. A few more paces and they'd be here. Steeling his heart, Chang wrenched himself free.

"Hu-tse," he commanded, "leave me!"

The startled Hu-tse saw him rip open the cover of a grenade with his teeth and hook the firing pin string with his finger. Chang pointed at the rifle lying beside him.

"A weapon of the revolution—take it, quick! If you touch me again, beware of this hand grenade!"

With tears in his eyes, Hu-tse put the rifle under his arm and trotted away. He kept turning his head to look back. He could see Chang from afar, placid as water, sitting motionless, the grenade concealed in his clothing.

Hu-tse saw a Japanese run up and point his bayonet at Chang's chest. Chang didn't stir. Then a second and a third surrounded the wounded squad leader. As they reached to seize him, black smoke spurted from inside his shirt and a steel helmet spiralled into the sky. When the smoke cleared, there were four bodies lying on the ground. . . .

III

The little village ahead had apparently been taken by the guerilla battalion. Rifles were popping and snapping like a string of firecrackers. Several guerillas came tearing out of the village.

"Can they have run into an ambush?" Tieh-han quickened his steps to head off and question the man in the lead of the fleeing guerillas. The closer he got to him, the angrier Tieh-han became. The wretch was holding his rifle in his left hand with its muzzle dragging in the dust, while with his right he was ripping off his equipment and throwing it away. His ration bag and knapsack were already gone. Now he was getting rid of his hand grenades.

"What unit are you from? Son of a bitch! Halt!"

Startled, the man stopped running. He stood dazed. His face the colour of white wax, he stared at Tieh-han with dead eyes, his legs shaking like a chaff sifter. Finally, he managed to mumble:

"Company Two."

"Why you running?"

The man pointed at the village. "The place is full of Japanese."

"Japanese! Why didn't you fight?"

The man stood open-mouthed, panting. He didn't know what to say.

"Go back! Deserting during a battle. . . . I ought to shoot you!"

Tieh-han seldom looked so grim. The man dared not disobey. He turned hopelessly and left.

Tieh-han asked him his name. He said he was Yin Tseng-lu. Tieh-

han inquired about the exact position of the battalion, then, with his platoon, followed after Yin toward the village.

The dozen men who had fled with Yin had stopped to watch this scene. They stood along both sides of the road, undecided. Tieh-han motioned them with his head to come along.

"There are enemy troops back there too. Let's push forward, boys!"

A young fellow stepped out and raised a clenched fist.

"Second Company men, let's march in formation, the brave to the front! Tieh-han and his men are made of flesh and blood too, and they're not afraid. What have we got to be scared about?"

"Good," Tieh-han said to himself. He felt his anger dying away. He recognized the young fellow—Chao Fu-lai, assistant leader of Squad Five, a new member of the Communist Party.

"Fu-lai," Tieh-han said in a softer voice, "I put these men in your charge. Follow behind us. Don't run off again whatever happens."

Fu-lai snapped to attention. His voice was firm and confident.

"Right!"

Yin, in the lead, every few steps sneaked a furtive glance behind him. Seeing Tieh-han glaring at him with tiger eyes, he would hastily trot a few paces. Then, he would unconsciously slow down, sneak another look, again run a few steps . . . until, with Tieh-han's eyes still burning him, he led the men into the village.

Rifle fire in the village had already shifted to the southwest section. The enemy troops trailing the guerillas had been left almost a mile behind. The Japanese were in no hurry. They were sure they had the battalion firmly bagged in their net.

It was at this point that Yin committed a criminal mistake. The battalion had clashed with enemy troops near the main intersection of the village and, after driving them back, pushed toward the southwest. Yin was afraid to expose himself on the wide main street. Trying to circle around the fighting zone, he blundered and led Tieh-han and the others into a blind alley. By the time they discovered that Japanese soldiers had set up a machine-gun on a rooftop and were just waiting for them, Squads One and Three were already stuck deep inside the alley. Bullets and hand grenades rained down from above. Many guerillas dropped in pools of blood without even knowing what hit them. The narrow alley was dyed crimson. Tieh-han and a few others dashed beneath a long archway, looking for a vantage point from which they could return fire.

Yin's error had wrought havoc among the guerillas. They stared at him furiously as he stood, trembling, cringing against the wall of the archway. He was terribly conscious of the enormity of his crime. Tieh-han raised his voice in a shout.

"Comrades, the first thing is to take care of the enemy. Grenades ready! Charge!"

"Charge!" With fixed bayonets, two guerillas rushed out into the open. Yin also took up his rifle and started to follow the others. Glancing fearfully right and left, he frantically worked the bolt of his rifle. Just as he reached the exit of the deep archway, the guerilla ahead of him spun around, blood streaming from his head, and dropped dead at Yin's feet. Yin's two hands leaped up as though he had been hit by an arrow. He shrunk back into the archway. Before he could find his footing, a grenade burst with a roar beside the mouth of the archway. Yin dropped his rifle and fell prostrate.

Tieh-han thought Yin had been killed until he heard him cry, "Don't shoot, I surrender! . . ."

A ghastly white face was turned despairingly to the sky, clasped hands stretched up in entreaty. Yin crouched like a dog at the opening of the archway.

Tieh-han's body leaped as though he had been pierced through the heart. He felt ready to burst.

"You filthy treacherous bastard!"

With one stride he was beside Yin. He clutched him by the collar, dragged him into the archway and flung him to the ground. This dog whose cowardice had resulted in the bloodshed of half a dozen brave comrades now wanted to surrender to the vicious pillagers and murderers of the Chinese people! Tieh-han's lips trembled with rage, his breath choked in his throat. He pointed his pistol and fired. Yin crumpled dead on the ground.

Two guerillas threw their grenades at the machine-gun on the roof. The grenades burst loudly, the machine-gun toppled over, and two Japanese helmets came rolling to the ground.

But the guerillas knew they couldn't hold out in this place. If the enemy put a bit more pressure on them, the five survivors would be mashed to a pulp. There was no going back the way they came in. Even a fly would have difficulty doing that. Taking their cues from Tieh-han, the guerillas threw grenades and kept the enemy pinned down on the roofs, while he edged down the alley to its "dead end." He was delighted to find that the base of the wall was crumbling with age. He quickly summoned the others, then they all put their shoulders to the masonry and heaved together. There was a crash and the whole wall collapsed. The five men flew through the breach. They were soon outside the village.

West of the village in a grove of trees, they ran into the leader of the First Platoon, Sun Erh-tung. He was leading Squad Two plus Fu-lai and the handful of guerillas who had just escaped from the back of the village. There were only seven of them altogether.

Far off in the lowlands to the southwest, they could see the rest of the battalion still trying to fight their way through the enemy.

IV

The July sun was scorching hot. With Commander Chien at its head, the battalion, in ragged formation, had run four miles without a stop. The men were drenched with perspiration. It was streaming right into their shoes. They were gasping, their throats burning like fire. Not only was the enemy pursuing close behind—they could also see signs of enemy activity in one village to the northwest and in another to the east. About a mile and a half directly ahead, the tall tower of the Japanese fortress in Yakouchai reared up above the gleaming yellow of the village's adobe houses.

It was plain enough. They were getting deeper into danger with each step. Chien liked to think problems over calmly and at length. Today, for the first time, he felt that his mind operated too slowly. Heavy concentrations of enemy forces were pressing him so hard from all sides, he couldn't find an opening to break through. Suddenly he wondered—could the column of troops coming from that village to the east be the Eighth Route Army Guards Brigade for this region? Ah, if the brigade could engage the Japanese—even if only for twenty minutes—that would be wonderful! How he wished for the support of the regular army! But then Chien caught himself. That kind of conjecture had to be squelched—the quicker the better—for it was simply wishful thinking. Without question the approaching troops were enemy soldiers, coming to cut the guerillas off, to wipe them out! To go in for day-dreams at a time like this was to send the entire battalion to its grave!

The guerillas kept turning their heads, first to watch the Japanese coming closer and closer, then to observe Chien, their commander. Chien understood. The look in the men's eyes meant two things. One was, "Don't be frightened. See how calm the commander is. What have we got to be afraid of?" Yet at the same time, their eyes were questioning, "The enemy is all around us, Commander. Can you think of a way out, quickly?" Chien's heart sank a little lower.

About a mile and a half away was a line of telegraph poles stretching from northwest to southeast, like a great picket fence dividing two worlds. At the foot of the poles, a large dry moat, twelve feet deep and twelve feet wide, ran for miles. Peasants had been forced to dig it to hamper the raids of our forces into areas which had not been liberated. On the opposite side of the moat was the highway between Yakouchai and Lokou. The highway was guarded at intervals of every mile by fortified towers. The moat had been the boundary between enemy and free territory. It had marked the limit of enemy encroachment.

Looking at it, the guerillas felt a weight on their chests. Even before the "Mop Up," crossing the moat had been very difficult, even at night. But Chien had a different reaction. A little breeze of hope stirred within him. Immediately, he felt much better. He figured it this way: The

chief enemy objective in today's drive is the free territory on this side of the moat. Most of their troops, therefore, are over here. If we can only get across, we have an eighty per cent chance of breaking away. Would the Japanese garrison in Yakouchai send troops to intercept them? Chien thought that likelihood very slim. The enemy would probably have most of their men out taking part in the "Mop Up." Chien was confident that his judgment was correct. He gave his command.

"Cross the moat!"

There was an uproar on the left flank. Company Two broke ranks and began running toward the northwest, the men bumping against one another in their haste. In this confused mass, Chien spotted a fellow in a white shirt and blue trousers. His face became grave. What had started the panic?—The guerillas had gotten a good look at the Japanese coming from the village to the east. Over one hundred cavalrymen were galloping fast, their big mounts kicking up a cloud of dust. Three troops of cavalry, the horses' metal fittings flashing in the sun, swept wide past the guerillas in a flanking movement.

Chien only squinted at them. Coolly, he pointed at a few guerillas walking beside him.

"You, go bring those men back. Say that it's an order from the battalion commander!" He turned to his orderly, Chin Shan, and indicated the man in the white shirt and blue trousers.

"Tell him I'd like to speak to him for a minute."

The man in question was Liu Yi-ping, leader of Company Two. He soon trotted up, panting, to report to the battalion commander. Chien looked at him and was startled. The white shirt was streaked with dirt. Yi-ping's waist pocket was torn. The white towel kerchief which usually covered his head was tucked under his sash. But what shocked Chien most was how thin Yi-ping's pasty face had become in just one day. It was grey, without a trace of colour.

Chien halted. "What happened to your men?" he asked in a calm friendly voice.

Yi-ping was amazed that the battalion commander could speak in such an unflurried manner. Chien was sweating heavily, but he had not opened one button of his uniform jacket. He was neat as always from head to toe. Yi-ping glanced at himself and flushed red.

"They saw the cavalry coming," he said awkwardly. "They haven't had any experience with cavalry, and then ran. I was stopping them, but I haven't got them all yet."

Chien knew the last part was a lie, but seeing the blush on Yi-ping's cheeks, he didn't press the matter. He couldn't keep a severe note out of his words, however.

"Others have brought them back for you. Get them lined up and push across the moat. What's so frightening about cavalry? When they come close enough, we fire a volley at their horses' chests. Don't

run around blindly. The more you do that, the more trouble you get into."

His face still red, Yi-ping hurried off to reassemble his troops. Chien called a word of advice after his retreating back.

"First brush some of the dirt off yourself."

Tieh-han and the guerillas he was leading caught up with the battalion. He approached Chien and pointed at a brick kiln a short distance ahead.

"Why don't we make a stand there?"

The battalion commander seemed not to have heard him.

"You've come at a good time," said Chien. "Take your Second Platoon and get across the moat as fast as you can!"

V

Beneath the red-hot sun, the guerillas began their race with the mounted Japanese.

The cavalry had split into two columns, one on each flank of the battalion. The Japanese were riding hard to make a juncture ahead of the running guerillas. The guerillas reached the large mound that housed the brick kiln only a few seconds before the converging horsemen. They rushed to the top and fired two quick volleys. Four horses went down. The cavalry wheeled off, then rode for a point still farther ahead. The guerillas continued their advance toward the big moat.

A series of three explosions burst before and behind the battalion. The pursuing enemy were firing their mortars. Another three rounds. . . . Two shrapnel shells burst in the air like a driving rainstorm. Splinters of iron, hissing down like hail on the surface of a lake, splashed bubbles of dust from the ground at yard intervals. The enemy seemed to have guessed what was on Chien's mind and stepped up the chase. From behind the moving guerillas, sharpshooters' bullets sang incessantly. Several men fell.

The guerillas increased their pace. They wanted to get past the cavalry ahead, they wanted to get out of range of the mortars behind. But the shells kept flying, and men continued to go down.

In addition to the rifle he was carrying in his hands, Hu-tse had three others slung across his back. He would trot a few steps, then walk a few steps, his mouth gasping for breath. Hu-tse's face was bright red with exertion, and the veins stood out sharply on his forehead. He was practically gushing perspiration. Tieh-han took one of his rifles, urging him not to fall behind.

Chang Hsiao-san, only eighteen, was fighting a losing battle to keep up with the rest. His shoes were too big and they had become full of sand. He could barely lift them. Though he strained his legs hard,

gradually he began trailing to the rear. Behind him he could see the helmets of the pursuing Japanese. Ahead, the two columns of cavalry had closed together in a pincer. Hsiao-san's face was turning paler and paler.

Tieh-han waited for him and relieved him of his rifle. But the youngster still couldn't keep pace. His chest was heaving like a bellows. He simply couldn't run any faster. Soon he would be left far behind. In spite of himself, tears came to the boy's eyes.

Tieh-han was already carrying two rifles. Because he had to look after all his men, front and rear, he had run somewhat more than the others. Exhausted, he was panting hard. He turned and saw Hsiao-san tottering like a baby taking his first steps, making great effort to lift one leg then the other. Tieh-han felt a pang in his heart. The guerillas were like brothers to him, and Hsiao-san was the youngest of them all. Tieh-han again stopped and waited for him to catch up. Then he leaned close to the boy and spoke to him softly.

"How's it going?"

Hsiao-san raised beseeching eyes. He was gasping, speechless. He could only make a weak motion toward the ration bag on his shoulder. Tieh-han understood. He put the bag on his own shoulder, and tucked under his belt the two hand grenades Hsiao-san had been carrying. With a sigh of relief, the boy hitched up his trousers, and ran forward more freely.

It was just at this time that most of the men in the Second Platoon of Company Two suddenly scattered and dashed toward the southeast. They thought they saw an opening there in the enemy lines.

"But they'll never be able to out-distance the cavalry," Chien said to himself bitterly. "They're finished, those men are finished!"

He suddenly realized that Yi-ping, commander of Company Two, had been sticking close behind him for quite some time, surrounded by a dozen of the company's men. But when he turned a severe glance at Yi-ping, he found the latter hopelessly observing his running troops. Yi-ping's lacklustre eyes timidly avoided the battalion commander's scrutiny. Chien walked up to him.

"Where's your Second Platoon going now?"

"Who knows," mumbled Yi-ping.

"The Second Platoon leader?"

"He's with the men," Yi-ping muttered.

One of the guerillas interjected, "But wasn't he killed?"

Yi-ping quickly changed his story. He pointed to the sky.

"He was killed by shrapnel."

Chien could control himself no longer. His voice trembled with rage.

"Instead of hanging around me, why aren't you directing your troops?"

Yi-ping hung his head. "The men who aren't near you are always

running off," he mumbled. "I'm looking after these men here. They're my troops too."

Chien's breath seemed to choke in his throat. He stared at Yi-ping for several seconds, then he realized that the man was in a funk. Neither encouragement nor curses would do any good. But he couldn't just drop the matter. Certainly not!

"Turn your First Platoon over to me. You go out and chase that Second Platoon. Bring those men back here!"

Though Yi-ping was good at obeying orders, he knew this one couldn't be carried out. But he also knew that the battalion commander had spoken in anger. He wasn't really expected to bring all the men back. Nevertheless, he turned and ran after them. His chase wasn't entirely in vain. After much shouting, two of the men heard him and returned.

VI

About three hundred yards from the big moat were two cemetery plots densely wooded with pine trees. The left column of enemy cavalry headed southeast in pursuit of the Company Two guerillas; the right column occupied the cemetery plots. As the first seven or eight men of Company One's Second Platoon charged the grave mounds, they were immediately pinned down by enemy fire.

The two cemeteries had become "tigers on the path" of the guerilla battalion. The men were lying on the ground, some taking pot-shots at the Japanese, some waiting for orders. Others, rifles cradled in their arms, were simply resting on their backs, looking up at the sky. Hsiao-san lay panting, stealing glances toward the southeast.

There, a column of Japanese cavalry was riding down the dozen scattered men who had broken through the encirclement. The guerillas were fighting back. They could be seen turning around, raising their rifles and firing. But they kept getting fewer in number, and although they continued to shoot enemy soldiers off their mounts, the Japanese closed in on them savagely. . . .

The enemy infantry that had been trailing in the rear of the battalion now moved up very fast. Their bullets spat past the ears of the guerillas. Because the enemy was so close, they were not using their mortars much. Only once in a long while did a shell come over.

"Tell me," Chien abruptly demanded of a few men beside him, "how shall we break out of this encirclement?"

"Push across the moat!" said one. He was echoing Chien's order, but he himself seemed really convinced of this method.

"We have to rout the enemy cavalry first!" another guerilla insisted.

"Right!" chimed in several of the others. "We have to drive off the cavalry first!"

Pleased with the results of his little quiz, Chien was sure of himself now. The decision he had made and the men's ideas coincided exactly. Only then did he lift his revolver from its holster. He cocked the trigger. A strip of red satin hung from the butt. Chien ran to the centre of the battalion and swung the revolver down in a slashing motion.

"Comrades!" he shouted. His eyes travelled in a wide circle at the men lying around him. They had all raised their heads and focused their attention on him.

"To break through, we have to drive the cavalry out of the cemeteries! Otherwise, we'll be wiped out! There are about sixty of the enemy. We're about sixty too. So let's take everything we've got and smash 'em! That way we're sure to win! Comrades, for the honour of our country, for the honour of our parents, for our own honour—forward! Communists, up and at 'em! Everyone—cooks, messengers, everybody—all together, up and at 'em!"

His voice was high and thin, but tough as a steel wire. His words were bright needles. Every one of the men heard him clearly.

Tieh-han was the first on his feet. He had always fought grimly, silent, his teeth clenched. Now he let himself go. In a voice like thunder, he started the cry:

"Charge!"

Then rose Erh-tung, Hu-tse, Fu-lai. . . first the Communists, then the rest of the men, till all were standing, shouting "Charge!" in voices that shook the heavens. The men swept forward—with fixed bayonets, aiming their rifles, waving pistols, grenades in hand—all charging together! Wounded men—if they could walk at all—also joined in the attack! Chien saw Yi-ping, yelling, brandishing a revolver, rushing forward too.

From the cemeteries, the enemy poured out a heavy fire. But the guerillas kept coming. Men in the front ranks fell and others moved up to take their places. The guerillas ran straight ahead. At fifty yards from the enemy, they threw their hand grenades. The bombs burst with a roar. Thick smoke curtained the cemeteries, the trees. Pine needles flew to the sky, then showered down again.

The enemy fled and the guerillas occupied the cemeteries. Japanese corpses were piled on top of each other.

"Don't stop here! Forward, forward!" Tieh-han led his men directly toward the big moat.

Cross the moat! The guerillas rushed on. Heedless of the Japanese behind them, heedless of the rifle and machine-gun bullets whistling all around them, the men ran. On, on to the moat!

On the opposite side, a couple of Hirohito Helpers (as the peasants called the Chinese puppet troops) had come down from a fortified tower, and were wildly popping away at the men with their rifles. The guerillas didn't even give them a glance, but drove straight to the dry moat. At this point there was neither bridge nor ramp. Both banks were steeply

vertical. What to do? With a thud, Tieh-han leaped into the cut. It was twelve feet wide and twelve feet deep. One after another, the men flew in after him. This boldness was too much for the puppet soldiers. They turned tail and ran back to their tower. The guerillas leaped and scrambled at the moat wall. But all slipped down, defeated. The wall had been packed straight and hard, without even a blade of grass for a handhold.

Then one of the men had an idea. He stood with his back to the wall, laced his fingers together to form a stirrup, and said, "Come on!"

Holding the man's head for support, Hu-tse put one foot in the man's hands, and with the next step was on his shoulders. Then, a few of the guerillas raised their rifles as high as they could reach, and pressed them, butt end up, against the wall of the moat next to Hu-tse. He put his foot on the rifle butts, grasped the edge of the moat, and pulled himself out. With a shout he lowered one end of his own rifle into the moat, where the next guerilla, standing on his comrade's shoulders, grabbed it above the sight. Hu-tse pulled him out with one yank. In this way, the men all were soon on level ground again. The bullets were flying thicker than ever now, but the guerillas had crossed the moat.

Before long, they were out of range of the tower. The straggling battalion slowed down. The cavalry, they had left stuck on the other side of the moat. The sun had sunk to the tree tops. They had escaped.

Only then did the men become aware that their legs were swollen, stiff and painful.

VII

The battalion stopped in the village of Chiangchia. In the dark, the men were split up and billeted in various peasant homes. Several of the guerillas cooked themselves something to eat, but many went right to sleep.

Chien was busy all night, during which he accomplished two things. First, he made a count of the men. There were only forty-two of them left. Excluding himself, his orderly Chin Shan and seven wounded, he divided the others into two platoons. He made Tieh-han leader of the First Platoon, and Yi-ping leader of the Second, with Erh-tung as the latter's second in command.

The second thing Chien did was to collect the seven wounded together in one group. Li Mao-lin, a former platoon leader in Company Two, himself suffering from a wounded arm, was put in charge. With some of the local peasants carrying the more seriously hurt, the casualties moved to the village of Hsiaoliu, where the Party organization was strong. Chien sent a note to the Party secretary there, asking him to conceal the wounded in places of safety and to take good care of them.

In the house serving as battalion headquarters Chien sat on the *kang*, leaning against the wall, his hands clasped around his drawn-up knees. He was deep in thought. He couldn't imagine why Yi-ping had changed so much today, and so quickly. Before the "Mop Up," when Yi-ping had been drilling troops, he had been very energetic. He had seemed an excellent company leader. On duty as officer of the day, he called out commands so loud and clear that it boosted the men's spirits just to hear him. Yi-ping had had some schooling, and all his actions were neat and methodical—before the fighting started. He could give good reports and make reasonable suggestions at meetings. He was considered one of the top men in the battalion. Even in the first few skirmishes, when the guerillas had fought for bases in co-ordination with the Eighth Route Army Guards Brigade, he had acquitted himself quite well. Yi-ping had even joined the Party a few months before Tieh-han. Yet why had he made a poor showing in today's test? Was it lack of battle experience? Or was it his class origin?

"Still, all men from rich peasant families don't act like him," mused Chien. "I come from that kind of family myself. Tieh-han is the son of a landlord, but what a difference between him and Yi-ping!"

For the moment, Chien had no answer to this problem. He decided he would discuss it later with the battalion deputy commissar.

"Even a mud brick turns hard after being exposed to fire. Once a man has been through a storm at sea, no little river will ever frighten him again!"

A bicycle was heard entering the courtyard, and Chien crawled on the *kang* to the window. "Bowback," the leader of the scout squad, had returned. Chien hailed him: "I'm in here, old fellow."

Bowback, whose real name was Yang Fu-ching, had been sent the night before to observe Ningchin City. An illness in childhood had hunched his shoulders, and most of the men still called him by his old nickname. As he entered the door, he wiped his face with his head kerchief. He was pale, and his large eyes darted about the room, then looked at Chien.

Seeing the scout's dismal expression, Chien himself couldn't help feeling a twinge of distress. The whole atmosphere of the room was dreary, cold, silent as a tomb. The men's joking and horseplay, their ready songs, seemed things of ages past. Chien took a grip on himself and patted the *kang* in invitation for Bowback to sit down. He asked the scout how he found them. Bowback said he had met the wounded in Hsiaoliu. They had told him where the guerillas were, and he came directly.

The scout fell silent. Chien felt he ought to comfort him, but didn't know what to say. At that very moment, Bowback was trying to think of how to comfort the battalion commander. He was sure that Chien was more distressed, more miserable than any of them, but Bowback didn't

know what to say either. After a long while, as though addressing an invalid friend, he suddenly blurted:

"Commander, have you had anything to eat?"

"Yes," Chien nodded.

"There's a little restaurant in this village. They've got wheatcakes. They make good noodles too."

Chien was silent for a moment. He thought they ought to talk business. He shook his head.

"I don't want to eat any more. Let's hear about what's happening in the city."

There wasn't much going on in Ningchin, Bowback told him. Most of the enemy troops had gone out to "Mop Up" the revolutionary bases in the villages, and were still around Yakouchai, Lokou and Paichihkou. Only about two hundred puppets and fifty Japanese cavalry were left in the city. The watchtowers that dotted the suburbs surrounding the city were pretty much empty.

Chien called in the platoon leaders.

Tieh-han wore a Mauser on his hip. A rifle was slung across his back, around his waist a cartridge belt was tightly strapped. Standing with one foot resting on the *kang*, he looked neat and sturdy as usual, his whole body exuding vitality.

Yi-ping sat down on the edge of the *kang*, near the door, with his legs sprawled wide in front of him. He kept his head down, expelling his breath in long gusty sighs.

Forty-year-old Erh-tung didn't like to talk much. Seeing that the *kang* was fully occupied, he squatted on his heels, resting his chin in his hands.

The battalion commander told them about the situation in the city of Ningchin. As to Yakouchai, Paichihkou, Lokou and other villages near the big dry moat, said Chien, because the scouts sent to observe those places had not returned, he could only make a rough estimate based on what he learned from today's battle. Finally, he took up the questions of where they would stay tomorrow and how they should operate.

"We should go to some place fairly close to Ningchin," he said. "Though we don't have any bases in that neighbourhood, we'd be much further away from enemy's main forces than we are now. Even if they start getting active, it'll be easy for us to circle around up there. I've thought about this problem a long time. To live there openly, of course, is out of the question. We have to go under cover. But we don't know much about the situation in the villages near Ningchin. What could we do if some bad egg reported us to the enemy? I know an abandoned monastery up that way, a few hundred yards west of Mengtsun Village. It's very desolate. Nobody ever goes there. They'd have a hard time spotting us in that place. Even if the enemy started coming that way,

we could see them a long way off. We could decide for ourselves whether to fight or pull out. What do you think of the idea?"

Tieh-han pondered. The proposition didn't sound very attractive to him, but he couldn't think of a better one.

"I haven't any objection to the place," he said. "But just hiding isn't going to be any good. This is a time when we have to fight with all we've got, to tie down the enemy. That'll mean victory. Even if we can't tie them down, we should make it as tough for them as possible!"

These words goaded Yi-ping into speech.

"There's a big difference between the enemy's strength and ours," he protested. "Staying out of sight is a good plan. After the 'Mop Up' is over and the Eighth Route Army Guards Brigade comes back—that'll be time enough to talk of fighting. And another thing—we have to be especially careful of cavalry. Cavalry pounces on small units just like a cat nabs a mouse. . . ." Yi-ping had been intending to say more, but seeing the way all eyes were fixed upon him, he fell silent.

The question of where to stay was considered settled.

Chien sent Erh-tung to look for some dry rations that they could eat the next day. He decided that Bowback should remain behind to keep an eye on Yakouchai. Chien also gave him a note to deliver to the deputy commissar of the battalion, if the latter could be found in Hsiaoliu the following evening.

It was now eleven p.m., and they were almost twenty miles from their destination. A sickle moon hung in the sky. The guerillas set out at a fast pace.

VIII

Years ago, a big section of the old monastery's temple roof had fallen, revealing a good view of the heavens. The temple beams sagged, tiles jutted out. There was no telling when the whole thing would collapse. The window lattices were sadly broken, giving them a picket fence appearance. The door, though it hung crookedly, could be closed, with some effort. The courtyard was choked with weeds and brambles, growing high as a man's waist. A low, crumbling wall circled the grounds. Of the courtyard archway gate, all that remained were the two sides and the stone floor. An idol of Buddha still sat in the temple. Only one glass eye now shone in his head; half of his right arm had been broken off. Along the walls sat idols of the Eighteen Disciples—missing feet, lacking eyes, arms in stumps, overturned, grinning toothlessly—all in all, a fearsome sight.

At dawn, the wide peaceful plain was visible from the window, stretching into the distance. Past the front of the monastery ran an automobile road that seemed to grow longer as the day brightened. Far

off, a village nestled in a grove of trees, a stone watchtower sticking up out of one corner. A few miles beyond was another tower; further on, still another. . . .

Sparrows cheeped in the temple eaves. Other than that, there wasn't a sound. It was as though there had never been any life in the world except for these few little birds.

Tieh-han was officer of the guard. He called back into the temple the sentry squatting behind the archway gate. Closing the temple door, he set two bricks beneath the high window and climbed up for a look. Then he got two more bricks and set them in the window space to form an inverted "V," leaving an opening of only two fingers at the base. After telling the sentry to watch through this space for any signs of activity along the automobile road or in the direction of Ningchin, Tieh-han made a round of the Buddha in the centre of the temple.

The men were sprawled sleeping on the floor. He stepped over them carefully, peering at their faces. Every one of the guerillas opened his eyes and looked at Tieh-han as he passed, then closed them again as though fast asleep. Actually, none of the men was sleeping, but none of them moved, or made any sound. In a dark corner, Tieh-han's foot struck something soft. He bent down and found Yi-ping lying there, a kerchief tightly bound around his head, both forearms covering his face. Yi-ping didn't even stir. Tieh-han watched him for a moment, then sighed in spite of himself.

The sun climbed higher into the sky, scarlet, dazzling. Like a great bloody-mouthed monster, its rays made the road shine brighter, made the towers seem taller. The red-ball Japanese flags flapped menacingly on top of the watchtowers. Daylight had come, with all its dangers.

Soon it was the peasants' breakfast hour. Early morning had passed peacefully. Just as Tieh-han was relaxing a bit, the sentry at the window called to him in an alarmed voice, kept down with an effort.

"They're coming! Aiya! They're coming!"

The men all bounded to their feet. Many rammed bullets into their rifle chambers. Tieh-han strode up to the sentry and glared at him.

"What's the matter with you? Control yourself!"

The man came down from the brick step and stood like a stick of wood in a corner. Tieh-han stepped up and looked toward the southwest. Sure enough, cantering along the automobile road was a troop of cavalry, trailed by a thick cloud of dust. Tieh-han was about to give the order for battle, when a calm clear voice rang out.

"Don't get excited. All of you get ready, but move your bolts quietly!"

Chien, coolly self-possessed, took Tieh-han's place on the brick step and looked toward the enemy. The mounted Japanese were advancing steadily in a neat column, a flag-bearer proudly sitting his horse in the

lead. Behind the cavalry came six or seven horse-drawn carts, and that was all.

Chien was certain the enemy hadn't discovered the guerillas. The Japanese were not in battle formation, and the presence of the carts seemed to rule out an attack. Chien decided to stay put. A row of heads crowded behind him to look too. He waved them back, and told the men to sit down. Only Tieh-han remained next to him.

"Tieh-han," said Chien, "you don't have to watch either."

"What difference will it make if one more stands here?" Tieh-han demanded stubbornly.

"If there's a charge to make, of course I'll call on you. But there's no need for you to bother about this."

The temple became completely still. On raised platforms along the walls, sat the idols of the Eighteen Disciples. The guerillas squatted on the floor, listening, staring, scarcely breathing. Their full attention was riveted on the "clip-clop" of approaching horses, their hearts leaping to the rhythm of the hoof beats. At last, the horses were heard passing by. Then came the rumble of the carts. Finally, the temple again lapsed into tomb-like silence.

"The enemy have gone into Mengtsun Village," Chien announced from the window. "They're probably out to commandeer wheat. Those carts were all empty and they were carrying a lot of unfilled gunny sacks."

At this, the bolder guerillas again lay down. Gradually, most of the others followed suit.

"Crack! Crack!" Two rifle shots sounded loud and sharp from behind the temple. One bullet whined past the front eaves. The men leaped up, startled.

"Fix bayonets!" Tieh-han shouted. "Prepare your grenades!"

He strode toward the temple door, ready to rush out. But seeing the battalion commander still standing quietly on the bricks beside the window, he didn't dare to move. Tieh-han turned around. Yi-ping was behind him, white as a sheet, his rifle in his left hand, trembling as though stricken with malaria. Several other men were quaking at the knees.

Tieh-han never could stand cowardice. You're a bunch of cream puffs! he wanted to shout. But he said nothing, for on second thought he felt it wasn't entirely their fault for being afraid, and swearing would accomplish nothing. They were really very good men—just inexperienced.

Again there were several shots, then silence again.

Chien motioned with his hands for the men to sit down. The Japanese were not coming toward the monastery. They had shot a peasant who was fleeing from the village, after which they returned to their pillaging. Several guerillas grinned wryly at each other, then sat leaning against the walls. Colour slowly came back to Yi-ping's face.

"Aiya, that fright took ten years off my life!" Yi-ping smiled sourly.

"It may not make me die any sooner," another man agreed, "but it sure was like being very sick!"

Fu-lai laughed. "You're all good for nothing. Take a look at him." He pointed with pursed lips at Tieh-han. "Aren't we men too?"

Meanwhile, the enemy troops were putting on a big show in Mengtsun Village. Now someone could be heard shouting, now there was a clashing of cymbals. The enemy set up a machine-gun on the roof of a high building. Several Japanese strolled back and forth beside it. On the outskirts of the village, except for a few people walking their horses, all was still and deserted.

The sun crawled across the sky with exasperating slowness. It seemed a year before it reached directly overhead. Not a breath of air was stirring, not a bird flew by. Leaves of the crops in the fields curled and drooped lifelessly. The world was coming to an end. The sun could only beat down, beat down relentlessly and never move.

Fire broke out at the entrance to Mengtsun Village. Thick black smoke spurted upwards. There was the sound of horses' hoofs nearing the monastery, then the rumble of the carts. The carts were laden high with sacks filled to the bursting point. . . . Gradually, the sound receded. The Japanese were returning to the city of Ningchin. Two Chinese, pulled behind the horses on long ropes, had to run to keep up with their mounted captors. . . .

Chien came down from the window and looked at the guerillas. Then he lowered his head and was silent for a long time.

"Where are the dry rations we collected yesterday?" he finally asked. "You all better have something to eat. The sun is still very high. It won't be dark for another three or four hours yet. . . ."

X

After nightfall, Commander Chien assembled the men and sent scouts across the fields to look for a home near Mengtsun Village where the guerillas could spend the night. After the place was found, Chien led his men to it. They entered the courtyard and barred the big gate. Sentries were posted behind the gate and on top of the house.

Chien explained to the owner that they were part of the Eighth Route Army, not bandits. Reassured, the man was then willing to vacate two rooms and loan the guerillas a couple of large sleeping mats. Two of the guerillas were told to boil water for drinking. The rest went to sleep on the *kang* in the rooms. A few slept in the courtyard and in the enclosed entrance way.

Battalion command occupied the east wing. Orderly Chin Shan borrowed an oil lamp from the owner, swept the *kang* clean, put a mattress and a pillow on it, then borrowed a low table which he placed in the middle.

Chien sat down on the *kang* and summoned the house owner. He asked what the Japanese had been doing in Mengtsun Village that day. He wanted to know the name of the puppet mayor of the village, where he lived, how much land he had, who else lived with him, what he did before he became mayor. . . . Chien then told the owner to bring the man to the house.

"But don't let anyone else know about this," Chien cautioned. "If others should find out and begin shooting around here, that would be no joking matter."

A little later, the puppet mayor arrived. Chien questioned him. Who were working in the village office, who was the "liaison" man with the Japanese and when had they sold out to the enemy, did the Eighth Route Army often send anyone to the village? Chien asked many questions. Then he said suddenly:

"Suppose we spend a few days in your village. What do you think?"

The mayor hastily wagged his head. "It isn't that we don't welcome you, but we never know when the Japanese are coming. Another thing —we've got all kinds of people in this village. Some bad person might give you away. And the village might be damaged if there was fighting here—of course that's a small matter. But wouldn't it be better if you weren't discovered?"

Chien hardened his voice. "Anyhow, we're going to stay a day or two."

Frowning, the mayor pondered for some time. Then, after looking to see that they were alone, he offered a suggestion.

"Let's do it this way—I'll find you a place to stay, but it won't be very comfortable. Up in the northeast corner of the village, there's a compound with two or three families living in it. The courtyard gate is in a lane. It's a quiet, secluded spot and they're good people. After you move in there with your men, whatever you do, don't show yourselves during the day. The house owners will help you out with food. The village will repay them for it later. If you stay there quietly for a day or two I can guarantee nothing will happen. But if you show yourselves openly, I can't be responsible."

"Suppose the Japanese come?"

"It'll be all right. I'll send a reliable man to watch them. He'll let you know if they're coming. We'll get our men from the village office out on to the street to keep an eye on them too. I guarantee nothing will go wrong. But there's one thing—Don't let your men come tearing out and kill the Japanese. If that happens, our village will really catch it. More Japanese will come after you're gone and finish off every one of us working in the village office!"

Chien weighed the mayor's words carefully and noted them in his mind.

"In a little while a man called Bowback will come looking for you,"

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Chien told him. "Bring him here to me." He also asked that the village lend the guerillas sixty or seventy catties of flour. Warning the mayor to keep their whereabouts a secret, Chien let him depart.

Chien sat beneath the lamp, deep in thought. He didn't even see Chin Shan bringing in drinking water. He was thinking of two things. The first was—although they had gotten through the day, they had been in hiding all the time. Was an army supposed to spend all its time under cover? He had never in history heard of such an army. Chien was also considering what the mayor had said. There were, he knew, thousands of mayors like this one, and there were thousands of places like Mengtsun Village. The method proposed by the mayor seemed a good one. It could be used in many villages under puppet administration for concealing guerillas to carry on the fight.

The courtyard outside was very quiet. Once in a while, a faint sigh could be heard. The oil lamp flickered over Chien's head.

"Perhaps that is the way to carry on the fight," he said to himself.

Then, there was the creaking of the big courtyard gate, and the sound of advancing footsteps. Chin Shan was the first to burst into the room.

"Ha!" he cried excitedly, "Bowback is here—with the deputy commissar!"

A cheerful familiar voice preceded its owner through the door curtain, "Chien, old man, how are you?"

Chien leaped up to pull the portiere aside, but it was already lifted. They almost bumped heads in the doorway, then they clasped hands in a tight and hearty grasp.

Hsueh Chiang, deputy commissar of the battalion, was a gay optimistic person. He was twenty-seven years old, of medium height, with a round fair face. His eyes were bright and clear; a shrewd smile always played about his lips. He never worried. Nothing ever stumped him. The guerillas liked him tremendously. Hearing that he had come, they crowded into the room. Though they didn't have as much to say as formerly, every one of them looked much more at ease now that Hsueh Chiang had arrived. Hsueh Chiang's orderly Yu-chu was a great pal of Chin Shan. The two boys fell on each other's neck with much shouting and laughter, and sat down together on a bench.

"My luck's not so bad. I've been playing hide-and-seek with the enemy for a whole day and a whole night. I finally got rid of them." Hsueh Chiang's words poured out like a freshet. He told how he had been blocked off in a courtyard, how he had climbed the wall and hid in a matshed; how he came out after dark and groped his way to the watch-tower guarding a crossing of the big moat. There, he had bluffed the puppet soldiers into thinking he was a special agent of the Japanese, and they let him cross. The Party County Committee, said Hsueh Chiang, had already moved to the village of Hsiaoliu. Everyone was safe.

Chien was relieved to hear this. At the same time he felt rather ashamed that he hadn't been able to provide protection to Hsueh Chiang and the Committee. He was silent for a while, then he asked about the First District guerillas and the regional command.

"The First District platoon caught it much worse than we did," said Hsueh Chiang. "The whole lot of them were trapped in a courtyard. Except for two who managed to break out, nearly all the rest were killed. The last one left alive was the deputy political instructor. He had a head wound, and his bullets were all gone. He smeared his face with blood and pulled a comrade's body on top of his. That's how he got by. The platoon sold their lives dearly, though. Twice as many Japanese were killed!—As to the regional. . . ." Here Hsueh Chiang paused, and his eyes flashed a glance at all the assembled men.

"The Guards Brigade has left already. . . ."

"What! It's gone? Where to?" The men craned their necks and looked at him with startled eyes.

"Probably toward the west." Hsueh Chiang deliberately ignored the men's shocked reaction. "I hear that two of its companies have had some losses," he went on steadily. "What organization has replaced the Brigade as leader of the region's guerillas, or where its headquarters are located, I still don't know. The Party County Committee is organizing contact points where it can get in touch with it. We'll probably have some news in a couple of days."

The atmosphere at once became sombre. Faces that had lit up on Hsueh Chiang's arrival again grew tense. The deputy commissar said no more, but his smiling eyes swept over the men. After a silence, Yi-ping, staring straight ahead, asked:

"Then we have no troops here?"

Hsueh Chiang smiled. "Who said so? Aren't we troops?"

Yi-ping laughed sourly and shrugged his shoulders, then dropped his head.

The deputy commissar could see that Yi-ping had not really understood him, and was only concealing his fears in order to avoid being criticized.

"What are you laughing at?" Hsueh Chiang pressed him. "I suppose we're not troops?"

Yi-ping was flustered. "Who says we're not troops?" he retorted hastily. "When did I ever say we aren't?"

Hsueh Chiang threw back his head and laughed heartily. He pointed his finger at Yi-ping's nose.

"If you didn't, then you didn't. But what are you getting so excited about? Doesn't that prove what you're really thinking in your heart?"

Suddenly the deputy commissar turned and shot a serious glance at the men.

"Comrades, we don't have to be so upset just because the Guards Brigade has gone. To tell you the truth, if it didn't leave, it would be easier for the enemy to locate us and wipe us out, and the Brigade couldn't have any decisive effect on changing the situation anyhow. We all have to get this straight—we are the troops. Look around. Which one of us isn't strong and tough? We've all got two arms and two legs, haven't we? Comrades, don't underestimate yourselves. If you make up your minds, and do it, the people who are afraid of the Guards Brigade will be just as afraid of us!"

Hsueh Chiang swept his hand down in a chopping motion. The men were listening to him carefully, and their faces began to light up. After a long silence, he finally told them that the regional command had kept behind two small regiments—the Thirty-first and the Forty-fourth, each with a strength of about four battalions. When necessary, these regiments could give the guerillas a hand in the fighting.

Hsueh Chiang notified Battalion Commander Chien of the decision of the Party County Committee: It appeared that the enemy's "Mop Up" was not yet over. We must prepare to meet a still more dangerous situation. Our main forces had already left the region. We were going to have to find ways of holding out for a long time. As to Chien's battalion, the Committee had decided that for the time being it should split up and go under cover so as to make a smaller target. It could occasionally attack small enemy units.

The Committee had also made two other decisions: Men who had been working in the county and district government offices were now travelling about the countryside in small units, and carrying on their duties under cover, and they needed weapons. Chien's battalion was to contribute two pistols. Secondly, a guerilla platoon had to be set up immediately in the First District, on the other side of the big moat. The battalion was to send men to handle the organizing.

XI

When the guerillas began leaving to go back to bed, Hsueh Chiang asked the officers of platoon rank and above to remain. He wanted to discuss with them how to continue the fight in the face of a long-term enemy "Mop Up."

The question was a hard one. The dim flickering light of the oil lamp cast fitful grey shadows on the faces of the men. In the stillness of the room, their short harsh breathing was very audible. Their losses in battle had made them gloomy, and this feeling was intensified now that they were being confronted with so difficult a problem. The young orderlies Chin Shan and Yu-chu had spread a grass mat on the floor. They were already fast asleep.

Commander Chien thought for a long time. He was the first to speak.

"From the size of this 'Mop Up' and the way the enemy prepared for it, they must be very anxious to wipe us out. Our job is to prevent them from wiping us out. We shouldn't stir them up any more than we have to. We should make as small a target as possible and preserve our strength. Later, we'll gradually think of ways to expand our operations. It's absolutely necessary to split up the battalion and go under cover as the Party County Committee has ordered. How shall we split up? My idea is to do it in units of platoons. A platoon isn't easy to spot, it can go into hiding quickly, but it still has striking power."

The deputy commissar nodded. Yi-ping quickly nodded too. After a silence, Tieh-han spoke. "I never in my life heard of an army acting like that."

"I felt that way myself, at first," said Chien. "But there never was an army like the Eighth Route Army before either. We've got no rear to fall back on. No one's supplying us with food and ammunition. But we're still fighting the Japanese, aren't we? And we've won a lot of victories. Why? Because we've got two magic charms—the leadership of the Party and the support of the people! With the Party lighting the road for us, we'll never fall into the mud, we'll never take the wrong turn. With the Party standing on high, looking into the distance for us, giving us methods and knowledge, we've got the strength to get through the toughest situation! Then add to that the way the people are with us. The soldiers and the people are really of one heart. We're like fish in the great sea of the people. We did very well before, and we'll do just as well operating under cover. As long as we hold on to them, those two charms will always be our keys to success."

There was nothing Tieh-han could reply. "All right then," he asked bluntly, "which platoon is going where?"

The deputy commissar looked at the assembled men. Yi-ping seemed to have something on his mind which he couldn't bring himself to say.

"We're all Communists here," Hsueh Chiang encouraged. "Everyone should feel free to join the discussion. 'Put three dunces together and you've got a wise man,' " he quipped.

Yi-ping rubbed his hands together and said carefully, "Commander Chien is right. We can't do anything well unless we stick close to the people. I think each platoon ought to go where the platoon leader has the best connections. That will make it easy to work under cover and keep informed of what's going on. A place like that will be a ready-made base. I don't know whether this idea of mine is right or not. . . ."

Chien nodded. Deputy Commissar Hsueh Chiang said decisively:

"That's easy to manage. Tieh-han is a Second District man. Let him operate in the Second and Fifth Districts. Yi-ping is from the Third District. The Third and Fourth Districts go to his Second Platoon. The

way things are in the First District, we can't send anyone there at present. We'll let that place go for a while."

Tieh-han kept shaking his head.

"It won't work. I don't want to be near my father. He's a stubborn old coot, and he hates our policy of supporting the Eighth Route Army with 'Work from the poor, money from the rich' because he's rich himself. He can't see eye to eye with me. I'm just a thorn in his side. He was happy at first when I joined the guerillas, but he regretted it when the revolution began getting stronger and stronger. The way things are between us, it would be better for me to stay away from him."

Hsueh Chiang thought a moment, then he jumped to his feet.

"Your 'godmother' is a fine woman! Aren't you always saying she's got a heart bigger than ten real mothers? Who could be a better connection than her? Besides, your men know a lot of people out her way."

At the mention of his "godmother," a little window opened in Tieh-han's heart. She was a neighbour, who had always been very good to him and he called her *kan niang*—godmother, though in fact she was not.

Tieh-han nodded. "You're right. She's poor, honest and reliable. And she loves the Eighth Route Army!"

Hsueh Chiang asked if there were any other comments. Tieh-han suddenly thought of something.

"Are we still allowed to fight?"

Before anyone else had a chance to speak, Yi-ping hastened to answer. He seemed very pleased.

"Didn't you hear that we're not supposed to stir up the enemy? That's a basic principle! . . . But, of course, it's up to you whether to fight or not."

The deputy commissar put in a word. "Naturally, if the situation is right for it, we can still fight."

Yi-ping slid off the *kang*. "If nobody has any more ideas, we'd better be going."

"I don't have any ideas," said Tieh-han, "but I don't feel right about us splitting up like this. The men are very low already. I'm afraid this will make them worse."

The deputy commissar offered encouragement and comfort. "You're forgetting—'Soldiers go with their generals as the grass moves with the wind.' The men's eyes are always on their officers. We have to stand up straight ourselves first, show some spirit, and the men won't weaken."

Hsueh Chiang went on, "The real hero becomes more determined and braver when things get tough. We're all officers, all Communists. Revolutionaries are afraid of nothing in heaven or on earth. Communists have never bent the knee. We don't retreat and we can't be frightened! Let's do the job, boys. The proletariat has to win through when things look worst!"

"Right!" Tieh-han agreed. "We can't be softies tied to our mother's apron strings forever. We have to stand up for ourselves even if the regular army isn't around!"

As the meeting was breaking up, Commander Chien relieved Tieh-han and Yi-ping of their pistols. He gave them to Bowback for delivery to the Party County Committee. Chien appointed Erh-tung leader of the First District guerilla platoon, but because things were still so tight across the big moat, Chien told him to remain for the time being with Yi-ping in the Second Platoon. They would see in a few days what could be done.

Chien and Hsueh Chiang also divided their duties. The battalion commander would go with the First Platoon, the deputy commissar with the Second. They agreed on a place and times of making contact. Only one difficulty remained—who would serve as contact man? The situation was tense and changing all the time. But Bowback was the only available scout. The other three hadn't returned yet. No one knew whether they were dead or alive. Without scouts, the guerillas were blind, and always in danger. Men picked from the squads to act as scouts temporarily were without experience. They might make a mess of it. Finally, it was agreed to have Bowback go with the Second Platoon, but he would have to bring a message to Hsiaoliu Village every day. Chien would send a man to pick it up. The First Platoon would find someone for this job.

After the others left, Chien talked privately with Hsueh Chiang about Yi-ping's actions during the past two days. He recommended that the deputy commissar keep an eye on him and try to educate him.

The night was dark, with neither moon nor stars. Coming out of the room was like stepping into pitch blackness. Tieh-han assembled his men in formation beside the east wall, and in a low enthusiastic voice told them what had been decided. The men stood motionless in the dark. Not one of them said a word. Tieh-han reported to the battalion commander that they were all ready.

Chien buttoned his tunic, smoothed his uniform, put his hat on straight, strapped on his pistol, then stepped out, with young Chin Shan behind him, carrying the carbine.

The forty men, split into two platoons, were about to go their separate ways.

In the inky darkness, there was many a handshake at the courtyard gate, many a pat on the shoulder. Several had spoken in strained voices.

"Good-bye. . . . Good-bye. . . ."

Then the First Platoon marched through the courtyard gate, quietly followed along the wall toward the west and entered upon a narrow twisting little path.

The leaves of the crops rustled in the wind. Perhaps it was going to rain.

A rifle on his shoulder, the stalwart figure of Tieh-han was swallowed up in the night.

XII

Now the clouds had cleared away and a crescent moon hung in the western sky. Stars blinked against a dark velvet backdrop. The villages had been sleeping for hours. Only the distant sound of dogs barking broke the silence.

Tieh-han's platoon, walking with a soft muffled tread, made a wide semi-circle through the fields surrounding the village of Machuang. Behind a house in the northwest corner of the village, the platoon halted. Tieh-han made a gesture with his hands, and the guerillas quietly squatted in a row beneath the eaves which jutted out beyond the wall of the compound.

Battalion Commander Chien walked on tiptoe behind Tieh-han as they inspected the house from all sides.

"All right?" asked Tieh-han.

Chien nodded. "All right. We'll stay here."

Tieh-han went back to his men and looked them over carefully. Then he reached out and pulled Kan Pa to his feet. Mystified, Kan Pa followed behind him to the wall enclosing the house and courtyard. Tieh-han whispered into Kan Pa's ear.

"You're light and agile. I'll boost you up on to the wall. You go in and wake up my *kan niang*. We're going to stay here tonight. But be careful. Don't make any noise. If the hens start cackling and the dogs begin to bark, we may not live through tomorrow."

Because this was his own village where he could be easily recognized and betrayed by traitors, Tieh-han was especially cautious. Kan Pa rested his rifle against the wall, tucked his long jacket up under his sash, clambered on to Tieh-han's shoulders, and with one cat-like leap was on top of the wall. Fortunately, beside the wall was a high stack of grain stalks. Kan Pa tested its consistency with his foot, then plumped on to the stack and slid to the ground without a sound.

Within the hollow square courtyard, the house consisted of a north wing and a small western wing. The large picket gate of the compound opened through the west wall, beside the wing. Kan Pa looked around, then moved quickly to the north wing and pushed lightly against the door. It was locked fast from the inside. He peered through a tear in the paper window, but it was pitch dark inside and he couldn't see a thing. He tapped lightly on the window frame, paused, listened. Not a sound. He tapped again. Suddenly, the high piercing voice of an old woman split the night.

"What do you want? Who is it?"

Kan Pa nearly jumped out of his skin. That does it! he thought to himself. We're really in a spot now!

But then he got an idea. Stepping away from the vent in the paper window, he spoke in a delicate feminine falsetto.

"It's me, Aunty, don't make so much noise. I'm afraid!"

There was a silence, then the voice from the room spoke again, softer this time.

"Oh, you're that young wife from the south compound?"

"Uh-huh," Kan Pa hastily replied.

From the room there came a sigh. "So you've had a fight with him again? The middle of the night and you still can't sleep! Just listen to you—you're so worked up even your voice sounds different. Did you climb over the roofs again?"

"Yes," squeaked Kan Pa.

"I'm putting some clothes on. Wait and I'll open the door for you."

Kan Pa could hear a rustle of clothing, and he seized the opportunity to rush to the courtyard gate and quietly opened it. Tieh-han was waiting at the entrance.

"What's the matter?"

Kan Pa stuck his neck forward and poked out his tongue in a comic grimace.

"I wanted to tell the old lady who we are so that she'd come out and welcome you. Who would have thought she'd holler like that? Nearly scared the life out of me!"

A door rasped and a grey-haired old lady, still buttoning her jacket, came out of the north wing, peering short-sightedly. Tieh-han hurried over to her.

"*Kan niang*, it's me. Please don't make any noise."

Startled, the old woman took a step forward, then withdrew.

"Don't be afraid. It's me, Tieh-han, *kan niang!*"

The old woman stood stupefied for almost a minute. Finally, she spoke.

"You're Tieh-han? Aiya, you've got me all mixed up. Come closer. Let me look at you. . . ."

Tieh-han stepped forward and brought his face close to hers. The old lady stared hard, then put her hands on his shoulders and looked him over from head to foot.

"It really is you, child. Why have you stayed away so long?" She turned and called toward the room, "Chu! Come out, quick! Tieh-han is here!"

"Softly, softly!" Tieh-han urged. "I've got troops with me."

Kan Pa had already quietly led the guerillas into the courtyard. Commander Chien told them to fasten the gate and appointed a man to stand behind it as sentry, then he hastened forward. Tieh-han introduced him.

"This is our Battalion Commander Chien. You've heard people talk about him, and here he is!"

The old lady peered at him. They heard her pleased laugh in the dark.

"Oh, so you're *that* Commander Chien? How many men have you brought?"

"Fifteen or so," Chien replied in a warm voice.

Immediately, the old lady's face fell.

"That's terrible. Why so few? How can you stand up against the enemy?"

She told them that two days before a great many Japanese had gone by toward the east, that the enemy often came to the village. Some wiseacres say that the Eighth Route Army has been blasted to pieces, she went on, that only a handful of our local guerillas are left and that these miserable few will never do anything. What's more, they say the Japanese are coming here in a few days to "Mop Up." The people are scared all day long, and the rich are squawking that they ought to do away with the practice of "Money from the rich, work from the poor."

Tieh-han explained the situation to her. Then he asked whether they could spend the night, telling her the manner in which they proposed to stay.

The old lady thought a moment.

"It's all right. You men stay here. First go into the room and rest. I'll boil you some drinking water."

Her little daughter, Chu, came out, rubbing her eyes. Chu led Tieh-han into the room, and struck a flint to light the lamp. But the men stopped her. They also refused to let the old lady make a fire to boil water for them. They were afraid that if the puppet soldiers in the watchtower saw light here at this hour of the night, they might become suspicious.

The rooms were very narrow. The west wing, where the men were to sleep, actually was only a shack for storing kindling. Spreading mats on the ground only accommodated about a dozen men, squeezed in tight. That still left four or five others who had no place to sleep. There was a kitchen with a *kang* in the north wing which the old lady could have let them use. But she was afraid if some unexpected visitor should call during the day, the men would have no chance to hide. The only other "room" was a large closet, crammed with boxes and cases, chaff containers, grain sifters. . . .

"Do you have any neighbours you can trust who could lend us a little space?" Chien asked the old lady.

She considered, then replied, "My neighbours all are good people, but they may be afraid of getting into trouble. Besides, I'd worry if you stayed any place else. I'm a poor woman with nothing to lose. If anything went wrong, the worst they could do to me is burn down my few old rooms! We'll fit you in here somehow."

She and her daughter then moved several of the grain sifters and ancient boxes from the closet into their bedroom, and swept clean the

space created. This they spread with grain stalks and invited Chien and the others to sleep there.

Only after everyone had settled down did Tieh-han notice that San Sheng, *kan niang*'s young son, was not at home. Tieh-han had always treated the boy like a kid brother. He learned that San Sheng had been conscripted the previous day to work on the big dry moat near the village of Talu, and had not yet returned.

Almost before the guerillas knew it, the cocks crowed three times and the sky began to turn light. Tieh-han told the men that they must remain indoors during the day; they were not to speak. Then he had a talk with his *kan niang*. He asked her to send the little girl, Chu, out on the street after daybreak to act as a lookout. Chu was twelve, very bright and courageous. She at once agreed, even before her mother had a chance to open her mouth.

Tieh-han checked over the rooms and the courtyard, stationed a sentry inside the rooms beside the window. When everything was in order, he reported to the battalion commander, then went into the west room and lay down beside the door.

XIII

Tieh-han tossed and turned for a long time, unable to sleep. In the early morning stillness, every sound was magnified. The bark of a dog, the slightest footstep, even the flight of a bird in a tree—he could hear and identify them all. He knew there was nothing to worry about, yet he felt he ought to remain awake, just to make sure. Some of the men began snoring loudly. They could probably be heard outside the compound. Tieh-han prodded them gently with a sorghum stalk to wake them up, then told them to go back to sleep.

Although the guerillas were bedded down on the hard ground, they seemed to be sleeping soundly, sprawled against one another in various positions. Some were using their hand grenades for a pillow and holding their rifle in their arms; some lay with their heads against the compound wall. Hu-tse was lying on his back, breathing harshly through his open mouth, great beads of sweat standing out on his forehead. Kan Pa rested his head on a comrade's ankles, his eyes shut tight, his teeth bared in a grin.

Looking from one man to the next, Tieh-han felt his heart glow with affectionate warmth. He knew that if the enemy should come, these guerillas would be on their feet in an instant and fight to the death without the slightest hesitation. Now, since it was necessary, they were hiding here, eating rough fare, sleeping on the ground, crowded into narrow quarters, with never a word of complaint passing their lips. During the big "Mop Up," they had been together through thick and thin. They

helped each other while their lives hung in the balance, and there was no question of anyone taking advantage of anyone else. They shared each other's joys and sorrows, more closely knit than any family.

The more he thought of them, the deeper Tieh-han's love grew for his companions. Even the nostrils of Hsiao-san, expanding and contracting with the lad's breathing, seemed to Tieh-han a most attractive sight, completely adorable. These comrades were his brothers, his children, his very life! He realized how heavy his responsibility was to them. The problem was how to lead them through this time of stress, how to win through to victory!

About noon, the door of the room in which Tieh-han was resting opened, and the old lady came in. Tieh-han sat up quickly and moved over to make room for her on the straw-spread floor. The other guerillas were all still asleep. The old lady tucked her legs under her and sat down opposite Tieh-han. Patting his knee, she asked softly:

"Will you have something to eat? There's still half a catty of sorghum flour left in the crockery jug. I'll grill a few cakes."

Tieh-han hastily refused. "I'm not hungry. You've been up cooking for us since early morning. You ought to take a rest."

Both fell silent and sat looking in each other's eyes. Tieh-han smiled. "*Kan niang*, what do you think of my brothers? Aren't they good?"

The old lady gazed at the sleeping men. "They're fine. Good men, every one of them. Honest and true peasants, just like you."

"Like me? I come from a landlord family. How can you call me a peasant?"

The old lady nodded her head slightly, but she made no further comment, except for a non-committal murmur. Her eyes were fixed on Tieh-han in a blank stare, and she sat looking at him silently for so long that he became uncomfortable.

"*Kan niang*, why do you look at me like that?" he demanded finally.

She seemed like one suddenly awakened, and said with an awkward laugh, "I was thinking how much you resembled my elder son. He was honest and very determined, the same as you. Ah! After his father died, he was sent to the coal mines in the Northeast the same year you went. You came back, but he didn't. The Japanese probably killed him."

Tieh-han ground his teeth. "They treated the Chinese like dogs! Ai! . . . The bastards!"

"They took my son away because we couldn't stop them. But your family, though it had plenty of influence, let them take you too. No wonder people say your father is hard-hearted."

"What's he doing now?"

"I don't know exactly. He's got two or three hired hands, and quite a few mule teams. The only work he does is eating! What's he got to worry about!"

The old lady shot a glance at Tieh-han and lowered her voice. "The

district government sent for him the day before yesterday. The past month or so, the Japanese and the Hirohito Helpers have been feeling very cocky, and they've been raising hell. Your father and some of the other rich families immediately started grumbling again about our 'Money from the rich, work from the poor' policy. They always try to take advantage when the enemy makes trouble for our government. Well, the district heard about it and called your father in for a talk. They didn't do anything to him, just lectured him. He admitted he was wrong, and they let him go. Ai! If you guerillas didn't show up here once in a while, those landlords would make things even tougher for us poor peasants."

Tieh-han, frowning, said nothing for a long time. At last he announced, "I'll go see him after dark. . . ."

"Seeing him is all right," the old lady replied, "but don't tell him you're staying at my place. . . ."

The sound of rapidly running footsteps broke in on their conversation. Tieh-han jumped up and grabbed his gun. With practically one movement, the guerillas were on their feet and were fastening their cartridge belts.

"My blessed mother!" cried the old lady. "What's going on?"

The words were barely out of her mouth, when Chu, her little girl, burst into the room.

"The Hirohito Helpers are coming!"

"Where are they now?" Tieh-han asked.

"They've just come in the south gate; they've gone to the village office!"

Commander Chien, who had hurried over from the north room, wanted to know how many there were of them.

Chu shook her head. She said she hadn't seen them clearly.

"Would you be scared to go back there again?" Chien asked her.

"I'm not scared," the little girl said firmly.

Chien told her to go back quickly and take a look, find out how many they were, why they had come, whether they were heading this way.

With only a sound of assent, the little girl flew out the door.

"Calm down!" the old lady shouted after her. "Act as if nothing was wrong, as if you were just going to watch them march. Don't attract people's attention!"

"I know!"

The old lady wasn't finished. "And when you come back don't run like that. You nearly gave me heart failure!"

Chu's vigorous nod made her short braids dance. She walked quickly through the compound gate.

Staring after her retreating back, Chien said half to himself, "Like a little scout. Those kids can do a lot of things we grown-ups can't."

The guerillas waited in battle readiness, but it wasn't until nearly sunset that the child returned.

"There were thirty Japanese and over a hundred Hirohito Helpers. They took five carts full of wheat. They're gone now."

"Where did they go?" asked her mother.

"I don't know," said the little girl. "I only followed them till they left the village."

Several men grinned affectionately at the brave youngster.

The sun was nearly set. Tieh-han posted a sentry inside the compound gate, then he summoned all the guerillas and told them they could move around freely in the courtyard.

XIV

It was quite some time after dark. The streets were still and deserted. As he walked toward his father's house, Tieh-han thought of what he was going to say.

He came to an imposing compound on the north side of the main street. Beneath the wide-eaved gate house, large wooden portals were painted ebony black. Two stone lions flanked the entrance way. Beyond the wall, a row of tile roofs could be seen. The place was still as impressive as Tieh-han remembered it, but seemed even more remote from his life than ever. Only this time as he entered, he was fully convinced of the rightness of the course he had chosen. . . .

The north wing was brightly lighted, and it was there that Tieh-han directed his footsteps. As he walked into the room, the first thing he saw was his father, Chou Yen-sung, lolling back in an armchair, drinking wine. Four unfinished dishes of food stood on the table before the landlord. He had been engrossed in his own thoughts, and Tieh-han's sudden appearance startled him. But he at once became cordial. Putting down his wine cup, he crinkled his eyes.

"So you've come back?"

"I've come back."

"How about it? Had enough of roving around?"

Tieh-han frowned, but made no reply. He didn't want to make things awkward between them right away. His father, judging by the events of the past month, assumed that Tieh-han was returning because he had no place else to go, as he did when he escaped from the Japanese coal mines in the Northeast.

"The leopard can't change its spots, you'll always be useless!" the landlord said harshly. "Last time you came back from beyond the Great Wall with your mouth open; I suppose this time you're hungry again!"

Tieh-han let him talk. Then he looked his father in the eyes and said evenly, "I've come to pay you a visit. I'll be leaving soon."

Taken aback, the landlord only grunted. Finally he said, "Sit down. Are you short of clothes then?"

Tieh-han sat on a chair. He shook his head. "No. I hear the district government sent for you. I wanted to find out what it's all about."

"Who told you?" the landlord countered.

Tieh-han had to make up a story on the spur of the moment. "I saw Lao Wu at Hsiutsaiying. He told me a little."

"So you've come from Hsiutsaiying? Are you there by yourself?"

"Our troops are there too."

The landlord assumed a more amiable expression. Clearing his throat he said, "There really was nothing to the whole business. They heard a rumour about me at the district, and I went to clear up the misunderstanding. That's all there was to it."

"Wrong!" Tieh-han cut in sharply. "I heard you were attacking our policy of 'Money from the rich, work from the poor'!"

His father's face reddened with alarm. "No, no, no! Lao Wu is talking nonsense, simply nonsense! I must speak to him about this tomorrow!"

Tieh-han saw through his father's hypocrisy readily. He made the speech he had prepared.

"Never mind about that. The tree doesn't stir if there's no wind. I wish you'd try to see things more open-mindedly. After all, you're not getting any younger. What if you do have a little less money? To be perfectly honest, none of our family's money was earned with our own hands. We sweated it all out of other people! Ever since the Japanese have come, nobody knows which day may be his last. The people don't have enough to eat. . . . We ought to think about these things. Surely we can't stand by and watch everyone suffer, see our country destroyed. Are we going to let the Japanese trample us underfoot year after year and make us a nation of slaves? The Communist Party's policy of 'Money from the rich, work from the poor' is right, because we want to fight Japan and save China. We don't want to be a slave country, to be disgraced. . . ."

Of course every word that Tieh-han said was true and reasonable. The landlord was amazed that he had learned to speak so well in his few years with the Eighth Route Army guerillas. His anger completely gone, he listened, nodding at intervals, with a smile that only went skin-deep. Tieh-han knew his father wasn't enjoying this talk, and that he wasn't truly accepting it. Still, Tieh-han felt he had to say these things. They could do no harm; they might even do some good. When he finished, his father wanted to order some hot food and wine.

"We haven't seen each other for weeks, Tieh-han," he said. "The food and wine are on the table. Don't go. Harmony in the family is something we both want. I've understood what you say for a long time.

That's just the way I've been acting, and that's the way I'll continue to act in the future. Our family has never left the straight and narrow path. . . ."

The landlord wanted to call his younger son and the boy's mother, but Tieh-han restrained him.

"Don't call them; let them sleep. I'll drink a few cups of what's here." He drained three large cups in rapid succession, swallowed a mouthful of food, and stood up. He felt he should leave right away. The men were waiting for him. Besides, these luxurious surroundings were making him uncomfortable. Whatever else it was, the place didn't seem like a home to him. It looked more like a temple, or a funeral hall. His real home was in the guerillas, among the fighters.

Only after he strode out of the compound and through those gloomy black gates into the street did he feel at ease, as though he had completed an onerous task.

Back at his *kan niang*'s place, he found the *kang* crowded with seated men. These included several newcomers. And there, lying on the *kang* with his shirt off, was his old friend Tsai Ta-shu, leader of the Second District's guerilla platoon. Tieh-han bounded over and gleefully punched him on the arm.

"You're here too! Have you been up to the puppet tower fort lately?"

Tsai sat up, grabbed three fingers of Tieh-han's hand and twisted. "Not a chance. Those guys think they've got the world by the tail right now. My friend there would be hard to handle, even though we're sworn blood brothers."

With a cry of pain Tieh-han yanked back his hand, doubled it into a fist and massaged Tsai's spine. Tsai rolled over and seized Tieh-han's wrist.

"Quit horsing around. Can't you see we're all down in the dumps?"

Tsai had heard from the local Party organization that Chien was here. Now he was arguing with Chien about how to operate in the future. Four days ago Tsai's platoon had been caught in the "Mop Up" and had lost seven men, leaving only fifteen. Their morale was very low and the situation kept getting worse. Tsai had split his remaining men into five groups and had each circulate within a radius of three or four villages, in this way keeping out of sight. Chien didn't approve. He said with so few men in each group, they'd have no fighting power; they ought to be more concentrated.

"We couldn't fight even if we were more concentrated," Tsai retorted. "The men don't have a bit of spirit. If we expose ourselves and the enemy clouts us one or two times more, you'll say I've been careless again."

"Spreading your men out so thin," Chien replied, "without getting permission first from the battalion, is guerilla operation, pure and simple!"

Tsai laughed. "A guerilla outfit has to operate like guerillas. What else could we do? I'm not afraid for myself; I don't mind risking my own neck. But the lives of fifteen men—that's not a light responsibility!"

Tieh-han cut in. "The more you scatter and the more you avoid a fight, the worse the morale of your men will get. If you keep it up long enough, you'll only destroy yourselves. There aren't any ghosts; they're just things grown-ups scare kids with. It's the same with soldiers. If you don't let your men fight a couple of skirmishes and kill a few of the Japanese with their own hands, they'll always feel the enemy are iron men, not made of flesh and blood."

Here Tieh-han glanced at Chien and found the latter was looking at him. But Chien said nothing. There was a silence, then Tsai said casually:

"Right. If we have to concentrate then we'll concentrate. I'll obey orders." He draped his shirt over his shoulders, stuck his pistol in his belt, and turned to his companions. "Let's go. We'll 'concentrate' our handful of men!"

Chien stopped him again, and directed that he send an experienced man who knew the road to Hsiaoliu to pick up a report from Yi-ping's Second Platoon guerillas. It was too late tonight, but the report had to be delivered to Chien tomorrow without fail. Thereafter, Chien discussed the local situation with Ma Chieh-ying, the Second District's Party representative, and the question of to which village the guerillas should move next.

Tieh-han went into the west room. There the guerillas were standing around a man from the Second District platoon, listening to him with rapt attention. But the man fell silent the moment he saw Tieh-han, and the others lowered their heads. Tieh-han had only heard the tail end of the man's story: ". . . and then the Japanese, one after another, so close together they could have held hands, came rushing at us. . . ."

"Don't stop on account of me," Tieh-han said with a smile.

At first no one spoke, then Kan Pa said, "We thought maybe you wouldn't like to hear this."

In the meantime, the story-teller had sidled out, and Tieh-han asked, "Have you been telling any jokes?"

"We told some," said Kan Pa.

"Were they funny?" Tieh-han asked the others.

The men looked up at him. Some smiled wryly and lowered their heads again. A few listlessly replied, "Very funny. . . ." One or two sighed.

"I don't know about anybody else," said Hu-tse. "Anyhow I'm not complaining. You can't live forever. Sooner or later we all have to die. While we're alive we can fight, and the people will respect us. After I'm dead you can make fertilizer out of me—I don't care."

The words were spoken boldly, but Tieh-han could detect the under-

current of bitterness in them, and it worried him. Again he thought of what he had told Tsai: ". . . the more you avoid a fight, the worse the morale of your men will get. If you keep it up long enough, you'll only destroy yourselves. . . ."

XV

For the next couple of weeks, the guerillas moved to a different revolutionary village base in the Second District each day, until they had lived once in nearly every one of them.

Every day there were alarms, sometimes two or three times in one day. Once the enemy marched by the gate of the compound in which they were hiding before they knew about it; only when the Japanese climbed to the roof of the house next door did the guerillas hear them. Fortunately, Chien kept calm and wouldn't let the men stir. If it had been left to Tieh-han, they all would have rushed into the street and attacked.

Ever since then, Chien felt it unwise to rely entirely on the householder for warning of enemy approach. Some were too careless. Some were too panicky; the moment they saw the Japanese they blanched and their hair stood on end—a sure give-away. If some traitor in a village should report the guerillas to the enemy, and the Japanese should quietly surround them in a house, not one of them would get away. Ai! It certainly was a nasty business not having any scouts!

Enemy bases on all sides had been strengthened the past few days. According to Bowback's reports, many Japanese had come back from the east, and many more were in the course of returning. Hashimoto, the Japanese garrison commander in the city, was boasting that the Imperial Army had won a great victory in their "Mop Up," and that they would continue to run down the remnants, and establish the New Order. . . .

All sorts of rumours were circulating in the villages. That the Eighth Route Army Guards Brigade had been wiped out, that in a certain village corpses lined the road for a mile and a half, that the Ningchin county head had gone over to the enemy and became a Hirohito Helper. . . . There was even a ditty going round that ran:

The Eighth Route Army to the hills did fly,
Tower forts are reaching up to the sky. . . .

Chien had a feeling that there was going to be a change in the enemy's military methods on this side of the big moat. From which direction would they come, how would they try to close in on us, what road should we take, how could we break out of an encirclement, how should we fight when we ran into the enemy—all these questions crowded Chien's mind. Lying on the *kang*, supporting his head with his left hand, Chien gazed

at the ceiling, deep in thought. He heard a giggle, and turned to see the young orderly Chin Shan resting on the opposite end of the *kang*, his eyes screwed up in a grin.

"What's so funny?" Chien demanded.

At this, the boy threw back his head and laughed hilariously. Chin Shan was only seventeen, just a big over-grown kid and rather simple-minded. He was happy all day long. Some said his one and only interest was taking care of the needs of the commander. Chien liked his honest naivety, and the two got along fine.

"Silly kid! What's tickling you?"

With an effort, the boy brought himself under control. "It's the way you look when you're thinking!"

"How can you tell I'm thinking?"

Illustrating with both hands, Chin Shan replied, "Your eyes are bigger and you move them more than usual. You twist them around at that ceiling like a couple of pinwheels!"

Chien grinned. "How could my eyes be any bigger?" he asked teasingly.

"Sure they are. When a person gets thinner, his eyes look bigger."

Unconsciously, Chien rubbed his hand over his chin. "Hm, I *am* thinner," he said half to himself. "When did I start getting thinner?" he demanded.

"The day the 'Mop Up' began."

"Did all the men in our outfit lose weight?"

The boy thought a moment, then replied, "Some got darker, some got thinner. Some lost a little weight, some lost a lot. Some lost weight fast, some lost weight slow."

Chien was interested. "Who got dark and who got thin?" he persisted. "Who was fast and who was slow?"

"Hu-tse got darker but he didn't lose any weight. Nearly everyone else got thinner. You lost a little weight; Hsiao-san in the First Platoon lost a lot. Yi-ping got thin fast; Tieh-han got thin slow. . . . Am I right or wrong?"

Chien mulled over the boy's impressions. He was silent for a few minutes, then suddenly he asked, "Why aren't you any thinner?"

The young messenger drew himself up. "Because I'm not afraid!"

"Why aren't you?"

"Because the Communist Party is leading us!"

"Who do you think is a Communist?"

The boy was embarrassed at being questioned so closely, but he promptly pointed at Chien and retorted, "Anyhow, you're one!"

Chien grunted, then turned away and lapsed back into silence.

Finally, he got up and walked out, intending to have a talk with Tieh-han. But as he stepped into the courtyard, a little beggar boy of twelve or thirteen entered the gate. The boy noticed him before he had a chance

to get back out of sight. Seeing this man with a pistol strapped to his side, the boy ran up to him without the least hesitation and thrust out his hand.

"Eighth Route Army uncle, give me a corn muffin."

Chien patted his empty pockets. "See. I haven't any."

"How about a little rice then?"

"Who has rice?"

The child cocked his head to one side and smiled. "You've got some in your ration kit."

"We're district men. We don't have ration kits."

Sceptically, the child shook his head. "District troops don't wear leather belts. You're trying to fool me!"

Afraid that this chatter might attract the attention of some passer-by, Chien led the boy to the matshed and gave him a millet cake.

"Sit here and eat quietly. After you've finished, you're not to leave."

"I was worried that you'd want to send me away!" said the child with a grin.

The reply gave Chien an idea. He looked the youngster over. The child was thin, and not much higher than a table, with a round skull. He had unusually large eyes that bulged out like apricots, loving-cup ears, a snub nose, and lips that curled slightly inwards. His air was bold and mischievous, though chronic hunger had distended his abdomen like a landlord's pot-belly. Chien lightly tapped the swollen middle, and the child narrowed his eyes in a grin.

"No use banging on that thing. There's nothing in it but chaff."

Chien's affection for the child was growing by leaps and bounds. Squatting before him, he asked, "What's your name?"

"Little Tiger."

"How old are you?"

"Thirteen."

"With that name and by the look of him," commented one of the guerillas, "he's a hell-raiser for sure!"

"How many are there in your family?" Chien asked.

The child's hand holding the millet cake trembled, and he stopped chewing. A glazed look appeared in his big eyes.

"Well, how many are there? Your *tieh*, your *niang*? . . ."

The little boy began to sob, tears rolled from his eyes. Alarmed, Chien soothingly patted his head.

"Don't cry. What is it? If anyone's been bad to you, just tell uncle."

With a loud wail, the child threw himself on his knees and embraced Chien's legs. Chien was very upset. He hugged the little boy and whispered:

"You mustn't cry. People outside might hear you. . . ."

Guerillas came crowding around to see what was wrong. When the child stopped crying, they questioned him, and the whole story came out.

His father had been deputy mayor of a village. Somehow the Japanese found out that he was in the underground resistance and they came late one night and arrested him. They beat him half to death with sticks in his own courtyard, they tied him to a tree and finished him off with their bayonets. His house, they burned to the ground. The boy's mother took his month-old baby brother and fled to the city. The boy himself followed his grandmother, begging along the roads. Two months later, the old lady died of hunger. . . .

"Why haven't you thought of avenging your father?" Chien demanded.

"How can I?" retorted the child bitterly. "None of you want me!" He had twice applied to join different guerilla units, but each time had been rejected because of his size.

"Are you afraid of the Japanese or the Hirohito Helpers?" Chien queried.

The boy gritted his teeth. "No!"

"Do you dare take a close look at them?"

"Sure. I've done it lots of times."

"How would you like to join us?"

Little Tiger hastily rubbed the tears from his eyes. He laughed, speechless with joy.

XVI

By dawn the next morning, the guerillas had moved to the village of East Ting.

Although he hadn't slept all night, Chien remained awake, and he ordered the guerillas not to sleep either. As he read a letter just received from Hsueh Chiang, the battalion's deputy commissar, he glanced out of the window from time to time to observe the position of the sun. The letter was brief: "Regional headquarters reports that the big 'Mop Up' in Suchi County has ended. Captured documents reveal that the enemy will be sending troops to various districts in an effort to finish off the guerillas."

According to the man in whose house they were billeted, Japanese soldiers had passed the night before on the way to Talu from Yakouchai. There was no telling when they might come here today, or in what strength.

Clutching a rifle, Tieh-han paced excitedly back and forth in the room. He couldn't stand quietly, he couldn't sit still. He was aching for the enemy to attack.

"Just look at him," Kan Pa said in a stage whisper. "Like that day of the big 'Mop Up.' He's going to yell 'Charge!' any minute now!"

Even Tieh-han joined in the general laugh.

Little Tiger was at the south end of the village, apparently only concerned with begging from door to door. He took off his tunic to make a sack of it, and climbed a tree as though to pick tender young edible leaves. Actually, his big eyes never left the highways.

Suddenly he noticed a column of men approaching from Talu. He had counted up to one hundred and two when he turned and saw a large detachment of green-uniformed Hirohito Helpers marching from the other direction. They had nearly reached the village. He took a good look at them, then scampered as fast as his legs could carry him to report to the guerillas. But as he got to the crossroad in the centre of the village, another column of Hirohito Helpers marched across his path from the east. They were closely followed by a unit of Japanese. The rifle bolts of the Hirohito Helpers slid in loud unison at the sight of the racing boy, ramming bullets into firing position.

"What are you running for?" barked one of the puppets. "Come over here!"

Tightly holding the tree leaves wrapped in his tunic, Little Tiger approached him. "I'm afraid," he said timidly.

The puppet advanced a few steps. "What's there to be afraid of!" Little Tiger pointed behind him. Lowering his voice, he confided, "An Eighth Route Army outfit just circled past the south end of the village through the fields. They were all dressed in green uniforms. I hear they're the Guards Brigade!"

The puppets fell back in dismay. "The Eighth Route Army," cried a babel of voices. "Quick, take positions on the roofs!" There was a veritable storm of clicking rifle bolts.

No one paid any attention to Little Tiger in the confusion. He dashed through the narrow twisting alleyways toward the west side of the village.

The householder had already informed Chien that a column of green-uniformed troops were approaching from the direction of Yakouchai. If they weren't Hirohito Helpers, they were Japanese. The men were preparing for battle when Little Tiger came rushing in, and reported the details of all he had seen.

Chien decided they must leave at once, and head for the village of Huochia, by way of West Ting.

"You take the lead," Tieh-han suggested. "I'll cover the rear."

Chien agreed, and the guerillas set out. When they reached the open fields, they were spotted by the large detachment of Hirohito Helpers, who immediately opened fire. Tieh-han had the utmost contempt for these "clodhoppers." With five other guerillas, he deliberately slowed his pace until the puppets were only a hundred yards behind. Then the rear guard took shelter behind trees, and at Tieh-han's command, poured two volleys into the pursuing Hirohito Helpers. Two of the enemy were

hit. The remainder promptly flopped on the ground, not daring to advance any farther.

Tieh-han was delighted. "Aim straight," he crowed. "The minute one of them moves, let him have it!"

But then he heard the voice of Chien's orderly, Chin Shan, "The commander says you men are to hurry and catch up. Look how far behind you've fallen."

It was true. Tieh-han could see the guerillas already entering West Ting Village. He gathered his men and hastened after the main body. Before they got very far, Japanese to the east opened up on them with a machine-gun. Bullets whistled all around, mowing the green spring shoots in the fields. Alternately running and crawling, they finally managed to get out of range and enter the village.

But immediately, they were greeted by the sound of hotly popping rifles not far ahead. Tieh-han led his men rapidly forward, only to find themselves pinned down at the main street, running north and south, by enemy soldiers on the roofs. Chien and the main force of the guerillas had already dashed across, but now the enemy had the intersection sealed off.

"You're so casual," Chin Shan said to Tieh-han sulkily. "You took your own sweet time getting here, and now I've got to risk my neck again!"

Tieh-han made no reply, but his face hardened. The murderous rage that always filled him when he came to grips with the enemy was again rising in his breast. He poked his head out beyond the corner of a building and looked around. Then, signalling to the men behind him with his hand, he snapped:

"Follow me!"

The minute he stepped into the open, the enemy machine-gun at the intersection swept at him, kicking up showers of earth and chipped bricks.

Tieh-han and Chin Shan dashed across to the other side of the street. But two guerillas behind them were hit and went down. The remaining three ran back. Seeing that the men were not following him, Tieh-han broke into a cold sweat. He cupped his hands and shouted to them, but the infernal racket of rifles and machine-guns drowned out his voice. Very agitated, as soon as the enemy fire slackened a bit, he bounded back across the street. The three guerillas were hopelessly confused, but at the sight of Tieh-han, their eyes lit up again.

"Take it easy," he soothed. "It's all right. We'll go across one by one; don't try to dash over in a bunch. Move fast and stick close to the wall!"

They worked their way back to the intersection and one of the guerillas made a run for it. He was brought down in the middle of the street. Tieh-han groaned.

"Watch the way I do it," he ordered, "then you all do the same."

In a few quick zigzag steps he dashed to the opposite side of the street, ran along the wall, then plunged into the lane going west. Another guerilla, Chan Wei, followed and almost reached the west lane when he was hit in the leg. He continued to roll toward his objective. Chin Shan rushed out and dragged him to safety. The fourth man had just reached the centre of the intersection, when he too was shot down.

Moving from roof to roof, the Japanese closely trailed the remaining guerillas and flung grenades at them. His mouth clamped tight, Tieh-han threw three of his own grenades in quick succession, covering Chin Shan who was carrying Chan Wei on his back. It was at this moment, on a high rooftop at the western end of the lane, that the large sun-blackened figure of Hu-tse appeared. As though there were hundreds of men behind him instead of a mere few dozen, he roared fiercely.

"Forward! Charge! Take 'em alive!"

Crouching behind a decorative masonry frieze, he opened fire at the enemy with his big-nosed Czech rifle.

Chien had come back with the main force to relieve the besieged rear guard. The enemy was forced to give ground, and the survivors rejoined their unit.

XVII

Trotting in single file, the guerillas cut across the fields toward Huochia Village. The Japanese, following in close pursuit, sniped at them from time to time, and bullets kept flying by. Tieh-han, a shotgun in his left hand, Chan Wei's rifle slung across his back, gradually fell behind.

Today's attack by combined enemy units was part of a pre-arranged plan. Before the guerillas had barely left West Ting, about fifty puppet troops appeared from a village to the north. Observing that the guerillas were heading for Huochia, they ran in the same direction. Both units began a cross-country race to reach the cover of the village first.

But the puppets were closer to Huochia to begin with, and by the time Hu-tse and the advance guard were about a hundred yards from the village, the first of the Hirohito Helpers had already reached the outskirts and were beginning to climb to the roof of a house. Chien's heart sank within him. Suddenly, the door of a neighbouring house flew open, and a couple of hand grenades came sailing out. Their loud explosion was interspersed with cracking rifle fire. Taken completely by surprise, three of the puppets fell. The remaining five fled to the shelter of a nearby family cemetery.

"What outfit can they be?" cried Chien delightedly. "Those rifles of theirs bark really sharp!"

Three men sprang like tigers from the open door. With gleaming bayonets they charged through the smoke at the cemetery. The Hirohito

Helpers were so terrified they didn't even open fire, but fled pell-mell. Two, rooted to the spot with fear, were promptly dispatched.

Magnificent fighters! Chien thought to himself. He ran forward, waving his hand and shouting, "Comrades! What unit are you from?"

The first one, a strapping youth, called back, "Guards Brigade!"

The guerillas grinned at one another in astonished joy. "No wonder they're so terrific! And each of them has one of those fine .38 rifles!"

They crowded around the three armymen, and asking many affectionate questions, all entered the village together.

The leader of the three was called Hu Tsai-hsien. He had been in command of a platoon. By now, the Hirohito Helpers had reformed their ranks and joined forces with the Japanese, and Chien asked him, "Will you go along with us?"

"We'll go together," Hu replied. "We're all forces of the Communist Party, and we'll take our orders from you!"

Chien's heart pounded happily. He grasped Hu by the hand. "That's fine!"

Tieh-han, who had just caught up, gave his shotgun to Hu-tse, then approached the platoon leader with a beaming smile and shook hands with him.

"I saw it all from a distance. Aiya, it's easy to see that you're from our regular army. You're our big brothers all right!"

He raised his right arm to pat Hu on the back, but he could only lift it halfway. One of the guerillas noticed the blood on his arm and rushed forward with an alarmed shout.

"Tieh-han, you've been wounded!. . ."

"Don't make such a racket," Tieh-han hissed at him. "Do you want everyone to know!"

But now all the men had heard, and they quickly relieved him of his rifle.

Chien led the guerillas at a trot out of the western end of the village, chatting with Hu as they ran. The latter revealed that he and the other two Guardsmen had lost contact with their company during the day of the big "Mop Up," and thereafter had wandered about from place to place. During the day, they hid in people's homes, or in the grain fields, or on the tree platform of an orchard watchman. They had spent about three weeks that way, living on food the people gave them.

"Losing your outfit is like leaving home," said Hu. "You're on your own every minute."

By sunset, the guerillas were nearing the village of Two Wells. The Japanese didn't like being caught out in the open after dark, and they returned to their base.

Assembling the men in ranks, Chien personally checked the roll. Four had been killed. All the others were present except Little Tiger. Some-

one said he had probably gotten scared and run away; others thought he hadn't been able to keep up with the guerillas' fast pace.

But late at night he appeared, carrying a big rifle on his back. He had fallen behind at West Ting and hid in a courtyard when the fighting started. After the shooting stopped, he ran out into the street to see the Japanese chasing after the guerillas. He snatched up the rifle of a fallen comrade and scooted back to the courtyard. There he concealed it under a pile of stalks and pretended to busy himself feeding the pigs. After he was sure the Japanese had all left the village, he bound the rifle in a bundle of stalks and carried it with him. By inquiring from peasants along the way, he managed to trace the guerillas to Two Wells.

As Little Tiger finished his recital, Chien took both the child's hands in his own.

"You certainly are a big-eyed little tiger!" he said with smiling approval.

"He's a pop-eyed tiger, that's what he is!" chortled Kan Pa.

Everyone rocked with laughter. Little Tiger crinkled his eyes and smiled shyly.

From that day on, he was known to all as "Pop-eyed Tiger."

XVIII

During the night, Tieh-han and Chan Wei, the other wounded guerilla, were carried to the house of Tieh-han's *kan niang* in Machuang. Her face stained with tears, the old lady, with the help of her son San Sheng, hurriedly removed the crates and boxes from their small storeroom, swept it clean, covered the floor with straw, and spread bedding on top of that. After San Sheng gently carried in the two wounded men, the old lady covered them with a quilt and puffed up their pillows. Then she left them to cook some gruel.

Physically, Tieh-han was not uncomfortable, but he had a shamefaced look about him. "Being shot doesn't bother me," he explained to Chan Wei. "Fighting in the revolution, that could happen to anyone. The pity is losing those four comrades. It should never have happened."

He was silent for a while, then suddenly asked Chan Wei, "Don't you think it's a shame you were wounded this time?"

Chan Wei stared at him in amazement. "What are you talking about? We're fighting the Japanese. Even if I died it would be an honour. Why is it a shame?"

"That isn't what I mean," Tieh-han hastily explained. "I mean you shouldn't have been wounded today. It's all because I messed things up."

Chan Wei tried to comfort him. "Tieh-han, if you hadn't come back for us from the west lane, I might not be here now. I could see how worried you were about us—the way you rushed around!"

Tieh-han closed his eyes and slightly shook his head. "Rushed?" he said half to himself. "Too late!. . . Much too late!. . ."

There were three knocks on the back wall of the compound, a pause, and then three more. The old lady put down her fire poker, opened the gate and admitted Chieh-ying, head of the propaganda department of the district branch of the Communist Party. He chatted with Tieh-han, then examined his wound.

"We'd better get a doctor to take a look at this," Chieh-ying said with a frown. "It doesn't look so good to me."

"That's what I say," the old lady agreed fretfully. "But where are we going to find one? The guerillas don't have any. Ai! It's enough to drive a body frantic!"

Chieh-ying thought a moment. "Isn't there a Mr. Feng in this village who used to treat wounds? Didn't he graduate from some Peking medical school or other?"

Kan niang clapped her hands together. "How could I have forgotten him? I'm really getting old! I'll go and call him right now. I hear he's got surgical instruments too."

"Can he be trusted to keep his mouth shut?" Tieh-han demanded quickly.

Chieh-ying nodded. "He's all right."

"Talk to him privately," Tieh-han urged his *kan niang*. "I don't want my father to hear about this."

The old lady handed the fire poker to her little daughter Chu and told her to keep an eye on the gruel. Then she quietly went out of the gate.

After Tieh-han watched her go, he asked Chieh-ying about his landlord father. The propaganda chief's face became grim. Leaning close to Tieh-han he said softly:

"Didn't you go back to see him? As soon as you left, he got hold of Lao Wu and gave him the devil. He scared him so, Lao Wu's been afraid to come out of house to this day. Ever since we criticized your father at the district government, he's been going around all smiles. But in his heart, he hates us worse than before."

Chieh-ying warned Tieh-han to be very cautious, living in this village. Lately his father had taken up with a local rascal known as "String of Cash," and they drank and gambled together. Several times a month String of Cash went to the market fair in Japanese-held Yakouchai. Each time, he'd be gone all day. He frequently brought things back for Chou Yen-sung. The other day the landlord was heard quoting to String of Cash an axiom of ancient morality:

"There's nothing surprising in a father taking measures against an unfilial son."

Plainly, landlord Chou Yen-sung was in a frame of mind to betray his son to the enemy.

Tieh-han nodded.

The gate creaked, and the old lady came in with the doctor. Mr. Feng wore glasses and had on a white jacket. He carried a packet bound in white cloth, containing a scalpel, two pairs of pincers, a bottle of mercurochrome, and two pads of cotton. He examined Tieh-han's shoulder wound. It was quite a deep gash, about three inches wide. Mr. Feng's brows puckered in a frown and he clucked his tongue.

"I'm not so sure I can treat this," he muttered.

"It's all right," Tieh-han encouraged him. "If I die nobody will blame you. Go ahead!"

After long and painful probing, Mr. Feng managed to find a large bone splinter, but by then his hand was shaking so, he couldn't extract it. Tieh-han grasped the man's hand with his own, and with one yank brought out a piece of bone as big as a horse's tooth. Mercurochrome was applied, and the wound bound with cotton and clean cloth.

When Mr. Feng had finished treating Chan Wei's wound, Tieh-han asked him, "How long will it take me to get well?"

"A month or so, at the earliest, if you get plenty of rest and good food."

"What rotten luck! How can I wait that long?"

Mr. Feng's voice became gentle. "Don't think about anything else except getting well. I'm afraid even then you won't be able to go back to the troops."

"What are you saying!" Tieh-han stared at him.

"Nothing, nothing," Mr. Feng rejoined hastily. "You just get well. . . ."

"Mr. Feng," Tieh-han pleaded in great agitation, "whatever is on your mind—please say it! You bury the head and leave the tailing sticking out—if you don't want to drive me crazy, let me hear the whole thing!"

"It's nothing, really," Mr. Feng replied as calmly as he could. "I'm afraid your arm may be a little crippled. It all depends on your rest and nourishment. Maybe it will be all right."

The room immediately became still. The old lady looked distractedly from Tieh-han to the doctor. Chieh-ying lowered his head to avoid Tieh-han's gaze. San Sheng and Chu could only blink their eyes.

Pale, Tieh-han lay in shocked silence. Finally he asked, "You mean I won't be able to go back to the battalion?"

"Probably not. . . ."

Tieh-han stared out of the window. Two tears coursed down his cheeks. In frantic haste, he rubbed his face and stole a glance at the others.

I hope they didn't see me cry! he prayed. What a way for me to act!

XIX

During the next several weeks, the wounds of Tieh-han and Chan Wei gradually closed. San Sheng and Comrade Chieh-ying dug a pit in the floor of the west wing. The men hid there whenever the enemy came through Machuang. They were never discovered. Having this place of concealment, they felt no necessity to leave the village.

But secrets cannot be kept for long, and news of Tieh-han's presence eventually leaked out. One day, when the little girl Chu was acting as lookout on the street, String of Cash came along.

"Has your foster-brother left yet?" he asked casually.

Chu was only a child. Her mind didn't work very fast. "No," she replied, but at once realized she had made a slip.

"I don't have any foster-brother," she amended hastily. "I meant my brother San Sheng!"

String of Cash only grinned and departed.

The evening of the same day, Tieh-han's *kan niang* met his father, Chou Yen-sung, at the other end of the village. Looking black as a thundercloud, the landlord laughed coldly.

"Don't forget that seven dollars I gave you!" he snapped, and strode angrily away.

The old lady's hair stood on end. She hurriedly began walking home, her mind in a turmoil. What to do? Shall I tell?. . . No, no. He's still too strong in this village, the Japanese are all around us. . . . I'd be sure to lose. Aiyaya, what shall I do!. . .

She had only a narrow view of the general situation, and didn't realize how much times had already changed. When she returned home, she sat on the *kang*, sighing, unable to make up her mind. Chu had been intending to tell her about String of Cash, but when she saw her mother's miserable appearance, she didn't want to add to her worries. Her little heart was beating erratically.

Chieh-ying came back late from a meeting in another village. He went directly to the west wing and slept. The house was all dark, without a sound, but the old lady spent a restless, sleepless night.

The next morning, she got up very early and wakened Chu. She sent the little girl out to patrol the street while she herself lit the stove and began preparing breakfast.

Tieh-han was a habitual early riser, probably something he had learned in the guerillas since the day of the big "Mop Up." The enemy usually surrounded a village where it hoped to trap guerillas at dawn, the most difficult time of the day for the guerillas to operate. Tieh-han now always awoke before sunrise.

Today, he went out into the courtyard and listened. All was deathly still. He went quietly to the west wing and wakened Chieh-ying. They chatted a while in whispers. Suddenly, there was a drumming of run-

ning feet. Tieh-han quickly rose and strode into the courtyard. The gate was flung open, and Chu came flying in. Very frightened, she threw her arms around Tieh-han.

"Hide, quickly!" she urged. "The Japanese have us surrounded!..." She pulled him toward the west wing as she spoke.

"Surrounded us how? Talk clearly."

"They're on the streets, they're outside the village," said the little girl, panting breathlessly. "Some of them are on the roofs, coming right toward us!"

Tieh-han realized this was a well-planned attack with a definite objective. He could see it from the hopeless look in Chu's eyes. He pushed the child from him.

"Run away, fast! The pit won't do this time!"

By then Chieh-ying had rushed out of the west wing. Tieh-han grabbed him by the hand.

"We can't talk, we've got to get out of here!" He pulled Chieh-ying to the east side of the compound and stood with his back against the wall. "On to my shoulder and over the wall, quick!"

A rifle cracked outside the village and a bullet whistled overhead. Chieh-ying clambered on to Tieh-han's uninjured left shoulder and scaled the wall into the neighbouring compound. Supporting Chan Wei, San Sheng came hurrying out of the north wing. Tieh-han knew the guerilla couldn't climb with his leg injury. He grasped Chan Wei by the waist, and after much straining and effort, with the aid of San Sheng, heaved him to the top of the wall. From a rooftop opposite the compound gate, a rifle spat fire, and a bullet kicked up a flower of dust beside the guerilla. With a yell, Chan Wei rolled off the wall into the next compound.

Tieh-han then pulled San Sheng to the wall. "Up and over with you! There's still time!"

The youngster stood stubbornly. "No, you first!"

"How can you argue at a time like this!" Tieh-han was frantic. "Hurry!"

He reached out his hand to pull the boy, when the gate was smashed open and five Japanese charged in with gleaming bayonets. Tieh-han whirled to face them, by habit grabbing at his waist. But it was empty of any revolver or grenades.

A red-nosed fellow in a black uniform worn by Chinese traitors working for the Japanese stepped up. "You're Company Leader Tieh-han?"

Tieh-han stared at him coldly. "What if I am?"

Red Nose grinned. "Nothing at all. We're inviting you to come along only to make friends."

San Sheng placed himself in front of Tieh-han. "He's not Company Leader Tieh-han, he's my brother—"

With one punch Red Nose knocked the boy down, then kicked him

hard. A Japanese ran over and tied San Sheng's arms. Red Nose indicated the gate with both hands as he nodded to Tieh-han.

"If you please. We have a cart waiting for you."

Tieh-han was about to go, when a voice cried shrilly from the north wing, "You can't take him away! My son, he's a good boy! You mustn't take him away!" The old lady, her arms spread wide, her hair awry, came rushing out like a mad woman.

A Japanese soldier promptly kicked her to the ground. She got up and was kicked down a second time. Still she tried to rise. The soldier struck her savagely several times with his rifle butt.

"Tieh-han, Tieh-han!" she cried. "You mustn't leave me!"

"Don't worry, *kan niang*, I'll be all right," said Tieh-han. "I'll come back."

The old lady wrenched herself to her feet. "Tieh-han, my darling son! I'm not your *kan niang*—I'm your mother!"

For the third time the Japanese kicked her down.

"Staying here only makes things unpleasant," urged Red Nose. "It would be much better for everyone if you left right away."

"Good!" replied Tieh-han. "You know all about me, so let's go! A Communist doesn't shilly-shally around!"

Tieh-han was put on one cart, San Sheng on another, and the vehicles departed.

Outside the village, from the cart Tieh-han could see a black column of smoke rising from the village's northwest corner. The old lady's house had been set afire.

XXIII

Commander Chien and Deputy Commissar Hsueh Chiang held a meeting that lasted all day with the leaders of the Thirty-first Regional Regiment. They discussed strategy and how to co-ordinate the movements of the two units. The next day, they returned to the village of Huochia. Late that same night, Bowback led in Fu-lai and his group. Sobbing, Fu-lai reported in detail how Yi-ping and his men had been destroyed.

After directing Chin Shan to find quarters for the weary guerillas, Chien sat on the *kang*, his back against the wall, elbows on his drawn-up knees, supporting his face with his hands. He was sunk in thought. Hsueh Chiang paced the floor, smoking furiously. From time to time, involuntarily, he heaved a deep sigh.

The two young orderlies, Chin Shan and Yu-chu, sat on the edge of the *kang*. Whenever their eyes met, they quickly looked away. They didn't move, they made no sound. They even tried to breathe softly, as though fearful of waking a sleeping child.

The oil lamp on the table cast four flickering shadows on the wall.

Outside, no cock crowed, no dog barked, there was no breeze stirring the trees. The windows were pitch dark. Perhaps clouds were blacking out the stars. Several times Hsueh Chiang glanced at Chien, but the commander remained motionless, his chin on his hands, like a poverty-stricken peasant brooding that tomorrow there would be nothing to eat. A few times, the deputy commissar was about to speak to him, but stopped. He felt he shouldn't disturb Chien; let him think things out.

But finally, Hsueh Chiang couldn't restrain himself. He could see Chien's eyes glittering with tears.

"Snap out of it, old Chien," he said quietly. "The important thing now isn't to feel bad, but to think of how to learn from this lesson so that we won't make the same mistake again. Defeat is the mother of victory. Maybe after this we'll learn how to win our battles."

Chien wiped his eyes with his sleeve, but remained silent in his original position. After a long time, he straightened up.

"Bring me a basin of cold water," he said to Chin Shan.

When Chin Shan returned with the basin, Chien got off the *kang*, rolled up his sleeves, tucked in his collar, and scooped big handfuls of water on to his head. All the while, he savagely massaged his face, neck, ears, rubbed his eyes. Finally he dried himself with a towel and sat down on the *kang* beside a low table. Though the commander didn't stir, he looked restless.

Hsueh Chiang came and sat opposite him. Chien raised his head and gazed at the deputy commissar. He sighed.

"We only realize how valuable a lesson is after blood has been shed."

Hsueh Chiang waited for him to go on, and after a brief silence, Chien continued.

"I'm beginning to see now that I've made two big mistakes. In the first place, I've gone too far to the Right in planning how we should hold out. I've stressed keeping hidden, I've stressed not stirring up the enemy, making ourselves a small target. I haven't put any stress on fighting, on raids to keep the enemy off balance, on victories to raise our men's morale. My being too conservative encouraged the same thing in Yi-ping; it sent him into a blind alley. To this very moment, it's kept our troops in low spirits; they can't raise their heads. It's let the enemy act as wild as they like, with no fear of us at all. . . . I remember Tieh-han. Even though he was a little too reckless, still he was aggressive. He was against just hiding. He could see that if we only hid and never fought we'd be destroying ourselves. And I, well, I didn't pay much attention to his ideas then.

"My second mistake was that I let Yi-ping's faults slide. I was satisfied because, when not in combat, he showed up quite well. I never made a full appraisal of his petty-bourgeois weaknesses. The bad showing he made the day of the big 'Mop Up' I took as an accident that happened only because he was confused by the enemy being exceptionally

strong. Later, though I thought of relieving him of his post, I never took decisive action. As a result, I sent him and his men to their graves. . . . Sacrifices can't be avoided in a revolution, but their sacrifice was worthless. It was simply disgraceful, criminal!"

The deputy commissar looked at Chien's flushed face with respect and approval. Previously, he had only seen the silent, thoughtful side of the commander's nature. Chien had never been so agitated as he was today. He had not been very sure of himself in the past, but now he had changed. Even his voice sounded different. He seemed possessed of a new strength, a new clarity.

"It makes me happy to hear you talk like this," said Hsueh Chiang. "I think we're getting a lot from this talk of ours. Before, I wasn't too sure either of what we meant by 'oppose conservativeness.' What's happened is my fault as much as yours. But it isn't fixing the blame that matters—the point is that we've found the root. We can correct our mistake now. We can take the initiative, fight aggressively, and we'll lick the enemy. —That's our most precious harvest today."

Chien pondered. His mouth a straight line, he nodded. "All those times we were beaten!"

The deputy commissar knew that another man would have shouted and pounded the table. He knew too that the tragedy of Yi-ping and his men not only made Chien see his mistakes—it was a severe blow to his self-respect. Most leaders in the Eighth Route Army had that self-respect, especially Communist Party members. Any kind of defeat they considered their personal disgrace, a disgrace to the Party, a disgrace to the Eighth Route Army. Nearly every one of them felt such a disgrace was insufferable, and in their hearts they would take a vow, quite a simple vow—Revenge! Wipe out the shame! That is precisely what Chien was doing in his heart.

Chien took out a small notebook and opened it on the table. He hadn't looked at it in days—not since the "Mop Up" began. This was his record of enemy activity, the pattern of their movements, and his own plan of the guerillas' operations and daily schedule. Chien read it through from the beginning, then turned to a new page, wrote a few lines, and summoned his scouts—Bowback, Tsao and the Pop-eyed Tiger. Each of them reported what they had observed at enemy bases that day, while Chien took notes.

The deputy commissar transferred four men from the First to the Second Platoon. He made Hu, the platoon leader from the Guards Brigade, acting leader of the First Platoon. Erh-tung became acting leader of the Second Platoon. Mao-lin, former platoon leader in the Company Two, who had just recovered from his wound, had been assigned to the First District as a platoon leader. Hsueh Chiang also rearranged the distribution of the Party members, transferring some to the Second Platoon.

That night it was agreed that for the time being the battalion would not split up. What happened in the future would depend on the situation. The guerillas were delighted by the news that they would remain together.

XXIV

Tieh-han and San Sheng were brought to the Japanese-occupied base in Yakouchai and locked in a dark room for three days.

The company leader of the Japanese garrison troops was called Nozu. He looked like a bear, round, fat and savage. His arms seemed permanently bent at the elbows, pushed out by the curve of his fat sides. Even indoors, whether winter or summer, he wore high leather boots, a cartridge belt and a sabre, as though ready to go into battle at a moment's notice. Low hanging brows covered a pair of yellow baleful eyes. His sharp nose slanted up. You could see at a glance that he was arrogant and boastful, a vicious, treacherous brute.

Tieh-han's hard, unyielding air had irritated Nozu as soon as he saw him, and the Japanese decided to take measures to "put him in his place." At one end of a large room, Nozu had his desk, a huge affair with an imposing green glass top covering half its surface. All around the room were implements of torture—cudgels, branding irons, whips. . . . The floor was sprinkled with water, and the whole atmosphere was dank and gloomy. Two rows of puppet military police in black uniforms and several Japanese soldiers with fixed bayonets stood along the sides of the room. All in all, it would have compared well with any corner of Hell.

Nozu first sent for two "suspicious characters" who had been arrested in the countryside. Without asking a single question, he had them stripped and beaten into bloody pulps. Then, when they lay groaning on the floor, unable to move, he sent for Tieh-han. His arms tied behind his back, the guerilla was led in.

As Tieh-han entered he felt as if enveloped by a dark wind. In spite of himself his hair stood on end. Standing in the middle of the room, he looked around. He observed the poor moaning peasants on the floor, he saw the flinty face of the bear-like Japanese behind the desk. So there's really a Hell on earth! he mused.

The Japanese waited until Tieh-han had completed his inspection, then began to question him in broken Chinese.

"You, what unit have?"

Tieh-han stared at him but made no answer. He knows very well I'm Eighth Route Army, Tieh-han said to himself.

"Quit stalling," said a black-uniformed puppet. "You're in the Eighth Route Army, aren't you?"

"If you know, why ask me?" Tieh-han retorted.

Nozu looked at him and wrote something down on a sheet of paper, then asked his name, his age, his village. Tieh-han answered all these questions truthfully.

"Are you a Communist?"

Tieh-han stood straighter. "Of course!" he replied loudly.

Again Nozu looked at him, and made a note. Then the Japanese asked how many men remained in the Ningchin County battalion, where did they usually operate?

The guerilla's eyes narrowed as he pondered, but he couldn't think of any satisfactory answer. Finally he smiled and shook his head.

"I don't know."

How many rifles do you have? How much ammunition? What is your method of operation?

"I don't know."

Who are the leaders? What other troops are there in Ningchin County? Where is the Guards Brigade now?

Tieh-han still shook his head. "I don't know."

Nozu leaped from behind his desk and strode noisily up to Tieh-han. But when he saw the rocky solidity of the guerilla's body and the stiff determination of his face, the Japanese stepped back two paces. He grasped the handle of his sabre, his yellow eyes gleaming cruelly.

"What *do* know?"

Relaxed and silent, Tieh-han stood looking at Nozu, as though watching a play. What are you going to do about it, you stupid oaf! thought Tieh-han.

Nozu waved his hand. Four men with long sticks immediately surrounded Tieh-han, and one began to strike him on the buttocks. No matter which way he turned, he was exposed to one of the stick wielders. Realizing this, Tieh-han stood still, clenching his teeth. Soon, his buttocks felt wet and his legs became numb. He fell to the ground.

With another motion of the hand, Nozu stopped his men. Then he walked up to Tieh-han and told him—this was the lightest of all the tortures. He pointed at the other implements lining the room as if to ask, "Will you be able to stand them?" Tieh-han rose to his feet. He nodded, plainly meaning, "Do your worst!"

More questions, and to all—"I don't know." Then, another signal from Nozu. Five military police rushed at Tieh-han and forced him to his knees. They put a log across the backs of his knees and a man stood on each end of it. Perspiration poured from the guerilla like rain.

"Will you talk?" barked Nozu.

"No!"

Another man stepped on to each end of the log. Tieh-han thought his legs were breaking. The pain ran up through his abdomen, through his heart, to the top of his head. The arteries in his temples were pounding to the bursting point. He noticed the two peasants lying on

the floor, trembling like sheep in a slaughter-house. Their tortured eyes seemed to be asking him, "Can you stand it?" Wrenching his head away from them, his gaze fell on Nozu. The Japanese was standing before him with legs spread apart, squinting at him gleefully. Where had he seen that look, that air, before? Was it the way his landlord father looked at his hired hands? Or the sneer the proprietor of a big shop had for an impoverished customer? Or was it the attitude of the overseer in the enemy-held coal mine to the Chinese slave-workers? A fury rose in Tieh-han's heart. How can I humble myself before a swine like that? he thought. Can I plead for mercy with his kind? I couldn't be so low, so craven! He clamped his lips tight and shook his head. There were now six men on the log. Tieh-han's head swam, and he slipped into unconsciousness.

On three different occasions they tortured him, and three times he passed out. Once, they strung him by his thumbs from a rafter. When he revived from this torment, his right arm felt heavy and swollen, and burned like fire. His wound had opened again.

XXV

Finding he could get nothing out of Tieh-han, a few nights later Nozu sent for San Sheng.

Although San Sheng was already eighteen, he had never been away from home. Since childhood he had worked together with his mother in the fields, together with her he suffered privation. He had never quarrelled with anyone, never cursed anyone. From his mother he inherited a good disposition and a warm heart. Even now, he still couldn't understand why there was so much injustice in the world, why the Japanese were so bent on coming to China to murder, burn and pillage. Why had they treated Tieh-han so cruelly? The boy was so innocent he didn't even feel vengeful.

Each time Tieh-han was taken away, the boy's heart was in his mouth. He waited for him, longed for him, prayed that he would come back quickly. But each time Tieh-han was carried back, it was in a torn and lacerated condition, more dead than alive. San Sheng tried to keep himself under control, but finally he broke down and wept in despair. As he tried to ease Tieh-han's bleeding wounds, with tears rolling down his cheeks, he demanded:

"Aren't they human? Why are they so savage?"

And Tieh-han replied, "Because we're good people!"

San Sheng's reactions worried Tieh-han. He had always felt the boy was too "soft." He remembered how San Sheng had suffered for him when the doctor was probing his wound for that bone splinter. Now he was crying because the Japanese were torturing him, Tieh-han, cruelly. These were all signs of "weakness," and weaklings were useless things!

From the day they had been captured together, Tieh-han had wondered whether the Japanese wouldn't be able to force something out of the boy. He spoke to San Sheng a great deal, teaching him how to answer the enemy's question, how to clench his teeth, telling him how a man ought to live—and die.

"Some people," Tieh-han had explained, "though they're still alive, are the same as dead in everybody's eyes. Others, though they've died, we think of as still living. We want to be like those people—the kind who live forever!"

Several times he told San Sheng the story of Chang, the squad leader who had blown up himself and his enemy captors with a concealed hand grenade. He wanted the boy to remember always this deathless hero!

San Sheng truly learned these lessons well.

In the middle of the night San Sheng was carried back to the dark room. He was unconscious and covered with blood. Tieh-han held the boy gently in his arms and massaged his chest. San Sheng finally groaned a few times, then opened his eyes wide, staring at Tieh-han. For several minutes, Tieh-han looked at him in silence.

"Did you say anything?"

"Yes."

"What did you say?"

"What you told me."

"Anything else?"

"Not a word."

Tieh-han sighed with relief and hugged the boy tighter, rocking slightly back and forth.

"Good, good...!"

Hot tears gushed to San Sheng's eyes. "...and to think," he sobbed, "you had to take such punishment four times...."

The prisoners stood fast in refusing to divulge anything to the enemy.

Hashimoto, garrison commander in the city, felt the matter was dragging out too long. He wrote a letter to Nozu instructing him to deliver the two prisoners to him. Nozu hesitated. He was ambitious, and thought he would be losing face before his superiors if he had to admit he failed to make his prisoners talk. It would be throwing away the chance for a promotion to give the guerillas up under such circumstances, especially Tieh-han. Nozu decided to make one final attempt on Tieh-han that night.

After midnight, the guerilla was again brought into the large room. Flickering candlelight, reflecting off the glass-topped desk, shone green on Nozu's face. At both ends of the room, Japanese with fixed bayonets stood stiffly in full battle array, staring at Tieh-han. The atmosphere was menacing, dreadful.

Nozu rapped his desk impatiently. "I give you three minutes. Think it over!" He launched into a recital of how there were only two

roads open to Tieh-han. One was to tell the truth and the benevolent Imperial Army would forgive all and give him a high position. The other was to die—tonight!

The Japanese was sure that this would terrify the guerilla, but he was surprised to see that Tieh-han didn't even blanch. Instead, the prisoner only smiled calmly and replied in a clear voice:

"Just because you yourself are afraid to die, don't think that Communists are cowards too! I thought it all over the time you nabbed me. What else is there to think about? You've got me. If you're going to kill me, let's go!"

Nozu hadn't dreamed his farce would fail so miserably, but he still clung to a thread of hope. At his signal, the soldiers marched Tieh-han away.

It was a dark, moonless night. Tieh-han could barely see the man walking in front of him. They went around a ruined temple and stopped. Nozu turned on his flashlight. There before him, Tieh-han saw a dark, scummy pit, filled with refuse. Besides some rotten scallions lay a dead cat. A black-uniformed Chinese puppet addressed Tieh-han in a voice that dripped pity.

"Do you think this is a good place to die?"

"It's fine."

"But isn't it a waste to throw your life away like this?"

Tieh-han spun toward him. "You filthy pig! Whether I live or die, I don't want anything to do with you dirty traitor bastards!"

But the man was shameless. "Ai, friend," he wheedled, "the Communist Party isn't your mother. If you die, it won't cry for you. In the end, it's your mother who'll cry! Why throw your life away? Nobody will even know about it if you die here today, no one's heart will ache for you. Give in a little. I can snatch you back from the gates of Hell with one wave of my hand. You can have honours, position, comforts...."

Exploding with rage, Tieh-han lunged at the puppet, but the soldiers pulled him back. Tieh-han stamped his feet.

"Dog of a traitor! The day will come when the people will gnaw your bones!"

"All right," said the puppet with an inane giggle, "have it your way!"

Behind Tieh-han, there was a metallic sliding of rifle bolts as bullets were pushed into firing position. The guns were aimed at the back of the guerilla's head.

The night was crushingly dark and silent. Tieh-han stood straight, his head raised, his mouth clamped tight. For about half a minute there was no sound. Then a voice shouted:

"Will you talk or won't you?"

Without turning around, Tieh-han yelled a reply.

"Forget it! I know everything but I won't tell you anything!"

Several rifles barked in loud unison. Golden sparks danced before his eyes and Tieh-han fell into the pit.

But he was lifted out again. The Japanese had fired into the air.

They brought him back to the prison and again locked him in the dark room.

XXVI

A truck stopped at the door of the dark room the next morning, and Tieh-han and San Sheng were loaded on board. Several Japanese soldiers also got in. Then the truck, its engine whining, started to roll.

Leaving a trail of swirling dust behind it, the truck flew along the road. Fortified watchtowers, villages, one after another flashed past. The autumn weather was cool, and the men on the truck instinctively huddled closer together. As they approached Talu, San Sheng and Tieh-han craned their necks to look toward the northwest. Beyond the irrigation treadmills dotting the plain, beyond the orchards with the watchmen's shacks that looked like pillboxes, on the edge of the green carpet of wheat fields they could see flat earthen-roofed houses half-concealed by trees decked with green and yellow leaves. Their home village —Machuang!

San Sheng thought of his old mother, and tears swam in his eyes. How he longed for her! She probably was frantic with worry about them. If he could only comfort her!

Tieh-han thought first of his dear comrades—silent and stern Commander Chien, the deputy commissar—so open-hearted and acute, big Hu-tse, the delicate Hsiao-san.... It was in this very network of little villages, on this endless plain, that they had sported about like fish, free and easy. They were happy all the livelong day! Of course, they had their sad moments too. Now, for instance, the men must be worried about me, mused Tieh-han. But they're sure to be thinking also of how to avenge me. Huh! Those Japanese tried to scare me into giving them away. I'd sooner tear my heart out!

Entering Ningchin through the east gate of the city wall, the truck stopped at the gate of the Japanese military police compound. The two guerillas were led to a cell and pushed in.

The enemy occupied one-storey buildings arranged in a hollow square. The west wing had been converted into a jail by fitting its doors and windows with strong wooden bars. At the south end of the courtyard, there was a latrine. The big north wing was occupied by a garrison company which looked after the prisoners.

When the guerillas were shoved in through the barred door, in the shadows, they saw many men lying on the floor. All had long unkempt hair, weary eyes, cords standing out in their skinny necks.

One man sat up and offered to share the thin quilt on which he had been lying. He patted the ground.

"Sit down and let's talk."

Tieh-han, who had been looking around at his new surroundings, nodded and sat beside the man, indicating to San Sheng to do the same.

The man told them that there were a total of eighteen prisoners, mostly people working in anti-Japanese village and district governments. Five were captured fighters, two of whom were wounded Guards Brigade soldiers. The latter were lying near the door, groaning every time they rolled over. The one with the thigh wound was called Hei Tsang; the one with a bullet in his groin was known as "Iron Hammer."

The next morning, Tieh-han was led by four Japanese soldiers to a large hall. It reminded him of his father's dining hall. The only difference was that the big table was in the centre of the room instead of near the side, and was surrounded by four armchairs instead of two. Otherwise the room had the same air of luxury and pomp.

A swarthy, fat Chinese of about forty came forward and greeted Tieh-han with a smile, very courteously insisting that he sit in one of the armchairs. On the other side of the table sat a little old man. He had a small black mustache and wore black-rimmed glasses. He was clothed in an expensive uniform of light green. Although a Japanese, to Tieh-han there was something very Chinese about him.

Tieh-han sat down and silently waited. The fat Chinese waved the soldiers away, then leaning forward politely, made the introductions.

"I'm Kuo Yun-feng, deputy commander of the county garrison. This Japanese gentleman is His Excellency Major Hashimoto. Please don't have any misapprehensions, Company Leader Tieh-han. We invited you here today because we heard you were badly treated at Yakouchai. We've prepared a small banquet to calm your fears."

Kuo glanced at Hashimoto who cordially but majestically nodded. Tieh-han was startled. These were dangerous opponents. One was the most notorious traitor in the entire county. The other was the poisonous, crafty Japanese garrison major. What were they up to? Tieh-han took a grip on himself and doubled his caution.

A great array of tasty food was spread upon the table—chicken and fish and meat and wine, and many delicious-smelling dishes that Tieh-han had never seen before. Respectfully placing a filled bumper of wine before Tieh-han, Kuo urged him to start.

"Rest assured, today we will not say a word about business. Relax and enjoy yourself, please!"

Fatty Kuo raised his own cup and drained it in three gulps.

Who's afraid? Tieh-han said to himself. If we're going to eat, then let's eat! He drank down his wine without a breath, then took up his chopsticks. He ate calmly and steadily, not looking at his hosts, ignoring

their existence. When Fatty placed a second filled wine cup before him, Tieh-han glanced at the puppet but left the cup untouched.

After consuming a huge quantity of food, Tieh-han, satiated, put down his chopsticks and sat back with his hands on his hips. Only then did Hashimoto speak. He told Tieh-han to think only of one thing—curing his wound; forget about everything else.

"I, although officer of great Japan," Hashimoto repeatedly assured him, "like make Chinese good friends. Please worry of nothing. Brain think of nothing."

Tieh-han was escorted back to his cell.

Thereafter, a doctor came and dressed his wound every day. When the weather turned cold, he was given warm clothes and bedding. The Hirohito Helpers who served as jailors treated him with respect. Other prisoners were only allowed two trips a day to the latrine. Tieh-han could go whenever he liked. And the puppets never failed to address him by his proper title. It was "Company Leader" every time they opened their mouths.

XXXII

Tieh-han's wound gradually healed. With his care, other injured prisoners also improved.

The small but continuous victories of the guerillas were a sore trial to the Japanese. They would have liked nothing better than to hack Tieh-han open and rip from him the information they wanted. But Hashimoto was a careful, methodical sort. He knew that haste would solve nothing, and he waited patiently for Tieh-han to change. Several times, he and the puppet Fatty Kuo sent for Tieh-han, and after a few ordinary remarks let him return to his cell. At each interview, they told him he had nothing to worry about. Then, one day, watching his face closely, they informed him of various "defeats" of the Eighth Route Army. They tried to sound convincing, even sympathetic. Tieh-han made no reply. Once he knew what they were up to, their voices became no more than the buzzing of flies. He was interested only in the job he had to do—play for time and lead the prisoners in a struggle against the enemy.

It was now the end of the year. Tieh-han's wound had closed and formed a scar. The Japanese felt the time was ripe for their next trick. Again Tieh-han was brought into the plush room that so resembled his father's parlour.

Again the table was spread with a banquet, even more lavish than the previous one. After they all were seated, Tieh-han drank only one cup of wine as before, then fell to gorging himself. But this time when the table was cleared, they did not let him leave immediately. Fatty, a cigarette dangling from his lips, began pacing the floor. After a few turns, he launched into a long rumbling speech, starting two thousand

years back in Chinese history and gradually working his way up to Wang Ching-wei, who had sold out to the Japanese and was then the head of the puppet government in Nanking. Then he spoke a while about Chiang Kai-shek. Finally, he got around to the guerilla battalion of Ningchin County. He had always admired its valour and skill, he said. Company Leader Tieh-han had especially aroused his respect.... Here he began a discussion of human feelings, friendship....

Watching the puppet pace back and forth, Tieh-han was puzzled. What made them so patient? They seemed to have all the time in the world. Wasn't time worth anything to them? Tieh-han wanted to laugh. That fat Kuo was as stupid as they come, and he was trying hard to put on an act. His speech was obviously carefully prepared, but he pretended to think before every phrase he uttered. Especially ludicrous was the way he glanced at Tieh-han each time he completed a circuit of his floor-pacing; the rest of the time he rattled on as if spouting a memorized recitation, unconcerned whether his audience was listening or not.

One hour passed. Two hours....

All at once, Tieh-han realized what they were driving at. They wanted to corrupt him! They were insulting him! What hateful dogs! He burned with rage. Let them talk!

Kuo completed his litany. With a broad smile, he came and stood before Tieh-han.

"I suppose you were able to get most of my meaning?"

Tieh-han gave a short snort of laughter. "I got it."

The fat puppet looked at Hashimoto, who nodded.

"I'm glad you have understood me," Kuo went on. "We have invited you here today, Company Leader Tieh-han, to find you a suitable post. There's a lieutenant's job open in our military police, and we need a staff officer in our garrison headquarters. Or perhaps our Fifth Company—it has no captain. Which do you think...?"

Tieh-han's head snapped up. "What!"

The gleam in Tieh-han's eyes frightened Kuo, and he involuntarily fell back a pace. But he again immediately masked his face in a smile.

"Please tell us frankly what's on your mind, commander."

Tieh-han stood up abruptly and pointed his finger at the fat puppet. "I'll tell you what I'm thinking! I'm thinking that you ought to stop being a traitor! Stop licking the backside of the Japanese! Remember that you're a Chinese! Don't cut the hearts out of your father and mother and put them on sale!"

Kuo's face turned purple, his eyebrows came together, his right hand tightly clutched his left wrist. He seemed ready to explode. But then he observed Hashimoto, and he frowned. After a moment, he recovered his control. Once more he smiled.

"You shouldn't be too emotional. 'One extreme is as bad as another' you know. To preserve face, one should go only just so far and no farther.

True, at Yakouchai, you were badly treated, your wound became infected again. We feel very apologetic about that." (The puppet struck a regretful pose.) "In the past, we were bitter enemies. Today, our side is willing to forget past hatreds and make you an official. This is being benevolent to the extreme." (Kuo made a gesture of taking all mankind to his bosom.) "You have probably heard—I too am a brave fellow. I love courage, friendship. The reason I'm so anxious to keep you with us is precisely because you're so bold." (Here Fatty looked as if he would swoon for his courteous devotion to men of genius.) "But this is not out of weakness. Ningchin County is in the palm of my hand. I have only to say the word and heads would roll! No one would dare to stop me!" (The puppet exuded an air of intrepid courage.) "Company Leader Tieh-han, you have been bewitched by the Eighth Route Army. Chiang Kai-shek and his Central Government Army have run far, far away. How can you people stand up against us? The Guards Brigade is hiding from us in the mountains. The Communist Party had been forced underground. Your Commander Chien is only a clumsy amateur. In daylight hours, you guerillas don't dare to even breathe too loud. You're all...."

Crash! The elaborate table spun over, its legs in the air. Tieh-han stood with clenched fists, his eyes flashing murderous fire.

"Shut your stinking mouth, Kuo! Some people don't live for bribes or position. I'm not a pig. Don't compare your dirty heart with mine! Your dog's eyes must be blind to try and sell me a bill of goods like that!"

Hashimoto had also stood up. In two quick steps he strode over to Tieh-han.

"You, too wild!..."

Tieh-han spat in his face.

Squawking loudly, the Japanese scurried behind a chair. At Kuo's signal, three military policemen entered, righted the table and placed on it a generator with a crank and two electric wires. Kuo slapped the machine with his hand, and his eyes went ugly.

"I'm giving you your last chance. Tell us all about the Ningchin battalion in the next two minutes, or else—this!" Again Fatty slapped the generator.

To Tieh-han, the insults he and his Party and his guerillas had received were worse than any torture. He stood proudly.

"Come on. We don't have to wait two minutes!"

They seized him and affixed one wire to his head, the other to his feet. The crank squeaked, and Tieh-han felt agonizing pain running through every part of his body. He fell fainting to the ground.

Kuo laughed. "Speak. A man of iron can't take this!" But seeing the inflexible look on Tieh-han's face, he could only signal again.

Again the generator whined. Tieh-han trembled violently and became unconscious.

The military policemen revived him and stood him against the table.

"What about it?" demanded Kuo.

"You filthy traitor son of a bitch," grated Tieh-han. "The people will never forgive you!"

The puppet's arms twitched. His patience completely exhausted, he slowly approached Tieh-han. All his rage had mounted to his fat face. He laughed savagely, determined to avenge the abuse Tieh-han had heaped upon him.

"Your bones may be tough, but they're not made of steel. Even if they are steel I'll melt 'em! You came through this once, but what about ten times, twenty times? All right!"

He waved his hand. The military police again pulled Tieh-han to the generator. Kuo pressed his face close to Tieh-han's.

"Are you going to listen to me? Or will you listen to this machine?"

Whether I pull my neck in or stick it out, either way I'm going to get the axe, Tieh-han thought to himself. Anyhow I'm going to die today. Why should I be the only one on the receiving end?

He drew back his left fist and swung it like a sledge-hammer against the puppet's jaw. His right crashed home an instant later. But before he could strike again, the police grabbed him and affixed the electric wires. This time Kuo personally turned the crank. The generator whined fiercely. Tieh-han slumped into darkness.

When he awoke, he was lying in the cell. It was already well into the night. His body ached as though he had been beaten. Though he bore no mark or wound, he felt exhausted. He immediately fell asleep again.

XXXIII

Several days later, in the latrine, Tieh-han spied something shining half-buried in the ground. He dug around it with his fingers and unearthed a two-inch nail. Glancing around to make sure he was unobserved, he picked it up and slipped it into his shoe.

He looked forward to nightfall more eagerly than usual that day. When darkness came at last, holding the head of the nail with the edge of his coat, he began scratching at the dried mud filler between the bricks of the cell's wall. So quietly did he work that the sound was audible to him alone. By midnight, the men were asleep and snoring. Every so often a Hirohito Helper would peer in through the grating, turning his flashlight on all corners of the room. Tieh-han would immediately drop his head and pretend to be sleeping, seated against the wall. But the moment the light was extinguished, the quiet scratching began again.

This was the happiest night Tieh-han had ever spent in the jail. By the time the cocks had crowed the second time, he shoved the brick. It moved a little. A few more minutes of scratching, and he lightly with-

drew the brick from the wall. His heart beating wildly, he put his hand in the opening. It was cool and damp. He nearly cried for joy. Gently, he replaced the brick, then crawled over to Liu Chen-sheng, wakened him and told him the exciting news. Chen-sheng was a member of a district Party Committee. He had been captured earlier than Tieh-han.

The two whispered animatedly. It was nearly dawn.

"Though we have hope now," Tieh-han said, "we mustn't get rash and give the game away. That would ruin everything."

"But we can't be too slow either," Chen-sheng warned. "We never know what tomorrow will bring. Speed is the best policy!"

Tieh-han nodded. The other two Party members were awakened and all four immediately conferred. There was a total of seventeen prisoners in the jail, including themselves. They decided to divide into four groups with one Communist organizing each group. After the groups were organized, Tieh-han would give over-all direction. Digging would go on during the daylight hours too.

The stars gradually faded from the sky. The room was becoming light. Wakening the other prisoners, the Communists formed their four groups. Now the whole room knew the thrilling news. Tieh-han was looked upon as a saviour. The men listened to his every word.

Tieh-han numbered the groups One, Two, Three and Four. He ordered the men of group One to take turns at the digging first, with group Two watching at the door and window. The latter would cough if any one approached. Groups Three and Four would rest while awaiting their turns. In this way, they could work fairly boldly even during the day.

The spirits of the men soared. No one could think of sleep. The soft scratching sound continued. But it stopped as soon as there was a cough at the door or window, and the man digging would sit against the wall and pretend to sleep, the nail hidden beneath his backside. Or another man would immediately sit beside him, and the two would engage in idle chatter. At a signal from the watcher, the nail would reappear and the quiet scratching would resume.

Deeper and deeper dug the nail into the filler between the bricks.

In the course of a whole day, three bricks were removed. The larger the hole, the easier it was to work. By the second cock's crow of the second day, the wall had been dug completely through. Only another four or five bricks had to be removed and a man would be able to squeeze through the opening. The suspense had the prisoners all on edge. Their hearts were beating violently.

"Finish and let's make a dash for it right now," said one.

"Right," chimed in a couple of others. "It's almost daybreak. Let's push through!"

"No, no," Tieh-han intervened hastily. "That won't do. Don't be in such a hurry. What if you can't get away and they bring you back here again?"

"Why worry about that?" said another prisoner. "At least a few of us will escape! Who knows what may happen tomorrow?"

Tieh-han thought a moment. Then he said firmly, "Nobody's going to run. If we get disorganized we're sure to lose out."

"That's right," said Chen-sheng. "We've got to keep calm and think things through clearly. Every man is going to have his chance to escape. If we go rushing around in all directions, the enemy is going to notice, and that will be bad. This is the worst hour of the day to make a break. It's going to be dawn soon, just when the sentries look their sharpest. Besides, we don't know our way around this city. After you get out of here, where will you go? How are you going to get over the city wall?"

"Sure," Tieh-han agreed. "If we don't solve these questions, we won't get away. We've been through a lot of hard times together. Now that we've come to the pay-off, we can't have each man thinking only about himself. If we're going to escape, we've got to figure out how we can all escape together."

Shuang Lai and Hei Tsang, the other two Communists, supported him. "Nobody should be getting any ideas of his own," they urged. "Let's all take our orders from Tieh-han. Whatever he tells us to do—let's do!"

"I'm in charge here," Tieh-han's low voice was emphatic. "The way I look at it is this: In a little while it'll be daylight. Even if we leave the jail, we won't be able to get out of the city. They'll grab us one by one and bring us back. So I've decided not to finish widening the hole now. Put the bricks back in place. During the day we'll make our plans. When night comes we'll make the break. All right, that's the way it's going to be!"

The impatient prisoners said no more. They returned to their beds and lay down.

Chen-sheng replaced the bricks and directed a man to sit leaning against them. He knew Tieh-han hadn't slept for twenty-four hours and urged him to rest. Chen-sheng promised to circulate among the men and try to find someone who knew the city well to serve as a guide.

Daylight came, but Tieh-han was unable to sleep. He tossed and turned, his mind racing. Thinking of the future, he burned with excitement. Recalling the past, he felt fearfully cold. Especially what had just occurred seemed to him frightening and dangerous beyond words! If they had really pushed through the wall and run pell-mell in all directions, the enemy surely would have nabbed them. At most one or two who knew the city might have escaped. But a chance like this was all too rare! If they didn't succeed the first time, there'd never be a second! Tieh-han decided he must establish some rules of discipline. Without discipline, it would be hard to preserve unity, to avoid making mistake.

A gust of cold wind, blowing in through the open window, ate into

the men's bones. Tieh-han shivered. Several men under a common quilt tried to adjust it more snugly around their bodies. But it was too small to cover them all, or to withstand being tugged in several directions at the same time. It suddenly split a foot and a half down the middle, exposing its greyish cotton padding. Looking up at the ripping sound, Tieh-han was struck by an idea. Wouldn't they need a rope to scale the city wall? —And couldn't the quilt cover be woven into a rope!

XXXIV

Whether it was because he was so tired, or because he had calmed down somewhat, Tieh-han finally fell asleep. He slept until dusk, then awoke with a start.

After the evening meal was finished it was already dark. Though no one spoke, the room was filled with sound of quick, excited breathing. Men were drumming their fingers nervously on the ground where they sat. There was tension in every cough. Tieh-han watched the sentry in the courtyard, then posted a man by the door to serve as lookout. The prisoners sat in a close ring beside the wall, a quilt covering their feet, while Tieh-han solemnly proclaimed three rules:

"One—Everyone must obey orders. We're an army now. The soldiers must listen to the group leaders, the group leaders must take their orders from the commander. Two—Whether in leaving the jail or scaling the city wall, no one is allowed to dash off on his own. Three—All secrets must be strictly kept. . . ."

A hush fell on the room. It was as though pieces of iron in a furnace were blending into one solid chunk of steel.

Chen-sheng had found a guide. In Shuang Lai's group was a man who had been an underground contact in the city for nearly three years. His name was Lien Chu and he was very familiar with the city's streets, fortifications and sentry posts. Tieh-han was delighted. He put the prisoners to ripping up the four quilts under cover of darkness and weaving the strips into rope. At the same time, he carefully discussed with Lien every inch of the escape route, how to avoid the enemy sentry posts, where to scale the city wall, how to get through the martial law zone surrounding the city. . . .

By midnight, the jail-break plan was settled. A thirty-foot rope had been woven from the quilts. Tieh-han announced the final disposition of the groups. He would command group One. Lien, the guide, would go with him. Hei Tsang and three other men would constitute group Two and follow next. Behind them would be Shuang Lai and his three men. Group Four, with Chen-sheng and his three men, would cover the rear. Again Tieh-han reminded them—from the time they left the jail even till after they got beyond the city wall, everything had to be done

in the same sequence. Anyone who violated the orderly procedure would be punished according to the rules of discipline.

Everything was ready! Slowly, the last few bricks in the hole were removed. Tieh-han waited until the guards were changed again, then gave the signal. He went through first. Standing up, he found himself in a kitchen. In the light of a dim lamp he saw a vegetable knife lying on a table. Tieh-han bounded across the room and picked it up. He told Lien, who had come in behind him, to pass the word that no one was to leave the courtyard, and that all should quickly search the rooms for things with which to arm themselves. Tieh-han then plunged into the adjoining room. On the *kang* an old man and two women were sleeping. Tieh-han shook the old man awake and waved the blade threateningly before his eyes.

"Don't move!"

Dazed, the old man wondered whether he was still dreaming.

"Don't be afraid. We're Eighth Route Army men rescuing prisoners from the jail. We're not going to hurt you or take anything from you. But we will have to put you to a little trouble."

Tieh-han directed Hei Tsang and three other men to bind and gag the old man and the two women, and leave them on the *kang*. Putting his mouth close to the old man's ear, Tieh-han whispered:

"You'll be uncomfortable, but this way it's better for you. When the Japanese come tomorrow they won't think that you were in league with us."

By now all the prisoners had crept through the hole and had armed themselves with sticks, crowbars and shovels that they found about the house. Tieh-han opened the compound gate. With Lien in the lead as guide, the escaped prisoners slipped into a narrow lane. Staying close to the walls, they twisted and turned through innumerable passageways until they finally reached a pool behind a large temple. There Lien halted and pointed at the city wall rearing up before them.

"This is the northwest corner," he said to Tieh-han. "You see—we follow that path to the ramp. At the top of the ramp is a small blockhouse manned by local conscripts. The two big tower fortresses on either side further along the wall are both full of Hirohito Helpers. If the men in the blockhouse see a bunch this size coming toward them, they're liable to start yelling and rouse the towers. Then we'll really be in a fix!"

Tieh-han thought a moment. "Why can't we say we're military police?"

Lien grinned. "All right, but we'll have to bluff in a big way to put it across."

"Let's go," said Tieh-han, "you and I. I'll go first." To Chen-sheng he said, "Take charge while I'm gone. When you hear three hand claps from the wall, come up quietly. If you hear any shooting or fight-

ing, charge up, fast. This is our only chance. We've got to get over the wall!"

He shoved Lien forward and, grasping the handle of the knife, advanced toward the ramp.

The night was pitch black; the two men were only indistinct shadows in the darkness. When they were almost on the wall, the blockhouse hailed them:

"Who are you?"

Lien was about to answer, but Tieh-han squeezed his arm and made him continue walking without slackening his pace. Footsteps sounded. Someone was coming toward them out of the blockhouse.

"Who goes there? Give the password!"

"Military police!" Tieh-han replied in a guttural angry tone. "What are you yelling about!"

The other hesitated, and lowered his voice. "But what do you want in the middle of the night?"

"Official business!" By then Tieh-han was on him and had grabbed his rifle. He pressed the big knife against the man's neck. "Shout and I'll kill you! We're the Eighth Route Army!"

Trembling, the man fell on his knees. "Spare me!" he begged in a whisper. "I was forced into this job. . . ."

Tieh-han asked who else was in the blockhouse. The guard said there was only a neighbour who had just gone to sleep. Clutching the guard tightly by the neck, Tieh-han warned him to be quiet and demanded:

"Where's the best place to get down?"

"It's all the same," replied the guard. "It's just as high everywhere."

In the meantime, Lien had gone back to the foot of the ramp and clapped three times. A column of dark figures streaked up the wall. Tieh-han told Lien to keep an eye on the guard. He personally selected an opening in the crenellated wall, let down the rope, and took a good grip on the top end. The men slid down the rope in accordance with the order Tieh-han had earlier directed.

After Lien descended, only Tieh-han was left. Tucking the knife into his belt, he called the guard.

"Hold the rope tight. I'm going down."

He stepped up into the crenellation. With his feet stepping against the wall, he lowered himself hand by hand. Halfway down, the rope suddenly went slack, and he fell the rest of the way. Fortunately, Lien and Hei Tsang—who were waiting for him, broke his fall with their hands. Tieh-han was in too much of a hurry to worry about being hurt. With the others, he jumped into the stream that ran around the city wall as a moat. Helping one another, they all got across.

Stars were blinking brightly in the sky. Although it was night, the men strode boldly across the level plain. Breathing the air of free-

dom again at last, they were excited, happy! Tieh-han led them rapidly toward the northeast. His legs felt strong, his breath came easily, and he set a fast pace. He wasn't afraid of enemy pursuit. But he was in a hurry, a burning hurry to get back to his unit, to his beloved comrades of the Ningchin battalion. He was a dragon returning to his home in the sea!

Behind him the line of men followed closely, no one slackening a single step.

XXXV

Near dawn, Tieh-han and the escaped prisoners reached Machuang. Tieh-han boosted San Sheng over the wall of their compound. Inside, the youngster found a desolate scene. Only a tumbled mass of scorched masonry remained of the north wing. A gunny sack hanging over the door frame of the small west wing indicated that it probably was still inhabited. Can this be my home? the shocked boy wondered. Hesitantly, he approached the west wing and tapped on the window.

"Is anyone here?" he whispered.

"Who's there?" a quiet, very weak voice replied. "Wait. I'll open the door."

The voice sounded familiar, and yet it didn't. San Sheng wasn't sure he was in the right place. "Is this little Chu's house?" he asked.

The room was silent, then the voice said queerly, "Little Chu's house? —Yes."

Tieh-han came striding across the courtyard. "What's happened to the place?" he muttered to himself. "The walls are all tumbling down."

The door of the west wing opened, the gunny sack curtain was pushed aside, and a grey-haired old woman poked her head out. She drew back at a gust of cold wind.

"You're not Chieh-ying?" she asked.

San Sheng and Tieh-han quickly came nearer and looked at her carefully. She stared at them without recognition. San Sheng grasped her hands in his.

"Niang!" he cried, and dropped to his knees beside her.

Tieh-han pressed forward. *"Kan niang,* is it you?"

The old lady trembled. Cowering, she retreated a step.

"Kan niang, don't be afraid. It's me—Tieh-han. And this is San Sheng."

Slowly, she straightened up. She stared at them hard with dazed eyes.

"We've escaped from the city," Tieh-han continued. "More of our men are waiting outside!"

The old lady stretched forth shaking hands. "I'm not afraid," she

said solemnly. "Even if you're ghosts I still want to get a good look at my sons!"

She pulled Tieh-han toward her and put her face close to his.

"We're not ghosts, *kan niang!*" he answered her.

Still peering at him intently, the old lady tottered. Tieh-han hastily supported her. He could hear her sobbing in the darkness. Her hot tears fell upon his hand.

Suppressing the ache in his heart, Tieh-han told San Sheng to help his mother back into the room while he went to open the compound gate and let in the fifteen men. The old lady dried her tears, struck a flint and lit the oil lamp. Tieh-han led the men into the room. At one end was a small earthen *kang*. There was also a brick cooking stove, a big water vat, many crockery jugs, a pile of corn cobs . . . all so chipped and worn that the room looked like the messy quarters of some impoverished bachelor. Tieh-han frowned. He brought in two armfuls of straw and spread it on the ground.

"First sit here and rest a while," he said to the men. "Later we'll try to find a place to sleep."

The men all sat down. In the small room, the *kang* and the floor were packed tight with people. San Sheng and the old lady were seated on the edge of the *kang*, and he was excitedly telling her how they had escaped from the city. Tieh-han brought in brushwood for the stove. He wanted to boil some drinking water. Suddenly, he thought of the little girl, Chu.

"*Kan niang*, where's Chu?" he asked.

The old lady looked at him and sighed. Tears again came to her eyes. "The day the Japanese took you, they set fire to the house," she wept. "Chu was helping me move our things out of the burning north wing. A Japanese picked her up and threw her into the flames."

"What! Into the fire?" cried the horrified San Sheng.

"Yes. I saw her lying there, raising her hands. She seemed to be calling someone, but I couldn't hear her clearly. . . ."

San Sheng flung himself on his mother's bosom and sobbed.

Tieh-han's eyes were moist. He hung his head and sighed. "*Kan niang*, don't brood about it," he said finally. "We're going to avenge her!"

The old lady rose to her feet. "What did you call me?" she angrily demanded.

"Did I say something wrong?" asked Tieh-han, startled.

Rocking back and forth, for a long time the old lady was unable to speak. She stood shaking her head and clenching her teeth, trying to control her emotion. She dabbed her eyes with the hem of her tunic, then took Tieh-han by the hand.

"Child, every day of the year for twenty-five years I've been holding these words back. I wanted to tell you long ago but I didn't dare. Today, I'm not afraid! Child, you are the flesh of my own body! . . . " She

wiped her eyes and pulled Tieh-han toward her. "Child, sit here beside me on the *kang*. I'll tell you the whole story from the beginning. When I was three months pregnant with you, the landlord Chou Yen-sung was nearly forty. He had no sons and it looked as though he would have no heirs for all his land and property. He was very worried. Your father owed him three pecks of wheat and was working them off as his hired hand. Chou Yen-sung took your father aside and said that if I bore a boy we should give it to him to be his son. In return, he would cancel the debt and give us seven silver dollars. Child, we were poor and frightened. He forced your father to agree. We swore we would never tell anyone even if the seas went dry and the rocks crumbled. Chou Yen-sung's concubine padded out her belly and told everybody she was pregnant. You were born on the thirteenth day of the eighth month that year. Child, a silver dollar for every catty you weighed, the landlord took you away. When our neighbours asked, we had to say you died at birth, and that we already buried you. . . ."

Tieh-han's mind was in a whirl. San Sheng, eyes glistening with tears, sat dazed. The old lady continued:

"The next year, Chou's concubine really became pregnant and gave birth to a son. From then on, child, in their family even dogs were treated better than you. When you were ten, they put you to work with the hired hands. You ate with them, you slept with them. No one gave you a thought. When your father came home and told me it was like a knife going through my heart. Two days out of three I would pretend to pick wild herbs so as to have an excuse to be near you. I brought you things to eat when I could, comforted you when you cried, mended your clothes. When you couldn't fill your basket with wild herbs, I would give you mine to save you from being punished. Child, I broke my heart for you, but I never dared tell you a single word. Your father had promised that if we let the secret leak out we'd pay back ten silver dollars for every one the landlord gave us. Chou would take us to court. The county magistrate was his mother's brother. But even if he wasn't, the landlord would never have let you and me live! Still, my care of you wasn't in vain. Behind his back you called me *kan niang*, as if I were your godmother, and that made me happier than I can say."

The room was absolutely quiet. The men were all listening with bated breath.

"Later, maybe Chou found out that we were looking after you. The black-hearted wretch—nothing was too dirty for him! He said your father had stolen some clothes, beat him half to death and sent him to the district yamen. In less than five days, he died on the road to the county magistrate. If it wasn't for your sake—and I had San Sheng and Chu by then too—I wouldn't have wanted to live any more either."

No matter how she dried her eyes, the angrier the old lady became, the faster her tears flowed. "You grew up. Your hot temper worried

them. When you were sixteen, they sent you north of the Great Wall to work in the coal mines in the Northeast. When you escaped and came home and told me how you suffered, how the Japanese tormented you—it made me tremble. I know you remember."

Tieh-han slowly nodded his head.

"At twenty-one, you had hit a Japanese overseer and had to run away. When you got back to Machuang, Chou cursed you and threw you out. It was then you got so mad you joined the Eighth Route Army!"

The old lady's recollections were making her seethe with rage. Every white hair on her head seemed charged with electricity. Tears gleamed in Tieh-han's eyes. His mother went on:

"The past few years Chou's been pretending to be on the best of terms with the Eighth Route Army! He seems to be behaving much better, but there's more bitterness and hate in his heart than ever. Child, you acted as his son, called him *tieh*. He shouldn't have treated you so rotten! Do you know how the Japanese caught you? How they knew exactly where to find you? Chou, that murdering bandit, told String of Cash to report you!"

Tieh-han leaped to his feet. "Where is he now?"

His mother pulled him back to the *kang*. "Child, String of Cash was caught by our district government people, but Chou got away. He ran to Yakouchai and turned traitor! But even I'm not worried. With our Communist Party, with our Eighth Route Army, we're sure to catch him some day. Some day we'll have our revenge!"

Tieh-han sat down on the *kang* with a thud. He clasped his hands tight around his knees, his eyes glaring. For several minutes he couldn't speak. Then he said furiously:

"*Niang*, at last I understand everything!"

XXXVII

Life under cover for nearly nine months accustomed the men of the battalion to night operation. During the day, hiding in someone's home, only their host knew of their presence. The village appeared quiet as usual. No one dreamed that perhaps right next door was an armed detachment of peasant sons and brothers. But as soon as it was dark, the guerillas came to life, for Japanese and puppets became timid in the unfriendly night and withdrew to their towers. When the sun set behind the mountains, the harmonica of Yu-chu, the young orderly, would pipe up a lively tune. Talk and laughter would resound in the lamp-lit rooms. Village government workers, invited to share the guerillas' supplies of firewood and millet, would join in the fun like old friends. Noise and merriment would fill the compound.

The night Tieh-han and the other escaped prisoners were marching from Machuang, Tsao, the scout, wheeled a brand-new Japanese bicycle

into the compound where the guerilla battalion was quartered. Tsao tucked his gloves in his belt and rolled down his trouser legs. Even before he pushed the bike into the room, he was shouting cheerily:

"Commander, today I had a great idea. Got rich and fixed a traitor at the same time!"

Chien was seated at a table with Deputy Commissar Hsueh Chiang, discussing the political offensive that was being waged against the puppets to persuade them to abandon their traitorous activities.

"Have you breached our rules again?" asked Hsueh Chiang.

Tsao removed his towel turban and mopped his face with it. "How do you like the bike?"

"Never mind about that," said Chien. "How did you get it?"

The scout snapped the towel. "Nabbed it. Didn't you tell us to put on a nabbing campaign? You can't catch all the puppets, there's no end to them. Anyhow, they know we treat 'em easy. The most we do is give 'em a little lecture and let 'em go. So they still come out every day and take things away from the peasants. They're not scared at all. Today I figured—no lecture; I'll keep your bike and let you walk home. If we do that a couple of times they'll find it too expensive and quit picking on the people and all our scouts will have bikes to ride. That's killing two birds with one stone."

"Whose bike is it?" asked the deputy commissar.

"He said he's a policeman from Yakouchai, going to see some relative in the city. Huh! I saw the bike flashing a mile away. When he drew up to me I gave one quick kick at the seat that sent him and his bike head over heels. I pointed my gun at his head and yelled, 'I'm the Eighth Route Army! . . . '"

Hsueh Chiang laughed. "As long as he was a policeman, it's all right. But you shouldn't have let him go without telling him a few things. We're not trying to get rich, we're putting on a political offensive to educate his sort!"

Tsao clapped his hands together. "Dammit, I knew I forgot something! Nabbing puppets and the political offensive have to go hand in hand. Just wait till next time!"

Suddenly, in the courtyard, there was a shout from young orderly Chin Shan, "Aiya! How did you get away?" and many voices rose in a clamour:

"Tieh-han, Company Leader Tieh-han is back! . . . "

"Did you escape? . . . "

"And look at all the men with him! . . . "

"He's terribly thin! . . . "

Chien hurried to the window, but all he could see was a dark mass of many men in the courtyard. The shouts had made Hsueh Chiang's heart beat fast. He was just about to go out when Chin Shan pushed

aside the door curtain and came in embracing the arm of a man he was leading.

"Commander," he yelled. "Look who's here!"

Tieh-han's stalwart frame entered the room. His bold eyes large in his thin sun-darkened face, he stood looking dazedly at the startled visages of Chien and the deputy commissar. Chien began to move forward, but Tieh-han had already strode up to him.

"Commander, I've come back! . . . " He wanted to say more, but for some unaccountable reason his words stuck in his throat. Grasping Tieh-han's hand, Chien quickly led him to the *kang*.

"Tieh-han's back!" The news spread through the battalion like a whirlwind, and the men crowded into the small room. Hu-tse, the first to enter, rushed up and pumped Tieh-han's arm.

"You're still alive!" he roared. "You haven't forgotten me?"

Tieh-han's fingers closed tight on Hu-tse's wrist. "How could I forget you! You're still as solid as ever!"

"Let me see that living spirit!" cried Kan Pa before he even came in the door. "Aiya, you've come back alive right out of the tiger's mouth! I thought you went to the next world long ago and already reserved a room for me!"

Hu, the former Guards Brigade platoon leader, laughed as he drew near. "So you're back! I thought of you every time we went into battle!"

Fu-lai crowded forward and sat beside Tieh-han on the *kang*, but got up again immediately when he saw how busy Tieh-han was exchanging greetings. Obviously, he'd never get a word in edgewise. To make more room near the *kang*, he removed the bike Tsao the scout had brought back.

By then Hsiao-san had arrived. He rushed up and hugged Tieh-han's other arm, his eyes glistening with moisture. For a minute, he couldn't speak.

"When I heard you were captured," he said at last, "I was worried stiff. . . ."

Chan Wei came in too. Between laughter and tears, he gave a disjointed account of how he had scaled the wall that day and hid himself in a pile of stalks, and how he finally was rescued.

The room was in a joyful uproar. Tsao the scout clambered up on a bench and waved his hand in the air.

"Quiet down! Quiet down!" he shouted. "Listen to my idea. Tieh-han's come back like a dragon to his home in the sea, and that's going to mean a big boost to the strength of our battalion. So I say today, come what may, we've got to celebrate!" He pulled a couple of dollars out of his pocket and turned to Chien. "Commander, I'm sure you'll let us down a few cups!—Chin Shan, take this and buy some wine!"

Hu-tse produced five dollars. "Take this too," he said to the orderly.

Others noisily added several dollars to the fund, and Chin Shan rushed out. Tieh-han was pushed to a prominent seat on the *kang* beside a low table on which a lighted lamp was placed. Although he tried hard to keep himself under control, Tieh-han was overcome by emotion. His face and his heart burned like fire. He spoke with difficulty.

"Now I've really come home!"

He was plied with questions about how he was captured, how he was tortured, what Fatty Kuo the puppet looked like, how he escaped, the condition of his wounded arm. . . . Talking, nodding his head to this question, shaking his head to that, Tieh-han tried vainly to answer them all at once.

Meanwhile, after a few words of hearty welcome, the deputy commissar went out to look after the other men who had come with Tieh-han.

Before long, Chin Shan returned with a big bowl of wine, his turban crammed with peanuts, sunflower seeds and candy. The edibles he dumped on the table, and Tieh-han was hauled to the place of honour beside it, with Commander Chien seated on his left. Kan Pa brought in San Sheng, Hei Tsang and Shuang Lai and sat them around the *kang* table too. Part of the wine was poured into another large bowl and handed to the men who remained standing. At the signal to drink, the bowls began circulating among the two groups, and laughter was punctuated with sighs of blissful satisfaction. Not until it was almost cock's crow did men begin leaving the comfortably heated room.

Hsueh Chiang and Chien discussed what use to make of Tieh-han now that he had returned. As a result of his wound, he couldn't lift his right arm higher than shoulder level. It was very difficult for him to carry a rifle, or anything else for that matter. They thought it would be best to send him to the rear where he could take charge of communications. The veins standing out on his forehead, Tieh-han was frantic.

"Commander, Deputy Commissar," he interrupted, "I can't leave the troops! I'll die before I go to the rear!"

"You can't get along just on ardour and fighting spirit," said Hsueh Chiang. "You've got to take care of your health. Anyhow, you can't carry a rifle with that arm."

"It isn't that we don't need men like you in our combat unit," added Chien. "It's because your body can't stand it."

Tieh-han hopped off the *kang*. "I don't want any special treatment. If I can't lift a rifle with my right arm, I've still got a left! I can still shoot with my right arm, I can still push a bayonet with it! If you don't believe me, let me have a bayonet contest with Hu-tse. If I lose, I'll go to the rear without another word!"

"Don't send my brother back," San Sheng pleaded from the sidelines. "He suffered plenty from the Japanese. He's got a lot of avenging to do!

You can't let a good man like him take so much punishment, Commander, and not give him a chance to hit back!"

Impressed by the two brothers' determination, Chien and the deputy commissar finally agreed to let Tieh-han remain as a platoon leader. For the sake of his arm, they wanted to give him a pistol instead of a rifle to carry. But Tieh-han insisted on a rifle, because he liked the long bayonet on its end.

From then on, the sturdy form of Tieh-han was seen at the head of his men on every night march. His rifle crooked under his arm, bold eyes shining in a head held high, he looked like a professional hunter of the mountain forests.

XXXVIII

Spring breezes and a heavy rain brought green wheat sprouts up from the ground. It was early in 1943, and changes were taking place all over Hopei Province.

Every five or six days Chien's guerilla battalion received a report from Regional Command headquarters with news of another victory. The Suchi County battalion had disguised itself and captured two tower fortresses; the Shennan battalion killed seven Japanese on the road between Shihchiachuang and Tehhsien; the Forty-fourth Regional Regiment cut off a company of Hirohito Helpers in broad daylight, wiped out half of them, and captured a hard-hitting light machine-gun. . . . In the Seventh Region, the guerilla county battalions were active too, attacking towers, taking enemy bases, becoming stronger and fiercer every day. The Communist Party underground in many villages in enemy-occupied territory was organizing the peasants to resist the enemy by "legal" means —pretend to lack men for military conscription and forced labour, pretend to lack grain for enemy levies, make late deliveries, have breakdowns of transportation. . . . Gradually the morale of the people was stiffening. It was obvious to the Hirohito Helpers which way the wind was blowing. Many of them secretly made contact with the Eighth Route Army through the local "Liaison Officer." The die-hard traitors, without being aware of it, were slowly but surely being isolated.

Tieh-han's return to the Ningchin County battalion with thirteen men created a considerable increase in the guerillas' complement. The battalion was reorganized into three platoons, each containing two squads, about ten men to a squad. Tieh-han was given command of the First Platoon, Hu and Erh-tung taking the Second and Third respectively. Regional Command also sent a Dr. Liu to be the battalion's medical officer. The guerilla unit was like a growing child. Chien and Hsueh Chiang were overjoyed to see it daily becoming bigger and healthier.

With the changing situation, the leadership of the Regional Command intensified its activity. Hot on the heels of a "Capture Puppets Cam-

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paign," it ordered a "Political Offensive" to win them over. Region printed and passed on to the battalions a great many attractive pamphlets on coloured paper for distribution among the Hirohito Helpers. The neatly mimeographed booklets included such titles as "To Our Brothers in the Puppet Army," "Our Lenient Policy to Prisoners," "Your Body Is in Enemy Territory but Your Heart Belongs to China," "Leave Yourself a Way Out."... Looking the material over, the guerillas grinned.

"The enemy has steel bullets," they said, "but we've got political bombshells!"

When late spring was giving way to early summer, the battalion split up for a second time. The Regional Command had moved temporarily to Ningchin and both Chien and Hsueh Chiang had been summoned to headquarters. There, they had a three-hour talk with Commander Wang. He stressed that under the present circumstances the political offensive was just as important as military battles. It eliminated the enemy and opened up new territory; not only was it necessary today, it would be very beneficial for the future. It was a form of psychological warfare that would be a canker in the enemy's heart. To carry on the political offensive in several places simultaneously, it was agreed to divide the battalion. Chien would take the Third Platoon to the Second and Fifth Districts; Hsueh Chiang would operate in the First District on the other side of the big moat with the Second Platoon; Tieh-han would remain with the First Platoon to handle the Third and Fourth Districts. Commander Wang approved this plan personally.

If the truth were known, Tieh-han didn't see much in the political offensive. He felt it was too indirect, not clear-cut. Worst of all, it didn't satisfy his thirst for vengeance! You had to waste a lot of breath, you had to wait patiently, and even then maybe nothing would result. How could you possibly compare it to the rifle or the bayonet for settling things? Tieh-han had been seething inwardly ever since he escaped from the city, with no chance to give vent to his rage. He just couldn't work up any interest in all this "fooling around." In the end, however, he was convinced by the deputy commissar. Hsueh Chiang asked him:

"When Kuo the puppet was trying to sell you a bill of goods in Ningchin, did it have any effect on you?"

"He was talking pure bilge! How could it affect me?"

"But suppose it was somebody like Yin he was talking to?"

Tieh-han was growing more and more indignant. "We don't have any Yins in our outfit now!"

"That's right," laughed the deputy commissar. "But there are plenty of them with the puppets!"

While Tieh-han was thinking this over, Hsueh Chiang continued. "Of course we're different from Kuo. He talks only dirty nonsense; we tell the absolute honourable truth. So our words have a much greater effect

than Kuo's. Any Chinese who still has a little conscience left can't help being influenced by what we say."

"But Kuo did his talking in a torture chamber, with a knife at your throat!"

"Exactly. That's why Region wants us to combine winning over the ordinary puppets with finishing off traitors who are blood-thirsty tyrants. We have knives too. Why can't we use it to put pressure on the enemy?"

The light was beginning to dawn on Tieh-han. "Oho, so that's the way it works," he murmured.

In Tieh-han's opinion the Tajen tower fortress guarding the blockade moat running between Lokou and Yakouchai was the worst of the lot. Although not many puppets manned the tower, the harm it did was enormous. It was a constant threat to any guerillas or people's government men who wanted to cross the moat. During the big "Mop Up," not a few comrades died because they were unable to get past it and escape. Moreover, its complement persecuted peasants on both sides of the moat. Tieh-han decided to devote his attention to this fortress first.

The night he approached it with his platoon the moon was setting, making the starlight shine more brightly. Coming softly through the wheat fields, as they neared the tower beside the big moat, the guerillas fanned out in a semi-circle. After the men all had concealed themselves and lookouts had been posted on both sides of their position, Tieh-han hailed the tower.

"*Wei!* Brother puppets. . . ."

Flashes of fire and two bullets singing over his head cut Tieh-han's words short. He had given himself a talking-to in advance—whatever you do don't lose your temper; be patient. He tried another call. The bullets flew back thicker than before, slicing right through the field of wheat. This was too much for Hu-tse.

"Why are you shooting?" he bellowed. "If you've got any guts come down and fight us face to face. Are you such chicken-hearted bastards that you're afraid to come out of your nest! . . . "

Tieh-han whispered to Hu-tse to shut up, but the tower had already heard enough.

"Stick around until daylight if you're not rabbits," a raucous voice shouted from the tower. "We'll know who the heroes are when we can see where to shoot!" A string of curses followed.

"Take it easy, brother puppets," urged Tieh-han. "I've got something to tell you."

"First tell us your name."

"I'm in the Ningchin battalion. My name is Chou Tieh-han."

"Chou Tieh-han, I spit on you and your eight generations of ancestors!"

Working the bolt of his rifle, Hu-tse leaped to his feet. "Tieh-han, let's charge the sons of bitches!"

Tieh-han was furious. "If I hadn't reformed my temper that's just what we'd do!"

With an effort, he brought himself under control. "But we've come here to teach them. It would be easy enough to rush them. If a couple of us got wounded it wouldn't matter, but that wouldn't be doing our job. We'd never be able to explain to our superiors."

While the two stood gabbing, the puppets in the tower lined them up in their sights. Suddenly there was a rattling volley of rifles, and bullets whizzed all around the two guerillas. Hu-tse felt his sleeve twitch. He touched it and found a three-inch rip. A bullet had barely missed his flesh. The hot-headed guerilla saw red. Raising his big-nosed Czech rifle, he fired a mighty blast at the tower. The puppets promptly responded with another sharp volley. Tieh-han could see things were going from bad to worse. What kind of political offensive do we call this? he thought. He hastily ordered Hu-tse to hold his fire. When the shooting from the tower died down a bit, he withdrew his troops.

All the way home, the men were sulky and annoyed.

The next night, the platoon surrounded the tower near Tiliang. This time when Tieh-han hailed, "*Wei*, brother puppets!" they responded politely:

"Don't shout. Just speak your piece!".

"Brother puppets, the Japanese are getting weaker day by day," Tieh-han began.

"Never mind about them," the tower interrupted. "Let's hear what business there is between you and us."

"We're all Chinese, we grew up on the same land. Chinese mustn't fight against Chinese!..."

"We didn't fight you! You've come after us today, we didn't go looking for you!"

"Don't try to be funny!" roared Hu-tse. "Listen to us!"

Tieh-han motioned him to be quiet, and went on: "But your picking on the peasants is wrong."

"When did we ever pick on the peasants? What proof have you got?"

"You steal their things, burn their houses, rape their women, take away their animals...."

"All right, let's hear it—where did we steal anything, where did we burn houses, whose women did we rape, whose animals did we take away?"

Tieh-han was stumped. He could only stare foolishly.

"Who burned down those twenty rooms in this village on the ninth of the first month if it wasn't you?" yelled one of the guerillas. "Are you trying to deny it?"

"Oh? You're pretty quick capping people with the dung pot! That

fire was set by Company Seven. We're Company Nine!" replied the tower righteously. "You ought to get your facts straight!"

After a silence, the voice from the tower spoke again. "Don't say any more, Eighth Route Army brothers. We don't want anything from you, why not leave us alone? Let's each stick to our own territory. You run your affairs, we'll run ours. 'The well and the stream never bump heads.' In the future, better not come looking for trouble!"

Hu-tse jumped up. "You've got to stop being traitors!" he shouted. "You're guarding a patch of land for the Japanese, you take their orders. We're Chinese. We have the right to tell you what to do!..."

"You'd better go now. Whatever you say we won't listen to you. Please forgive us, we can't keep you company any longer!" said the tower sarcastically. An insolent voice rose, singing in exaggeratedly tender tones something about unrequited love....

Obviously, it was no use. Tieh-han led his disgruntled guerillas back to their base.

XXXIX

Tieh-han's two attempts at the political offensive had both fallen flat. The failures pressed in his chest like a heavy weight. For several days, the guerillas merely circulated from place to place within the districts assigned to them.

One morning after an early breakfast in the village of Chiangchia, although the other men had gone to sleep, Tieh-han lay wide awake on the *kang*. He got up and decided to write a letter to San Sheng. At Tieh-han's own request, the boy had been attached to the Second Platoon. Tieh-han had always felt two brothers in the same unit was...he couldn't say exactly what; anyhow, it didn't feel right somehow. But now that he hadn't seen his kid brother for about a week, Tieh-han missed him. After San Sheng had volunteered to join the guerillas, Tieh-han had begun to think maybe the boy wasn't such a softy after all. His affection for him increased considerably. But he was still afraid San Sheng wasn't accustomed to military life. Tieh-han spread out a sheet of paper and wrote: "Comrade San Sheng—"then, on the next line, began, "Since we separated, I have been...." But what could he say? He had wanted to talk about the political offensive, yet he hadn't a single accomplishment to report. Of course, San Sheng was eagerly waiting to hear from him. Even an ordinary chatty letter would make the boy very happy....

While Tieh-han was thus pondering, a man and woman in the rear courtyard started to quarrel, shouting and crying enough to raise the roof. Tieh-han asked the woman in whose house the guerillas were staying what was wrong.

"They're really unlucky," sighed the woman. "They're relatives of mine, and very poor. The husband borrowed a little money and bought

some cloth to peddle at the market fair. Ai, it never rains but it pours! With a poor person, even a sip of water sticks in his teeth! Who should he run into but Scummy Snake! The Snake's sister wants to get married, and he was just looking for gown material for her. After one look at the cloth the husband was carrying, Scummy took the whole bundle back to the tower. The husband came home crying. As soon as he came in the door, he and his wife began to quarrel. His creditors are pressing him too hard; he wants to pawn part of his wife's trousseau. She won't hear of it, and they're having a terrible row. Ai, Scummy Snake's sister wants a trousseau, so other people have to sell theirs!"

"Who's Scummy Snake?" asked Tieh-han.

"I'm only a housewife, I don't know much about his sort. All I've heard is that he's one of those dirty Hirohito Helpers in the tower."

Tieh-han thought a moment. "Ask that husband to come in here, will you?"

"What for?"

"I want to ask him something."

The woman laughed. "You Eighth Route Army fellows take care of everything."

A few minutes later, she returned with a man of about forty. He was still scrubbing the tears from his eyes. When he saw Tieh-han, and the men crowded asleep on the *kang* with their rifles in their arms, he was frightened out of his wits.

"The commander of the guerillas here heard you and your wife quarrelling," the woman said to him, smiling reassuringly. "He wants to ask you about it."

"*Hei*, our guerillas!" said the man. "If I knew you were here, I would have come long ago. I've got a belly full of steam and I don't know how to let it out!"

Tieh-han invited him to be seated, and after calming him down a bit, began to question him about Scummy Snake. Hearing the sound of conversation, the guerillas woke up and listened. It turned out that Scummy Snake was in the Tajen tower, the same that had shot at them. The guerillas were furious. Hu-tse sat up and pounded his big fist on the *kang*.

"No wonder they wouldn't hear us out that day. That sneaky sort will never listen to reason!"

The guerillas learned that there were two squads of puppets in the Tajen tower. They were commanded by a man named Pan Ya-chuan, a former bandit who had gone over to the Japanese. He had buried alive two of our district government men and had been captured by some of our county plainclothes militia. Condemned to death, he escaped. The Japanese put him in charge of the squads in the tower. He persecuted the peasants, waged war against the Eighth Route Army. He would make frequent raids on neighbouring villages, drag off the local mayor,

beat him half to death, then ask for money or grain as ransom. Taking a leaf out of the book of his Japanese masters, a number of times he demanded "girl entertainers." Young wives were rejected, only virgins would do. Once he snatched a bride on the way to her wedding right out of her gaily decorated sedan-chair and abducted her into the tower. Only several days later was she allowed to leave.... Whenever a market fair was held in the village of Tajen, he roamed the streets with his bullies, grabbing anything that appealed to him, beating up anyone who displeased him. The people hated his guts. They called him Scummy Snake. Even his own men behind his back said, "He's three times as bad as the Japanese. Why did the Eighth Route Army let him get away!"

Hearing these stories, Tieh-han went blue in the face with rage. "Suppose we wiped him out, what would you say to that?" he asked the husband.

The man ground his teeth. "I won't be happy till you kill him and his whole gang! If you don't, the people in this section will still suffer plenty on account of him!" After a pause, the man continued, "But you'd better be careful. That bird is a tough customer."

"What's so tough about him?" demanded Hu-tse.

"He used to be a bandit. He sees quick and moves dirty. He's a crack shot with his pistol. Nobody dares get too near to him."

Tieh-han thought this over. Angrily, he asked on what days of the month was there a market fair in Tajen, how the streets were laid out, what kind of things were sold the most, when did Scummy Snake usually show up at the fair, did he come alone?... The man answered in detail. Tieh-han told him not to worry and sent him back to his wife.

"We can't let that dog get away with treating the peasants like that," Hu-tse said to Tieh-han.

Tieh-han's sturdy body stood like a rock. He was deep in thought, his mouth clamped tight. Kan Pa suddenly leaped from the *kang*, straightened his clothes, twirled on his toes, and struck a fighting position, facing the door.

"What are you supposed to be doing?" cried Hu-tse in amazement.

Kan Pa comically batted his eyes and pointed at Tieh-han with pursed lips. "We're going to the market fair!"

"What has the market fair got to do with you?" asked Hu-tse.

"If you keep going to market every day, you're bound to find what you want," Kan Pa replied enigmatically.

Tieh-han glanced quickly at Kan Pa's mischievous face. "Have you an idea how to handle this?"

"There's something I think we can try. Let's see if your idea is the same as mine."

"I haven't thought it out yet," said Tieh-han. "First let's hear your idea."

Hu-tse grabbed Kan Pa's arm and pulled him toward the *kang*. "Do I have to twist your arm? Stop playing coy. Come on, out with it!"

Off balance, the comic fell backwards against the *kang*. The guerillas hooted with laughter.

Kan Pa outlined his plan in detail. Everyone approved enthusiastically.

"The trouble is we don't have a pistol," said Kan Pa. "We've got to borrow one from the district or the county, fast."

"There's no time for that," said Tieh-han. "Tomorrow's a market-day. Who knows where our government offices are set up anyhow?"

Hu-tse pounded his fist against his palm. "Forget it. I'll go tomorrow and use a knife!"

"This isn't going to be easy," several of the guerillas protested. "A knife can't do the job."

Tieh-han pondered. "A knife will be all right," he said suddenly. "But—better let me do it!"

Hu-tse flung his arm down in an angry gesture. "Why? Because I don't always stick to our policy? This time I'll do everything exactly as I should, how about it?"

"It's not that," said Tieh-han. "This is going to be tricky. Just courage isn't enough. We need a sharp eye and fast hand. That bird is nobody to fool with. One false move and you pay for it with your life!"

"If I'm done in, we'll be less one fighter," Hu-tse yelled, "but if anything happens to you, who's going to lead this platoon?"

"I'm better with a knife than you. I practised with one when I was in the coal mines, getting ready to use it on the Japanese. I didn't get the chance then, but now I can show what I've learned."

"Anybody can use a knife. You just stick it in a vital spot and twist!"

Kan Pa stepped in between them. "All right, all right. I masterminded this plan, I should be the one to put the seal on it. Everybody listen to me! One man can't carry it through anyhow. Platoon Leader Tieh-han will be the customer at the fair; Hu-tse and I will pose as venders. When the time comes, if Tieh-han can't finish him off alone, we two can pitch in and help!"

That night, with the assistance of the village's deputy mayor—who was in the underground organization—all the necessary items for disguise were prepared.

XL

The next day dawned bright and clear. Following the paths that wove through the fields of wheat, people slowly filed into the market-town of Tajen. The early arrivals had already set up their stands halfway down both sides of the main thoroughfare. Those coming to buy drifted

from stall to stall; venders hawked their wares in high strident voices, as though fearful they would be passed by unnoticed. Hu-tse's burly form appeared in the crowd, bare-headed, dressed like a vender. On both ends of his shoulder carrying-pole hung coloured baskets half full of small onions. He wandered about, from time to time calling his wares. From another entrance to the market-place came the skinny Kan Pa, in gaudy trousers and a towel turban, bare from the waist up. He carried rotten scallions in his pair of baskets. "This is the last! Buy the whole lot, cheap!" he yelled piercingly.

At the crossroad, Tieh-han, a head kerchief almost down to his eyebrows, a pouch tucked under his left armpit, stopped Kan Pa.

"How much a catty for the scallions?"

"For the whole lot? I'll let you have them cheaper that way."

Tieh-han shook his head. "I can't eat so much."

"If you can't eat them all in one meal, finish them in two. They make fine stuffing for dumplings."

Tieh-han glared at him. "Never mind the chatter. How much per catty?"

Kan Pa looked furtively around and whispered, "You're not acting like a customer. Take it easy!" And in a loud voice he responded, "Two catties for a dollar."

"I can't afford it," said Tieh-han, and walked away.

Strolling along, Tieh-han couldn't help laughing at himself. A market-goer ought to play the part, be leisurely. With Kan Pa just now, he had been in entirely too much of a rush! Still, how could he help himself? In the past six months so many things had happened that cried out for vengeance! Yet he hadn't avenged even one—not one battle had he fought! Today, he finally had this slight chance, and his heart seemed filled to the brim, like a flooded river about to burst its banks!

Around mid-morning, the hubbub suddenly stilled. People crowded back against the walls of the houses on both sides of the street, at the same time looking toward the east. Three Hirohito Helpers were seen approaching. The one in the lead was elegantly dressed, a pistol bulging slightly in the belt beneath his snow-white tunic. Hair sleekly parted, a mouth full of gold teeth, the puppet walked arrogantly, his beady eyes darting restlessly from one direction to another. Behind him came two Hirohito Helpers in green uniforms, wearing peaked dress caps. The taller one was empty-handed; the shorter one carried a rifle.

The crossroad was still jammed with people. Reaching it, the puppets were forced to slow their pace. Just then, two men behind the Hirohito Helpers began to quarrel. A voice like thunder cursed foully.

"Are you blind!" Hu-tse was yelling. He waved his massive fist at Kan Pa's skinny face. The latter had detached his big carrying-pole and was holding it in a fighting position, while shrilly casting implications against the purity of Hu-tse's ancestry.

Hu-tse moved forward threateningly with his own carrying-pole. It seemed as though the two would come to blows at any minute. The onlookers circled close, pressing the three puppets toward the centre. The bodyguards pushed back at the people behind them, swearing. The fancy bird with the sleek hair-comb stopped and turned around. In that instant, Tieh-han whipped a knife out of his pouch and plunged it through the fellow's back into his heart. With barely a sound, the puppet collapsed. The unarmed bodyguard couldn't understand what had made his leader fall, it had happened so quickly. But when he saw a bloody knife sticking out of his back, he was shocked motionless. A heavy carrying-pole cracked against his head, felling him to the ground. Hu-tse was raising the pole again to crush the fellow's skull, when Tieh-han stopped him with a cry:

"Don't hit him again! Drag him out of town through the west gate!"

Meanwhile, Kan Pa was wrestling with the bodyguard with the rifle, clutching him from behind around the waist, but not strong enough to throw him. Tieh-han quickly relieved the dead Scummy Snake of his pistol and rushed over to help Kan Pa. They pulled the rifle away from the puppet, then marched him and his mate out of the town.

The market burst into an uproar. People ran in all directions. In the twinkling of an eye, the streets were completely deserted. Only when the last of the market-goers was fast disappearing were a few wild shots fired from the puppets' fortress tower.

XLI

The puppet Hu-tse had struck with the carrying-pole was a squad leader. Back at the guerilla base, even before he was questioned, he began spilling out his story to Tieh-han.

"I'll tell you everything...I'll tell you everything. I was close to our platoon leader because he was dirty and hard-hearted. He had power. I was afraid of him. My own faults are that I beat up two people at the market and stole a bolt of flowered cloth...and, and I took a few baskets of cabbage. All these things the platoon leader made me do! I know the Eighth Route Army is lenient to puppets who confess. I have a seventy-year-old mother at home. May lightning strike me dead if I'm lying!"

Hu-tse held himself in check as long as he was able, then threw back his head and roared with laughter, infecting all the guerillas in the room with his mirth.

"That night we came to your tower to teach you, why did you curse and fire at us?" asked one. "You've become very virtuous all of a sudden!"

"That—that wasn't me cursing," the Hirohito Helper squad leader quickly explained. "That was our platoon leader. He was the one who fired too."

"I'm just a plain soldier," the other prisoner added. "I didn't swear at anyone!"

Kan Pa pretended to be angry. "Hah! You're lying again! There was more than one man cursing that night!"

"It wasn't me!" the squad leader protested in panic. "It was Pai, the leader of Squad Four!"

"The next time we come to instruct you, will you curse or not?" asked Tieh-han.

"We wouldn't dare!"

"Why not?"

The puppet squad leader stabbed himself in the chest with his finger. "Who isn't afraid of the knife?"

Smiling inwardly, Tieh-han nodded. He questioned the puppets in detail about the tower, even to the names of every one of the Hirohito Helpers. After ordering that the injured head of the puppet squad leader be dressed, Tieh-han told the prisoners to rest. He directed Kan Pa to write a letter to the deputy commissar Hsueh Chiang asking what to do with the prisoners. In one sentence he summed up what the experience of the last few days had taught him: "Unless we understand all about the enemy's set-up, we hit snags in our psychological warfare."

The news of how the Eighth Route Army dispatched Scummy Snake in the market-place spread rapidly. The people were overjoyed. In several villages pigs were immediately slaughtered; peasants wanted to know where the guerillas were staying so that the meat could be sent to them as gifts of gratitude. But at the same time, other news also went around: It was said that the puppets had seized several people in Tajen and had hauled them to the tower to question them about the guerillas. However, the following day, when Tieh-han had the deputy mayor send a man to investigate, the report he brought back was more reassuring:

"People have been taken all right, but the puppets are scared to death. They didn't dare let down their drawbridge till well after sunrise; long before sunset, they raised it up again. They came out that once to arrest those people, but they haven't had the nerve to show themselves on the street since."

The next day, the guerillas moved to another village, where Tieh-han received the deputy commissar's reply. He noted Tieh-han's experience as "...extremely important. From now on, we shall insist on a careful, thorough understanding of the enemy's situation." He was quite complimentary about the destruction of Scummy Snake. As to the two prisoners he was very brief: "Educate and release."

Tieh-han toyed with the letter thoughtfully for some time. Suddenly he clapped his hands together with satisfaction and summoned the prisoners.

"I'm letting you go tonight," he told them.

They didn't entirely believe him at first, but when they saw that he was in earnest, they were overjoyed.

"I'm letting you go," Tieh-han repeated, "but you've got to behave decently. Try to act like Chinese from now on."

The puppets nodded vigorously. "Yes, of course."

"When you get back tell the men in the tower—the Eighth Route Army and the people are moulded into one; we're getting stronger every day. The Japanese don't have enough soldiers. They've bitten off more than they can chew. Sooner or later the Eighth Route Army is going to stage a big counter-offensive. Those of you with a little sense ought to be careful. Make contact with us while there's still time. Do some secret work against the Japanese. Leave yourselves a way out. If all you think about is your own pleasure and act like damned traitors, when the people get the upper hand they'll make you pay. Even now, you can't stay in that tower all the time. You've got to come out to buy supplies. Whoever does anything bad again is going to end up like Scummy Snake!"

The two prisoners punctuated Tieh-han's every sentence with "Yes!" They swore they would follow instructions.

"And tell Pai, that leader of Squad Four, we've got his record in our books. He robbed a big cart going to pay a New Year's call, and stole a pig from a man named Wang. In the fourth month he squeezed a bolt of cloth from one village and a sack of flour from another. These are only the worst crimes. We're not even mentioning cursing and hitting people. Like the time the big moat was being dug—how he pushed that old man in and broke his leg in the fall. He did plenty of things like that. You tell him we've got them all marked down. He's got a long bill to settle. And he just grabbed some people off the street the other day. Tell him to figure out for himself what to do about them!"

The puppets were so astonished they couldn't even say "Yes!" They stood listening tensely.

Tieh-han gave them some propaganda pamphlets. "The next time we pick up someone from your tower, we're going to ask whether these were given out." He pointed his finger at the puppet squad leader's nose. "As a junior officer, you're especially responsible!"

"They'll be given out, for sure!" the latter assured him fervently.

As the Hirohito Helpers were about to leave under armed escort of two guerillas, the puppet squad leader begged a favour of Tieh-han.

"Company Leader, write a note for us. My memory's no good. I'm afraid I won't remember everything, and later you'll hold it against me."

Looking at the man's vapid face, Tieh-han glowed with joy. "All right," he nodded, and instructed Kan Pa, "Your writing's a little better than mine. Write out two copies of what I just told them to take back to the tower."

Kan Pa busied himself with fountain-pen and paper for almost an

hour. When he was finished Tieh-han examined the result. Tieh-han pointed to the last line.

"Change that 'Chou Tieh-han, Leader of the First Platoon' to 'Eighth Route Army, Ningchin Battalion.' Otherwise, it's all right."

After Kan Pa had made the necessary corrections, Tieh-han handed the letters to the puppet squad leader.

"We're going to release you near the tower in Tiliang, first because it's closer to us than yours, and second because it's manned by Squad Six of your platoon. You can give one copy of the letter to them and bring the other back to your own tower."

XLII

In the next two days Tieh-han carefully gathered data on the crimes committed by the Tiliang tower, and had Kan Pa keep a record of them. The evening of the second day he decided to pay another call on the Tajen tower. The guerillas were in Tsaochuang that night.

Somehow the man in whose house they were staying got wind of their plan. He had a request to make.

"I've got two *mou* of wheat land not far from the tower. The wheat is ripe and ready for harvest but I don't dare go near it. I'm afraid puppets will come out and make trouble. I know you're going to talk to them. Couldn't you stretch it out a little longer tonight? While you keep them busy, my son and I can rush that wheat in. There's a nice bright moon."

"You won't be scared if there's shooting?"

"We've heard plenty of shooting the last few years. We're used to it!"

"All right. But just you and your son aren't enough. Some of us will help you. It's only right."

Deliriously happy, the old man immediately hitched up his big cart and followed creaking after the guerillas in the direction of Tajen. A full moon had just risen in the east, turning to silver a sea of undulating wheat that seemed to flow endlessly to the horizon. A few hundred yards from the tower, the old man and his son got down from the cart and entered their own wheat field. Tieh-han dispatched half a dozen guerillas to help them reap. Then the remainder spread out and advanced to encircle the dark shadow of the tower.

About sixty yards from the fortress, Tieh-han ordered the men to take cover. Crouching behind a raised path, he raised his voice in a shout.

"*Wei*, you on the tower! We're the Eighth Route Army! Tell Squad Leader Pai to come out!"

Complete silence.

Hu-tse was puzzled. "Why don't they shoot?"

Tieh-han called again. "Do you hear me? Tell Pai, leader of Squad Four, to come out. We've got a few things to talk to him about."

Again there was silence. Then a wheedling voice responded:

"Eighth Route Army comrades, our squad leader is sick. He can't leave his bed. Whatever you've got to say, tell me."

"What's your name?" asked Tieh-han.

"Chang Teh-kung."

"There's no one in this tower by that name. Don't kid me!"

More silence. This time another voice spoke up.

"Eighth Route Army comrades, don't ask us any questions. Just tell us what's on your mind!"

For a moment, Tieh-han didn't know how to answer. "Why did you grab those peasants in Tajen?" he finally demanded.

"We couldn't help ourselves. We had to obey orders from our superiors. But after our other squad leader...after he came back...we let them go this afternoon."

Kan Pa laughed. "Those puppets are a hopeless lot!"

"Did you read the letter the Eighth Route Army sent you?" shouted Hu-tse.

"We read it! We read it!"

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Ai, Eighth Route Army comrades," the voice on the tower replied beseechingly, "we only do this job to keep from starving to death. We're all Chinese. We're not mad at anybody. From now on we won't come out and we won't bother the people. There isn't much we can do to help, but any time you want to cross this big moat we're guarding, just let us know in advance, so we don't fire at you by mistake. All we hope is that you'll give us credit for our good deeds."

"Do you know the kind of thing Pai has been doing?" asked Hu-tse.

"We know, we know," replied the tower. "He's sick today and can't come out. But we'll talk to him and make him change."

"All of you must put it to him good and strong!" Kan Pa commanded. "Otherwise you'll be held to blame too!"

In conclusion Tieh-han told the Hirohito Helpers how the Soviet Union was fighting Germany on the eastern front in Europe, about the vast area resisting the Japanese, the strength of the Eighth Route Army, the victories they were winning everywhere.... He went on for more than half an hour. By then, the old man had gathered all his wheat, loaded it on his cart and was heading home.

"We're leaving now," Tieh-han said to the puppets. "We'll be seeing you again."

"Eighth Route Army comrades," pleaded the tower, "we're very close to the village. If our superiors there hear about this, we'll be in serious trouble. We'll fire a few shots and you fire a couple, just to make it look good!"

Frowning, Tieh-han did not reply. "We've only got four or five bullets apiece, and no way of getting any more," he said to himself. "If we run into trouble, we'll need every one of them." In the end, however, he let Hu-tse and Kan Pa each shoot once.

To everyone's surprise, not far off there was still another shot. Enraged, Tieh-han glared.

"Who fired that shot?" he shouted. "Come over here! No discipline at all!"

A trembling figure approached, then stopped a good distance away and stood at attention, defensive, as though waiting for a storm of abuse. Tieh-han peered at him in the moonlight. It was Hsiao-san, who used to be so timid that he blanched at the sound of a shot. Tieh-han's heart softened at once.

"You shouldn't fire without waiting for orders," he said more quietly. "Don't you know how hard it is for us to get bullets?"

"I know."

Tieh-han strode up and clapped him on the shoulder. "Aren't you scared firing at the tower?"

Hsiao-san raised his head. "I guess you don't know—I fired a couple of shots in the fight in West Ting. I had to shoot again this time or I'd burst."

"Ah," said Tieh-han thoughtfully, "this is a different Hsiao-san we have here...."

Meanwhile, the tower was noisily peppering the surrounding clouds. Bullets flew upwards in all directions.

The guerillas started for home in the light of the moon. Tieh-han was feeling fine. He looked up at the Big Dipper. It couldn't be much past midnight. He called the men to a halt.

"Let's pay a visit to the Tiliang tower, what do you say?"

"Sure!" the men chorused. They were in high spirits.

Another mile, another turn, and they were there. After the tower was encircled and had answered their hail, Kan Pa brought out his little notebook. Like a waiter reciting a menu, he reeled off a list of the puppets' crimes.

"Would you call that abusing the people or wouldn't you?" he yelled. "Are you or aren't you traitors?"

The tower promptly and sadly admitted all. "We won't do those things any more, and you can cross the big moat any time you want to," swore the puppets. "About that record...we hope...we hope you'll cross it out."

"We're not going to cross anything out," Tieh-han retorted. "We'll mark down your good deeds and your bad. They'll balance off, one against the other!" He then gave them the same talk he had made at the Tajen tower about the national and international situation.

When he had finished, the tower asked him to please continue so that

they could thoroughly understand. Tieh-han's throat was dry and hoarse, besides he wasn't much of a speech maker. He stood there, hesitating. Kan Pa, who still remembered with irritation how this tower had responded to their last talk with a sentimental love lament, now had a proposal.

"I'll sing you a song instead. What do you say?"

Somewhat mystified, the puppets agreed. Kan Pa thereupon took the same ditty with which the Hirohito Helpers had twitted the guerillas, and invented new lyrics. In a voice dripping with sarcastic bathos, he sang of the puppets' lack of freedom, the abuse they took from their officers, ending with the advice that they quit this dog's life and go straight!

There was no response from the tower. Hu-tse roared with laughter and applauded. He was tickled with Kan Pa's skill at quick versification.

It was first cocks' crow, and Tieh-han marched his men away. Along the road they passed the dark shapes of little villages and hamlets. The people around here can sleep peacefully, Tieh-han said to himself. This political offensive business really *is* as good as a battle!... His heart had a cool pleasant feeling. Unconsciously, he lengthened his stride.

XLIV

It was the same time of the year and the same place as a year ago—the old monastery west of Mengtsun Village. In the dark of night, guerillas filed silently into the temple.

Beyond the waist-high weeds and brambles choking the courtyard was a vast plain covered with green autumn wheat sprouts as far as the eye could see. It was this view that confronted Chien, Tieh-han and Hu the next morning as they stood peering out of the monastery window. Each had made himself a platform of stone bricks and was watching the east-west highway that ran past the compound. Standing dark and tall against the western horizon was the city of Ningchin, watchtowers dotting the top of its walls like stacks of wheat. A few hundred yards to the east of the monastery, Mengtsun Village was still asleep. In the grey dawn sky, blinking stars were just beginning to fade.

Hu, the former Guards Brigade platoon leader, kept clucking his tongue with admiration. "What a perfect spot! How did you happen to find it?"

Chien laughed. "We picked it last year as a place to hide from the enemy. Who knew that we'd be using it today for an ambush!"

"If we had the Thirty-first Regiment Second Battalion with its two machine-guns beside us then, those few dozen Japanese cavalry troopers wouldn't have got off so easy!" said Tieh-han.

But Hu was already wrapped in his calculations—how to take the cemetery on the other side of the highway after the fighting started, then

move east across the melon patch; if the enemy took cover behind that stone monument, how to drive them out....

Chien divided the men into three combat platoons. When the time came, One would go east, Two west, Three would remain behind the temple as a reserve. For the moment, all the guerillas rested at the feet of the Eighteen Disciples. Holding their rifles, the men chatted softly among themselves. Hsiao-san was reminding his companions of the day they had spent in this temple a year ago. Fu-lai and Hei Tsang were engrossed in being armchair generals, trying to guess the tactics of the coming battle. San Sheng sat opposite them, listening raptly, like a student in class.

The sun climbed above the level of the Mengtsun rooftops and bathed the countryside in its golden rays. Tension began to tighten in the guerillas. Their voices dropped to almost inaudible whispers. Chien was looking through the window with an unblinking gaze. He had already spotted a string of little black dots, like ants, crawling slowly from the eastern end of the highway. From the tail of the string rose a small cloud of smoky dust. Chien's eyes never wavered. Only when the dots had grown larger and had approached to within a third of a mile of the monastery did he turn his head.

"Get ready," he said quietly. "They're coming." He swept both arms down, indicating to the men to remain seated, and immediately resumed his observation. Like an experienced hunter watching a wolf, his deep-set black eyes now flashed toward Mengtsun Village, now darted in the direction of Ningchin.

Step by step, the dark column drew nearer. Preceding a row of big carts, the Japanese were divided into two files of about a dozen men each, walking parallel along both sides of the highway. From their steel helmets to their leather boots, the enemy soldiers breathed arrogance. Chests high, they strutted as though they held the world in the palm of their hand.

"No wonder people love them!" Chien snorted to Hu sarcastically.

"The cocky bastards!" Tieh-han grated. "We must finish every one of them! The very sight of them makes me want to vomit!"

The Japanese had passed Mengtsun Village. The creaking of their carts was already audible. Hu and Tieh-han each were grasping one of the two big double doors, waiting. The Japanese were seventy yards away. Chien swung his hand.

"Charge!"

Tieh-han pushed open his door and leaped out. As though fired from a machine-gun, Hu-tse, Kan Pa, Hsiao-san . . . a whole string of guerillas, followed in rapid succession. They fired a volley, scaled the low wall enclosing the compound, and rushed at the enemy. Japanese tumbled left and right. Hu and his platoon had already shot through the compound gate, crossed the road and occupied the cemetery ground.

By then the Japanese machine-gun was spitting fire at Tieh-han's Platoon One. The men threw themselves down and took cover.

Tieh-han could see Platoon Two charging another cemetery to the east. The guerilla who was quickest and furthest out in front was his kid brother San Sheng! Good, good, he said to himself. Get in there with your bayonet and thrust! The Japanese were running away through a melon patch. One of them dropped; the remaining three took shelter behind a big grave mound and stone tablet, and opened fire at the pursuing guerillas of Platoon Two. The fallen Japanese was still moving. It was obvious that his companions were anxious to take him with them. But from the west, a guerilla came crawling forward. It was San Sheng. He was in a very dangerous position. The three Japanese concentrated their fire on him; on all sides of San Sheng, little geysers of earth sprang up. Of course the boy couldn't hear, but Tieh-han, straining every muscle to pull him on, shouted, "Don't be afraid! Crawl faster, faster!"

San Sheng crept closer to the Japanese on the ground.

"Wait, wait!" yelled Tieh-han. "See if he's still moving. If he is, shoot him!"

The boy could hear nothing above the noise of battle. He crawled up to the Japanese and took his rifle. But the enemy soldier was motionless, probably killed by one of the bullets his companions had been firing at San Sheng. The boy turned around and began to crawl back.

"Ai!" Tieh-han bawled frantically. "Where are you going? Go forward! Forward!"

As though he had heard, San Sheng hesitated, then turned back, rested the rifle across the body of the dead Japanese and fired at the enemy soldiers behind the stone monument. From the cemetery to the west, Hu and his platoon charged toward the big grave mound with levelled bayonets. The three Japanese fled east, and San Sheng rushed to occupy the vantage point behind the monument they had vacated. He fired, and brought down a Japanese with a bullet through the leg at sixty yards. The wounded soldier continued crawling east.

"Keep after him!" Tieh-han shouted.

Before the sound of his voice died away, there was a loud "Boom!" as a mortar shell exploded in front of the stone monument. San Sheng fell sideways. Tieh-han's heart leaped, his shoulders contracted. When the white smoke cleared away, he saw the boy sit up and look dazedly around. An instant later, Platoon Two swept past in pursuit of the Japanese.

Fighting back, the entire enemy detachment retreated east, apparently intending to take Mengtsun. Several times Tieh-han gathered himself to charge, but Chien always restrained him.

"Save your strength for the slaughter. They're retreating right on to the hook!"

And indeed, just as the enemy reached the outskirts of the village, from behind the first buildings two machine-guns began to chatter in unison. To this was added volleys of rifles and a rain of hand grenades. The Japanese were mowed down in a sea of fire and smoke.

Ten minutes later the machine-guns fell silent, and the men of the Thirty-first Regiment came gushing out of the village in a torrent. Tieh-han and Hu led their platoons charging forward. For the next ten minutes there was a bedlam of shouts and cries. When it was over, except for two Japanese who had got away, scurrying and tumbling to the north, every one of the enemy lay dead on the field of battle. Shouting triumphantly, the guerillas searched for victory trophies.

The moment the battle ended, Tieh-han rushed to the stone monument to find his brother. San Sheng, in the company of another guerilla, came walking toward him, limping slightly.

"Where were you wounded?" Tieh-han asked.

"No place. The shell blew a chip off the stone tablet, and it hit my leg."

Tieh-han rolled up the boy's trouser leg. There was a black and blue mark on San Sheng's thigh. Tieh-han's face suddenly clouded. Putting a hand on his brother's shoulder, he looked the youngster in the eye.

"It's only bruised a little," he said, more like a commander than a brother. "You shouldn't have let that wounded Japanese get away. Why didn't you chase him under the cover of the smoke?"

San Sheng made no reply, but the other guerilla spoke up.

"What do you mean—get away? We finally killed him anyhow, didn't we?"

Tieh-han looked stern. "That's no way to fight a battle. No matter how hard it is, or how dangerous, when you've got a chance to kill one of the enemy personally, you can't depend on someone else doing it for you!"

XLV

Not long after, the Second Battalion of the Thirty-first Regional Regiment was transferred east to another county and parted from the Ningchin guerillas.

The destruction of the Japanese platoon at Mengtsun Village took the wind out of the sails of the "Mop Up." Enemy troops that had come from the east left hastily. Hashimoto dejectedly departed for Chaohsien with two companies. Nozu, leaving a platoon behind in Yakouchai, took over the defence of Ningchin with only one company. All other enemy bases had to rely solely on the Hirohito Helpers for their defence. The Ningchin guerilla battalion felt as though ropes which bound it were removed; its arms and legs could now move freely. Every night it carried the political offensive to the very shadow of the city walls.

As the spirits of the men rose, the battalion won more victories, bringing the people new courage and determination. Every few days, three or four young men were sent by the district or county government to take part in the war against Japan. Often, after the guerillas conducted a night mass meeting in some village, they would be approached directly by peasants applying to join them. In less than three months, the ranks of the battalion increased by over twenty volunteers, giving seven or eight new men to each platoon.

With the additional manpower came additional problems. At battalion headquarters one day Hu told Chien:

"Three new men have no rifles. They request that we issue them guns right away. Two others have rifles with no firing pins. They want to know are they supposed to puff the enemy down with their mouths when the battle starts."

Two days later, Tieh-han brought up another question with Hsueh Chiang. "We've got these new men now, but we don't have enough veterans. We spend months training them for every day of actual fighting, but how can we take them into battle without experienced men to lead them?"

The deputy commissar felt the battalion had to expand much more to keep up with the changing situation. He and Chien decided to intensify training and education, and draw the energetic guerillas into the Communist Party. In addition, they issued an order for every district platoon to transfer four men with their arms and equipment to the battalion; two of the four had to be veterans.

The district platoons all now had complements of nearly thirty men each. On the march, the platoons looked big and impressive; parting with a few men was no hardship. In less than a week, the transfers were completed. But not all of the men brought rifles with them. Only two guns came with the four men from the Second District, plus a letter from Tsai, its leader, which read:

We're short of rifles ourselves. In our platoon, we don't even have one per man. This is our biggest problem, and we don't know how to solve it. Your battalion is strong in men and fighting power. All you have to do is win a few more battles and you'll get all the rifles you need from the enemy.

It was the same with other district platoons. Some sent three rifles, some sent two. First District sent only one, saying it was just beginning to expand itself; in fact it was thinking of asking for rifles from the battalion!

"They've been on their own so long, they've forgotten what discipline means," grumbled Chien. But he didn't press the matter.

With the battalion now containing more than one hundred men, it was necessary to reorganize it again. The three platoons were divided

into three squads each. At night, when the men assembled in formation, they made a large square mass in the darkness. Facing the troops, with the nine squad leaders, each gripping his rifle smartly, lined up at attention in the front of the ranks, Hsueh Chiang thought the guerillas looked fine. But when he went around to the rear to inspect, his pride in their appearance sagged. Over a dozen had no rifles; only ration bags were slung across their backs; some held hand grenades; others carried nothing but fresh cabbages! They didn't look anything like soldiers. As for cartridges, things were even worse—each man had only three! Pacing back and forth, the deputy commissar worried how to make up these shortages.

One night Tsai, leader of the Second District guerilla platoon, came in the door. First he engaged Tieh-han, Hu-tse and other old friends in a bit of roughhousing that threatened to collapse the *kang*, everyone roaring with laughter all the while. Then Tsai sought out Chien and spoke to him privately.

"Commander, what about those rifles for our platoon?"

Chien pivoted his neck in his collar. Dryly, he gave Tsai the same advice Tsai had written to him: " . . . win a few more battles and you'll get all the rifles you need from the enemy."

Tsai grinned. "It's easier for the battalion to win victories than our little platoon. You cover the whole county and have plenty of chances. We just stick around Tangchiu. Wei Kai-chi, that puppet captain bastard in the tower there, is slippery as an eel. He seems to know every move we make. He comes out whenever he feels like it, but we can never nab him. All of a sudden he surrounds a village; by the time we hear of it, he's cleaned it out and is back in his tower!"

Just then, a messenger from District Two burst in. "Report!" he yelled.

"What's up?" Tsai demanded.

"Deputy Political Instructor Chen sent me to tell you—the enemy from the Tangchiu tower have surrounded Feichia Village. He's taken our platoon and gone after them. He says if you hear a lot of shooting, better ask the battalion to send some men to cut them off."

Chien's eyes swept the room. When their gaze reached Tieh-han, Tieh-han leaped to his feet.

"Aren't we going?"

Tsai pushed him back on the *kang*. "Keep your seat! By the time Chen gets to Feichia Village the puppets will be back in Tangchiu. Chen's just putting on a show. He comes from Feichia. He's probably using this as a chance to go home and take a look."

Hsueh Chiang, listening from the side, was very disappointed. "A lazy guy like you for a commander—how do you expect your platoon to win any battles! No wonder you're short of rifles!"

Tieh-han's platoon put on their equipment and waited, but there

was no sound of rifle fire. About an hour later, footsteps were heard approaching, then Deputy Political Instructor Chen of the Second District's guerilla platoon entered the room.

"You see," Tsai cried triumphantly, "just as I said—we never got a shot at them!"

"What's the enemy up to in Feichia at this time of the day?" asked Chien.

"It's very queer," replied the deputy political instructor. "They only took a closed carriage and two mules—nothing else. They just stole the stuff and went right back!"

"Is anything else stirring?" asked Hsueh Chiang.

Chen thought a moment. Suddenly he recalled. "One of my family came back from Tangchiu today. He heard from a relative there that the chief of police has been ordered to transfer to Ningchin City and probably will leave soon. Kai-chi, the leader of the puppets in the tower, has given him a farewell party today."

Commander Chien's eyes gleamed. "How does your relative know this?" he pressed.

"He works for the puppets. His son is a cook there."

Chien's deep-set eyes squinted thoughtfully. He raised his head. "Tomorrow! The chief of police is leaving tomorrow, for sure! We've got to start preparing immediately!"

"I think you're right about the time," Hsueh Chiang agreed. "Kai-chi is crafty. He wouldn't show his hand too far in advance. He stole the carriage tonight. That means he'll definitely see the chief off tomorrow. Since he's given the farewell party already, then there must be nothing more to keep the chief from going. This is a great chance for an ambush attack."

Tsai dissented. "It seems to me the best we can do is hit and run. There are three roads from Tangchiu to the city. Kai-chi uses them all. How will you know where to lay your ambush?"

"What three roads do you mean?" asked Chien.

"There's one out of the west gate and one out of the south gate," Deputy Political Instructor Chen explained. "A few hundred yards from town, the south road forks into two." Chen illustrated with a drawing on the table—a small square represented Tangchiu, two lines spread from its lower side, one line ran from its left side. "An ambush would be hard to carry off," he went on, pointing at his map. "At the halfway mark, each of these roads is about a mile apart. If you wait for him at this road, he may take that one; if you wait for him there, he may come along here."

His elbows on his knees, his hands supporting his face, Chien pondered, staring at the drawing on the table. Several minutes later, he thrust forward a cupped hand and brought it down below the small square.

"Hey, what do you think of this?"

The men crowded around to look. Chien explained his plan.

"The battalion will wait at the fork in the south road, in that way covering two roads. If the puppets come through the south gate, we're sure to catch them. The Second District platoon will cover the west road and engage the enemy if they go that way. The battalion will then follow along the village wall and reinforce the platoon in plenty of time. We'll have every one of the three roads stopped. If only they leave Tangchiu tomorrow, they'll never get by us."

"It sounds all right," said Hsueh Chiang, "but the battalion will be too close to the enemy. We'll be waiting right under their noses. They'll spot us if we don't stay out of sight. But if we hide in a place that's out of sight, we won't be able to get at them fast enough. . . ."

Chien laughed. "I've already got that figured out. Just watch the act we put on tomorrow. . . ."

XLVI

Gradually, the sky turned light. Slowly, the sun climbed behind the trees east of the village. A light breeze swayed the "red-lanterned" sorghum, the "wolf-tailed" wheat, making them rustle like the chuckle of laughter. Within the yellow earthen wall that encircled Tangchiu, the five-storey fortress tower rose high and lonely. From a distance, it seemed to be standing in a swath of green satin.

Autumn harvest time had just begun. Early ripening crops were already being gathered.

Peasants, in small groups, were entering the fields. It was then that Chien suddenly appeared out of nowhere, his legs soaked with dew, his hair sprinkled with sorghum grains, bare to the waist. His tunic, tied by the sleeves around his middle, hung sloppily down his backside, covering his pistol. He was carrying a small sickle.

Chien looked exhausted, evidently a man who was very tired or had gone hungry too long. His back was bent like a bow, every step he took was an effort. Slowly, he approached a field of wheat. He nodded his head as he spoke.

"You're busy, uncles. Can I give you a hand?"

Two peasants glanced up at him from their reaping. He seemed the usual tramp who helped out in busy seasons on the farms to earn an occasional meal.

"No, thanks," they said carelessly. "Where are you from?"

Chien laboriously bent forward, grabbed a handful of wheat stalks and sliced. Then he raised his head and replied, "Southeast of here. Feichia Village." He picked up an armful of wheat and deftly bound it around the middle. "Looks like a pretty good harvest this year."

"The old Lord of the Sky hasn't forgotten us after all, he gave us two good rains. If it was like last year again, none of us could live.

We'd never be able to raise the grain tribute we have to pay to the tower." The two peasants continued reaping as they talked.

Straightening his back, Chien looked toward the north at the road leading out of Tangchiu's south gate. In a dense field of sorghum, it separated into two branches, one of which led directly past the wheat field. Again Chien bent to his cutting.

"They say the chief of police is being transferred, going to the city today. Have you heard?"

Startled, the two peasants looked at Chien. "No. Who told you?"

Chien went on reaping. "I'm a poor man," he said slowly. "Nobody tells me anything. It's just the talk that's going around. . . ."

A woman brought some simple fare for the peasants. They gave Chien half a bowl of gruel which he gulped down greedily, finishing even the grain husks at the bottom. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and returned the bowl. Again he glanced in the direction of Tangchiu.

"In a little while, Hirohito Helpers are going to come down this road," he said to the two peasants. "You better hide, whether you've finished reaping or not. They're liable to try and make trouble for you. We don't want to give them any excuse to find fault. That always ends up too expensive for us poor peasants."

As they were finishing breakfast, a medley of fifes and cymbals struck up near the tower. Then, the south gate in the village wall swung open and three files of Hirohito Helpers came marching out, all with bayoneted rifles on their shoulders. An officer, prancing beside them, was shouting cadence. It was quite an impressive sight. Behind rolled a brand-new enclosed carriage, pulled by two mules with tinkling bells around their necks. In the rear of the carriage, surrounded by a gang sporting officers' swords and Mauser pistols, strutted the pot-bellied chief of police in a black uniform. He was wearing a black peaked hat, white gloves and high leather boots. Following him were the tootling musicians and a crowd who were seeing him off.

The two peasants had quickly given their bowls and chopsticks to the woman and sent her home. "Aren't you going to hide?" they asked Chien. "What's the use of just standing there looking?"

"You go first," Chien said calmly. "I'll watch the wheat for you."

The two peasants were worried. "That'll never do! Aren't you scared?"

Chien laughed. "I'm not afraid. Ever since I was a kid I've been like this—I like to take care of things for people."

The peasants saw now that this "tramp" was different from the average. His fatigue and hesitancy had disappeared; his deep black eyes flashed. He didn't hide, but strode off instead toward the dense field of sorghum. The two peasants crouched hastily, circled past another sorghum field, and kept going till they were out of sight.

The music was coming closer. The puppets were almost at the fork in the road. Turning, the pot-bellied chief of police courteously urged the send-off party to return. The sword-wearers politely begged him to enter the carriage.

"It's a beautiful day today," they said. "Have a good trip!"

While all this bowing and scraping was proceeding with so much flourish, Chien untied his tunic from his waist and waved it twice over his head. The black muzzles of more than one hundred rifles rose from behind the sorghum and pointed at the puppets fore and aft of the carriage. Chien pulled his pistol from its holster. His first shot was a signal to the rifles. They roared together like thunder bursting on the open plain. The puppets tumbled in all directions, the way trees fall when ripped up by a cyclone. An instant later, from the sorghum, the corn, the wheat fields came the cry of "Charge!" With Tieh-han and Hu-tse in the lead, guerillas carrying fixed bayonets poured forth from all sides and rushed at the puppets. . . .

Fifteen minutes later, more than half of puppet Kai-chi's company was wiped out. Wounded in the posterior, Kai-chi himself had been hastily carried back to Tangchiu. The chief of police lay dead beneath the wheels of his carriage.

Chien brushed the sorghum grains out of his hair with his cloth tunic. He shouted for the guerillas to hurry and pick up the arms and equipment of the dead puppets. But enemy soldiers were firing from the tower by then, and Chien knew puppet reinforcements were likely to come from the nearby village of Talu. Leaving those rifles that were too close to the walls of Tangchiu, the battalion joined forces with the Second District guerilla company, together with it left the battlefield, and headed in the direction of Hsiaoliu.

Check-up after dark revealed that the battalion hadn't suffered a single casualty—killed or wounded. The guerillas had captured twenty-five rifles and five hundred rounds of ammunition. Because they had wanted to get away quickly, they had released on the spot about a dozen puppet prisoners.

Guerillas who had been without rifles were given shiny new pieces. Broken weapons were secreted. Each man was issued eight cartridges.

When the ammunition was being distributed, Tsai also came forward to get his "share in the profits."

"Well, did we carry off the ambush?" Chien asked him with a grin.

Tsai reddened. "What would you be battalion commander for if we didn't?" he demanded grudgingly. "Why would we have to take lessons from you?"

XLVII

The great plain of central Hopei looked exceptionally vast after

being bared of its autumn crop. Guerilla activities began sweeping across this plain like a wind. . . .

Japanese and puppet troops were struck again and again. Most of the towers guarding secondary highways were abandoned. Military roads and the blockade moat lay lonely and unattended. The district and county government men didn't stand on ceremony. In the dark of night they organized teams in every village to go out and build crossings over the big moat; pillboxes along the roads were demolished; the abandoned towers were burned. Travel between the territory on both sides of the big moat was now possible without the least hindrance. As soon as the sun went down, the Eighth Route Army took over completely.

But Yasuji Okamura, the Japanese general, still had illusions that he could "quickly wind up the battle on the mainland." With forty thousand troops, he began an "annihilation drive" toward the revolutionary stronghold on Mount Hengshan. All the people and fighting units in the Shansi-Chahar-Hopei Area were mobilized to smash this attack. Everyone was concerned about General Nieh Jung-chen, commander of the regular Eighth Route Army forces in the mountains, and about the Area government. The people were constantly inquiring for news of them.

One night, two scouts on bicycles arrived after a fast twenty-mile trip from the regional command and delivered an order to Chien. The order said that in a few weeks the biggest campaign of the year would be launched in the region embracing Ningchin and Suchi Counties. Its objective would be to destroy the towers in Yakouchai and in its neighbouring villages. Besides the two county battalions, the Thirty-first Regional Regiment would take part too. Other county battalions had also been directed to co-operate. The main task of the Ningchin battalion for the moment was to become well-informed on the whole situation, study the terrain and make all necessary preparations. It should submit a plan of battle to the higher command.

The purpose of this campaign, said the order, was twofold: First, to co-ordinate with the counter-blow of the regular Eighth Route Army forces on Mount Hengshan against the "annihilation drive." The guerillas would hit at the enemy from behind. Under no circumstances should the Japanese be allowed to remove from the region so much as one man or one rifle. Second, in the Suchi-Ningchin region, it was necessary to clear an area thirty-five miles square of all enemy towers and strong points and destroy the enemy's rule. Thus, when engaging the Japanese in this region, the guerillas could operate openly, without the constant danger of being encircled.

Chien signed and sealed a receipt for the order and handed it to the scouts. They promptly hopped on their bicycles and pedalled off furiously.

Chien carefully read the order two more times from beginning to end, then delivered it to Hsueh Chiang. With his hands clasped around his knees, the commander sat against the wall, his eyes staring up at the ceiling. He was beginning to plan his tactics.

When Hsueh Chiang finished reading the order, he made some notes in a small book, slipped the order under Chien's notebook, and looked at the commander. Several minutes later, Chien discovered that the deputy commissar was watching him expectantly. The two men gazed at one another in silence, until Hsueh Chiang laughed.

"We knew this day was coming!"

"It's good news all right," Chien smiled, "and it's a good job we've been given to do. But it isn't going to be easy. We've got a lot of new men with no combat experience. Our guerillas know a lot more about fighting the Hirohito Helpers than about fighting the Japanese. With our present strength, we can't launch any direct assaults on Japanese towers. Also, it'll take time to gather intelligence reports."

"We'll have difficulties," Hsueh Chiang admitted. "But we've still got a little time for training. If we can't overpower the Japanese, we'll out-smart them. Haven't we won quite a few victories by using our brains? The only problem remaining is getting well-informed on the situation. There's no question about the enthusiasm of the men."

Officers of platoon rank and above were summoned together for a meeting. Chien slowly read them the order, word by word. Wide-eyed, Tieh-han listened. With every sentence he clucked his tongue approvingly. When Chien finished, Tieh-han threw his arms around Hu.

"Buddha be praised! Our time is coming!"

Hu struggled to break free. "Hah! Things will really be getting hot now!"

Erh-tung excitedly stroked his moustache. "I never thought I'd live to see the sun again, but I can see its edge already!"

"All this has nothing to do with you, you old fossil," Hu teased him. "Once we start operating openly and become part of the regular army, you can go home and play with your grandson!"

Grinning, the older man shoved Hu and Tieh-han down on the *kang*, and the three laughed and wrestled joyously. Hsueh Chiang smilingly waited till everyone had settled down again, then opened a discussion on how to handle the difficulties they would encounter in the coming campaign. The men eagerly presented their proposals, interrupting one another in their enthusiasm. The meeting was serious, but very lively.

Finally, it was decided that Chien should go personally to the vicinity of Yakouchai and gather intelligence. After three days he would return and the discussion on tactics would be resumed. So as not to reveal their true objective, the battalion would keep away from Yakouchai, and stay around Ningchin City while practising. Besides drilling on the three basic manoeuvres, the guerillas would concentrate on crossing dry moats and climbing to rooftops. In each squad, one veteran was designated to team with every two newcomers.

After midnight, Chien set out with his orderly Chin Shan. The battalion headed toward the city, with Tieh-han in the lead. All along the

way he kept drilling them—"Spread out. . . . Advance. . . . Take cover. . . ." At the highway, he gave a command, and the men leaped into the dry moat surrounding an abandoned tower fort. They clambered up the other side of the moat, competing to be the first to climb into the decaying tower. All the way to their billet for the night, they continued to practise.

The next day, Tieh-han rose before noon and made the rounds from room to room. The men were still sleeping. He couldn't think of anything to do, yet he had a feeling of incompleteness, as though a little deer were capering about in his heart. Happy, yet rather upset at the same time, he returned to his own room. Pulling out his bayonet, he stropped it against his hand. Though it slid smoothly, he wasn't satisfied. He went outside and began to polish it on a whetstone.

One after another, the men got up. Hu-tse, Hsiao-san, Kan Pa . . . found themselves whetstones too and vigorously sharpened their blades. Kan Pa sang as he honed:

Sharpen, sharpen your bayonet,
Sharpen it shiny and bright,
Only wait for the order,
Then forward—with all your might!
First kill a Japanese devil,
Let your bullet into him thump,
Then slay a Hirohito Helper,
The muddle-headed chump!

"What's going on?" Tieh-han asked, puzzled. "A man sharpens his bayonet, and you all decide to do the same."

"We figure you probably know something," said Kan Pa.

"What would I know?"

"Who can tell? You're so good at playing innocent!"

Tieh-han laughed. "What's there to be innocent about?"

"All right, cut it out," pleaded Hu-tse. "We're getting ready to fight, aren't we? Tell us when it's going to be, or we'll all go crazy trying to guess!"

"Just keep on waiting," Kan Pa said to Hu-tse with a smirk. "It's a military secret. We can't take the cover off the pot till it's finished cooking. There's no use you sniffing around!"

"We will fight soon," said Tieh-han. "But when and how, I don't know myself, and I shouldn't make any wild guesses. Our job now is to train hard so that we plough right through them when the battle comes. That will be really something!"

Hsiao-san looked up at the sky. "It's past noon already. Let's get out and do a little manoeuvring!"

Hu-tse rolled up his sleeves and spat on his hands. "Let's go!" He led his squad out for rifle drill.

Kan Pa took another squad indoors to practise aiming. They all stayed at it until dark.

XLVIII

At lamplighting time on the third day, the guerillas were in the fields west of the village, working on manoeuvres. On the street, Hsueh Chiang ran into Chien, who was just returning. Walking back to the house together, the deputy commissar had the feeling that Chien's pace was faster than usual. His bearing was different too. With both hands hooked in his belt, the short-statured commander jounced along lightly, as though gathering himself between the words "Double time—" and the rest of the command "—march!" before breaking into a trot. It struck Hsueh Chiang that if Chien didn't grasp his belt, but let his arms swing naturally, somewhat crooked at the elbow, his walk would be very much like Hsueh Chiang's own.

Chien now knew all about the situation in Yakouchai. In addition to a platoon of Japanese, there were over one hundred puppets guarding the enemy base. This stronghold was located in the southern part of the village in what was formerly a large residential compound. A dry moat had been dug outside, all around the compound wall. Streets ran beside the moat on its north, east and west sides; beyond the south side lay the outskirts of the village. The large compound gate faced west. Within the walls of the compound, four wings of one-storey buildings were arranged in a hollow square. In the centre of the courtyard stood a three-storey round tower fortress which was occupied by Japanese troops. A square tower of the same height, guarded by Hirohito Helpers, stood in the northwest corner of the compound, facing the Japanese tower. Walls five feet high were built on the roofs of the houses lining the compound. This upper portion was sand-bagged and had firing slits for rifles. From a distance, the compound looked like a small walled city built on the house-tops in the southern part of the village.

Chien removed his pistol, readjusted his belt and mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. "That's the enemy lay-out," he concluded. "With our present strength, if we tried to storm them, we'd never get in!"

The deputy commissar looked at him with bright laughing eyes. "But I'll bet you've got a plan of attack."

Chien made no reply. He sat down on the edge of the *kang* and slowly took off his brief-bag. From Chien's expression Hsueh Chiang could see that the commander had something up his sleeve. But he knew that Chien was a taciturn sort. Only if you asked him again and again, or when he felt he had thought a problem out thoroughly, only then would Chien open his mouth. This trait often drove the deputy commissar frantic, and at times displeased him. But he never criticized Chien for

it. Perhaps his way is right, Hsueh Chiang thought. It makes people pay close attention to every word he speaks, and seems to add weight to even the most ordinary statements. That's a good thing in a military leader. . . .

From his bag, Chien produced a loose-leaf notebook, ruffled through it to a particular page. He came close to the deputy commissar, and in a low voice, as though telling a story, said:

"The Japanese issued an order to all the villages yesterday. Within five days' time, they each have to deliver to the fortress a certain amount of raw cotton. See—I've got it written here—a thousand catties from Tiliang, eight hundred from Chiangchia, and so on. . . ." He paused and glanced at Hsueh Chiang. "If we're looking for a plan, I think we ought to start here."

"What use is all this to us?" asked the deputy commissar.

Chien continued his recital. "Today, the village of Leichuang delivered one cartful. I arranged everything with the district government. The villagers can prepare the cotton for the next trip but they can't deliver till the government gives them the word." Nodding confidently, Chien fixed his eyes on Hsueh Chiang.

The deputy commissar was beginning to see the light. He blinked mischievously. "Can it be that when the time comes we'll hide under the cotton and ride the carts right into the fortress?"

"That's what I had in mind!"

Hsueh Chiang slapped the table enthusiastically. "A great idea! With three big carts we can slip in twenty men!—But no matter what you say, we're still a little short of men. Let's talk it over in detail among ourselves tonight, then, tomorrow you can take it up with Region. See if they can't help us out with some more troops."

That night, the guerillas agreed on their plan. Chien took it to Region immediately. The following afternoon, Hsueh Chiang summoned a meeting of the leaders of the Communist Party groups within the battalion. He heard their reports on the results of the training of the past few days and on the men's morale, then gave them some new instructions. In the evening, Chien returned from regional headquarters. The plan had been approved. Moreover, Region was giving them two platoons, each with a machine-gun, from the Thirty-first Regional Regiment. The operation was to start at 7 p.m. of the fourteenth. Time schedules and signals were all already determined by Region. Because the plan required disguise and concealment, the guerillas were to begin their final preparations at 3 p.m. of the fourteenth. That was only a little more than two days from the present.

Chien wrote five orders. Two went to the Second and Fifth District platoons, directing them to hide near the roads west of Talu and Tayingshang, and stop any enemy attempt to send reinforcements from Ningchin City. Two other orders went to the Third and Fourth District platoons,

telling them to join forces at the blockade moat between Yakouchai and Lokou, and prepare to storm the Tajen tower when the signal was given. The last order, Chien sent to the guerilla platoon of District One, across the big moat. Their job was to maintain contact with the Thirty-first Regiment and the Suchi battalion, both of which would be attacking Chih-chiu, at the same time keeping an eye on the tower in Tuantsun to prevent the tower's puppets from running away.

L

The courtyard of the compound in which the battalion was billeted in Leichuang the night of the thirteenth was piled with a thousand catties of raw cotton. The peasants had contributed the cotton from their quilts, mattresses, padded hats and jackets . . . a motley array covering half the courtyard. In one corner of the courtyard stood three big carts which District had secretly delivered, a sleek mule hitched up to each.

Around midnight, Chien called a meeting of all leaders of platoon rank and above, both of the battalion and of the Thirty-first Regiment platoons. They held a whispered conference beside the carts, then started the rehearsal. The eighteen men comprising the three assault squads were summoned. After a few instructions from Chien, they got busy setting up an oval retaining wall of matting on each of the carts, then, at Chien's command, began clambering in. Tieh-han was the first to mount his cart. He immediately squatted. In this position, the matting wall was higher than his head. Besides Chan Wei and four other guerillas, Tieh-han's cart also contained Big Li of the Thirty-first Regiment, and his machine-gun. The men in the second cart included Fu-lai and Chin Shan. Hei Tsang was in charge of the assault squad in the third cart.

Hsueh Chiang then covered the men in each cart with a large quilt. On top of this, other guerillas piled on more cotton. When the loads were adjusted and in position, the deputy commissar looked at the carts with satisfaction.

"They'll do."

Kan Pa took up a whip. "I'll drive the first one."

Chien drove the second. Bowback had long since been assigned the third. Chien gave the command to go, Kan Pa lightly cracked his whip and prodded the flank of his mule with the butt. The animal strained forward; the cart began to roll. Through the softly opened compound gate, the three carts moved swiftly.

Far outside the village, the carts stopped. Hsueh Chiang and the commander of the Thirty-first Regiment platoons had been trotting on either side of the caravan, examining it critically. Chien leaped down from his cart.

"How do we look?"

"Good enough," they replied. The deputy commissar added a word of caution. "You ought to hold your whip like Kan Pa. You still look a little amateurish."

Chien laughed. "All right. You two had better get started. Be sure to post a few extra sentries outside the village you stay in tomorrow. We've got to keep this thing secret. The main thing is—when the firing starts, you've got to get to us in ten minutes!"

The two each took him by the hand. "We'll get there!" they assured him.

Chien, with the three carts and a total of twenty-two men, spent the night in Chiangchia. Not a soul knew they were there.

Hsueh Chiang marched off with the rest of the battalion and the two platoons from the Thirty-first Regiment. Before morning they were hidden in a compound in a little hamlet only a third of a mile from Yakouchai.

LI

The afternoon of the fourteenth, three carts loaded with cotton skirted the little hamlet while proceeding to Yakouchai.

Walking beside his cart, Chien kept both places under careful observation. Yakouchai, with its surrounding earthen wall, looked like a city that children build of mud. On its southern corner, another smaller mud city seemed to have been superimposed, from within which rose two towers. This was the enemy's fortress. The closer they drew to Yakouchai, the tighter Chien's heart became. But his pace grew ever firmer and steadier. . . . Only a few dozen families lived in the hamlet. Hirohito Helpers had long since stripped it of its trees, using them as convenient firewood. Seen against the background of the large fleecy clouds on the horizon, the hamlet stood out like a barren little island. Kan Pa loudly cracked his whip, and Chien saw the Pop-eyed Tiger, who had been standing at the entrance to the hamlet, turn and walk into it.

Outside the big gate of the Yakouchai fortress compound, two puppet sentries lolled, rifles on their shoulders. Gazing listlessly, they occasionally strolled a few paces, then stopped and resumed their sloppy stand.

The three carts pulled up to them and halted. Kan Pa, beside the first cart, stuck his whip into the joint of a shaft, approached the puppets and made them a deep ceremonious bow. The Hirohito Helpers glanced sideways at him. Kan Pa smiled ingratiatingly.

"If you'd be so kind—is this where we deliver our cotton?"

"Where you from?"

"Leichuang."

"Got a pass?"

Kan Pa frowned, looked thoughtful, then grinned and shoved his hand in his tunic. After considerable fumbling, he brought out two paper

money notes. "You must excuse me, brothers. I didn't know you had to have a pass to get in. Take this and buy yourselves some cigarettes. Next time you come to our village look me up. We'll cook a couple of chickens and have a pot of wine together. You'll be my guests!"

The Hirohito Helpers took the money. Seeing how little it was, their lips curled with disdain. "Can you spare it?" they inquired sarcastically.

"A thousand pardons," Kan Pa begged. "I wasn't prepared today. Next time I'll make it twice as much." Without waiting for their reply, he waved his hand to the two carts behind. "We can go in!" he cried.

Having taken his bribe, the puppets couldn't very well stop him. They let the carts go creaking through the gate.

A bunch of puppets came out of the north wing when they saw the carts entering the compound. Three Japanese, armed with rifles, also hurried over from the big tower. This last was unexpected, and Kan Pa got excited.

"We're here!" he cried in a high-pitched voice. "Hurry and unload the carts!"

Like an opening flower, cotton flew up and splayed out in all directions. Twenty-two guerillas leaped from the carts as one man. Chien's pistol barked at the Hirohito Helpers. Tieh-han and a group of guerillas rushed the three Japanese. Two were downed before they had a chance to raise their rifles. The third charged them with a hastily fixed bayonet. A bedlam of shots and cries filled the air, terrifying the mules. They galloped madly around the courtyard, hoofs flying.

Chien and the guerillas from the second and third carts scattered the puppets and plunged into the square tower in the northwest corner of the compound. A squad of Hirohito Helpers still had not reached for their rifles when they were taken prisoner by the guerillas. Big Li bounded up the steps three at a time to the roof and opened fire with his machine-gun on the round tower opposite manned by the Japanese.

While Tieh-han and his squad were trying to come to grips with the stabbing, slashing enemy soldier; they heard Chien's voice ring out from the puppet tower.

"Tieh-han, take over the west wing. The Japanese will be coming out in a minute!"

Tieh-han began to get tense. Then there were two shots, and the Japanese with the bayonet flopped over, face to the sky. Bowback was standing behind Tieh-han with a smoking rifle.

"Let's grab that west wing!" the old scout urged.

The guerillas made a concerted run for the wing. Frantic Hirohito Helpers inside barred the door. Tieh-han put his shoulder against it, and with one powerful shove, splintered it crashing to the floor. A squad of puppets retreated cowering to a corner of the room, throwing down their rifles and raising their hands.

By then five Japanese had come charging out of the round tower, running toward the west wing with levelled bayonets.

"Fire!" yelled Tieh-han, and let go a mighty blast with his shotgun.

Chan Wei and the others ripped the covers from their hand grenades with their teeth, yanked the safety strings with their left hands, threw the grenades with their right. There were loud bursts and spurting pillars of black smoke. Two Japanese fell. The remaining three turned tail and fled back to their tower. Streams of covering fire from two Japanese machine-guns shattered the wooden window frame through which guerillas were flinging grenades. Bullets rained into the room, fracturing the leg of one of the assault squad. He sat on the ground trying to stem the flow of blood.

Tieh-han swore. His forehead was beaded with perspiration. He told Kan Pa and a couple of the others to guard the doorway, then picked up the wounded man and carried him to a corner facing away from the enemy. Next, he dragged over a square table and fitted it into the corner, forming a shield in front of the seated man.

"Don't groan," Tieh-han whispered. "Keep your mouth shut tight and try to rest."

Taking a sleeping mat off the *kang*, he placed it over the pool of blood in the centre of the room.

Machine-gun bullets were still whining in fast and furious. No one could move. Tieh-han jumped up, took a bayonet and pried vigorously at the side of the brick *kang*. A moment later, it toppled over.

"Come and get these bricks!" he ordered. "Block up the door and window!"

The guerillas hastened to comply. Except for a few small openings for their rifles, they jammed the door and window tight with bricks. Now they finally had a fortified position.

After this initial clash, things settled down somewhat. The guerillas had occupied the square tower and all of the west wing; they also commanded the entrance to the compound. But their firepower was weak. Enemy machine-guns could play up and down the entire length and breadth of the courtyard. The north, east and south wings were still held by Hirohito Helpers. That the enemy was quiet for the moment meant only that they were preparing to launch another attack.

South of Tieh-han and his squad, in an adjoining room, was Fu-lai's squad; to their north in the square tower were the guerillas' machine-gun and battalion commander. But all of these structures were separated by walls between them. This seemed to Tieh-han too cramped, too dangerous. He ordered the men to remove the covers from all of their grenades and keep them ready at hand, to rearrange the rifle openings between the bricks. Then, with a couple of crowbars and a small shovel, he and two guerillas attacked the north wall of the room, to dig a connecting passage with the square tower. Just as they had nearly dug

through a hole half the height of a man, the Japanese again opened fire. Machine-gun bullets splattered against the bricks in the window, knocking several of them to the ground. Geysers of earth spurted up all over the floor.

"Get ready!" said Tieh-han.

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than from each side of the short wall that screened the entrance to the enemy tower a steel-helmeted Japanese emerged.

"Fire!"

A volley of bullets from the guerillas brought both of the Japanese down in their tracks. Immediately, two more stuck their heads out, but they made no attempt to advance. Two shots chipped brick off the screen wall behind which they were hiding. They withdrew their heads in a hurry.

Unexpectedly, a dozen Hirohito Helpers rushed out of the north wing. Hugging the wall of the west wing, they approached the window, all the while firing wildly, screaming "Give up your guns, Eighth Route Army! We'll let you surrender!"

Tieh-han guessed they must be right outside the window. Sure enough, the remaining bricks in the window swayed, then crashed inward. The heads of two puppets appeared at the opening. Tieh-han raised his shotgun and pulled the trigger. An empty click was the only response. He was out of ammunition. Hastily levelling his bayonet, he lunged at one of the heads. But, from both sides of the window, the Hirohito Helpers began tossing in hand grenades.

"Down!" he shouted.

Two grenades were rolling across the floor. Kan Pa snatched them up and threw them back out of the window. There were two loud explosions. Grenades continued to pour into the room, Tieh-han and the guerillas picking them up and flinging them out as fast as they came, throwing their own grenades in addition. Several enemy grenades they couldn't catch in time, and these rocked the room with their concussion. Emitting a dense white smoke, they sent iron splinters whizzing about the room. Just as the skirmish was at its hottest, the covering fire from the Japanese machine-gun on the tower suddenly switched to a target north in the distance. A machine-gun there returned the fire. The Hirohito Helpers, left without support and having no place to take cover, abandoned their dead and ran to the east wing.

Beyond the compound's north wing, the shouts of advancing men grew louder. Tieh-han strained his ears.

"Our troops are coming from the hamlet!" he said happily.

His assault squad guerillas looked as though they had just crawled out of a stove. Sooty black faces, sweat-soaked clothes covered with grime—Tieh-han couldn't repress a grin. Quickly, he helped them cram

the bricks back in the window opening, then resumed digging through the wall. A few minutes later, they walked into the square tower.

Peering north through one of the tower's rifle slits, Tieh-han could see Hsueh Chiang's guerillas moving up in two columns. The western column Hu was leading directly toward the north wing of the compound. The eastern column, made up of the two platoons from the Thirty-first Regiment, was clearing the way to the south with a machine-gun. Both columns were carrying scaling ladders, advancing over the rooftops. Tieh-han tied his tunic to the end of his rifle, shoved it out through the slit and waved.

"Hai! Comrades! Come on! Give 'em hell!"

About seventy-five yards away, from behind the peak of a sloping tiled roof, four heads popped out.

"Tieh-han! How're you doing? We'll be right over!" In chorus with Hu-tse's thick bass were the squeaky voices of two youngsters. "Charge, comrades!" they were crying. "To die now means glory!"

Tieh-han nearly jumped for joy. "Hurry up over here!" he shouted. "We'll give you a real welcome!"

The men on the rooftops responded with ear-splitting cheers.

Hu-tse's great hulk slid down the slanting roof, crossed a flat top, leaped into a courtyard. Close behind him, darting, skipping, followed San Sheng and Hsiao-san. Next, moving fast with Hu in the lead, ignoring the Japanese machine-gun bullets spattering against the tiles, came the rest of the column. Tieh-han urged them on with vigorous waves of his tunic.

Hu-tse had jumped into a courtyard which had a gate made of sorghum stalks, facing south. Before the gate lay twenty yards of open ground, then the deep dry moat guarding the north wall of the fortress compound. Tieh-han could see men stirring behind the sorghum gate; one end of a big scaling ladder rose briefly and disappeared again. Stamping with delight, he thought—if they can break into the north wing, all the Hirohito Helpers will be finished!

Sure enough, after a volley of rifle fire the sorghum gate swung open. Four guerillas, two at each end of a twenty-five-foot ladder, came charging out. Carrying the rear end were San Sheng and Hsiao-san. Five yards from the moat, the four were enveloped in the thick smoke of a bursting grenade. All fell to the ground. Tieh-han's heart sank. But the boys rose to their feet. They took one end of the heavy ladder and pulled it like a rope in a tug-of-war toward the moat, heaving a step, pausing a step. Three such steps and Hsiao-san keeled over sideways, obviously hit. San Sheng looked around wildly, then angrily stamped his foot and continued to drag the ladder alone. Hsiao-san got up groggily. Grasping the rear end of the ladder, he pushed forward. With leaden movements, the boys inched the front end into the moat. The rear end

began to rise, then toppled into the moat, dragging the two youngsters with it.

There was a roar from the little courtyard. Hu-tse, carrying a rifle, bounded across the open flat and sailed into the moat. His head pressed against the stone wall, Tieh-han wanted to leap through the rifle slit. Though he couldn't see, he guessed the ladder was already raised against the base of the north wing and that Hu-tse was tunnelling through. A few minutes later, he heard two hand grenades exploding in the north wing; smoke poured out of its windows. Through the rifle slit, he saw Hu and the rest of the column streaming out of the little courtyard and jumping into the moat beside the ladder.

Tieh-han turned to Chien. "The whole north wing is ours! . . . " He rushed out of the square tower.

Darkness fell. A round yellow moon rose in the sky. The two platoons of the Thirty-first Regiment had also crossed the moat. They blasted into the east wing, then breaking through the walls of the adjoining rooms as they went, drove into the south wing. By nine p.m. they had pushed the Hirohito Helpers into the last room of the southwest corner of the compound. The puppets surrendered.

Only when this phase of the battle ended did the guerillas notice that from three or four places about seven miles to the northeast rifle and cannon fire could be heard. In two of them flames were glowing, which meant that the towers there had been taken.

In accordance with Chien's order, before midnight, holes were knocked through all the walls separating the various rooms. Every window and door facing the round Japanese tower in the centre of the courtyard was blocked with bricks. Only small openings were left for rifles to shoot through. A brick wall was erected in the compound gateway. The Japanese tower was now locked in a fortified square, though the enemy continued resisting stubbornly.

LII

About one in the morning, the Japanese tried a crafty trick. With two incendiary grenades, they set fire to the south wing. While the guerillas were busy trying to extinguish the blaze, the Japanese made a rush for the compound gate. They found it blocked with a wall two bricks in depth. At the same time, Fu-lai's squad and the regiment machine-guns poured lead into them. Leaving five bodies on the ground, the Japanese fled back to their tower. But three rooms of the south wing were burned out and the compound wall which backed them had collapsed.

The square tower became a temporary headquarters command post. Chien, Hsueh Chiang and the commander of the Thirty-first Regiment platoons went into conference on how to settle the Japanese.

"They're going to hold on hard and wait to be relieved," Chien predicted. "If we can't clean them out before morning, tomorrow they're sure to get help from the city. We have to prevent that at all costs and finish the battle while it's still dark. . . ."

Hsueh Chiang thought a moment. "The enemy are tough. They occupy the most favourable position. Their firepower isn't any weaker than ours. Since they can't break through, they'll try to hold out to the death." He clenched his fists. "But we've got them in the palm of our hand. We can't lose this chance! We've got to be even tougher, strike while our men's morale is at the highest, put everything we've got into wiping the Japanese out before sunrise!".

The commander of the regimental platoons agreed. "If we can take the tower, it will mean a big boost to the Regiment too!"

"The question now is how to win a complete victory with a minimum of losses," said Chien.

The three men looked through the rifle slits. In the moonlight, the tower reared up before them round and solid. Flames spat through small openings in its three-storey wall; from its roof, grenades could be tossed to any corner of the courtyard. There was no place near it for a man to take cover, no way of climbing it.

Staring at the tower, the Regiment officer sighed. "A few hundred catties of dynamite would send it flying!"

A thought suddenly occurred to Chien. "We haven't any dynamite, but why can't we set it on fire?"

"That's right!" cried Hsueh Chiang. "We'll win a complete victory with a minimum of losses that way all right!"

Completing their inspection of the enemy tower, the three commanders decided to give the job to Tieh-han's platoon.

After Hu had arrived with the reserves, the entire First Platoon concentrated in the north wing. Tieh-han was lying on a pile of bricks peering out at the round tower, having just returned from a tour of the four wings. Though he had examined all of the prisoners, he had seen no sign of his "father," the landlord Chou Yen-sung.

"He belongs to the intelligence group that works for the Japanese," one of the prisoners told Tieh-han. "He's probably up in the tower!"

A beam of moonlight, shining through the rifle slit, illuminated the upper part of Tieh-han's face and gleamed in his eyes like embers. It was in this very room that the enemy, four times, had nearly finished him. Lying facing the tower, facing the moonlight, he thought of the people whose wrong he had to avenge: the thousands of fighters who gave their lives in the big "Mop Up"; the heroes who were tortured in enemy jails; in the Northeast coal mines, the men who were being worked to death; the women and children in enemy-occupied territory, once free and happy, now being ground beneath the Japanese heel. . . . He could still dimly picture Chang, the guerilla squad leader whose leg

had been shattered by a bullet, how Chang had waited to blow himself and enemy soldiers up with a grenade concealed in his tunic. . . . And there was his honest father, and Chu, his sprightly little sister. . . .

Last of all, he thought of his white-haired mother, of what had been done to her, to San Sheng, to himself. Facing the tower, facing the moonlight, one by one he recalled the deeds that were crying for vengeance in his heart! Today, he wanted to clean the slate in one sweep, to get payment for these bloody debts! And the ones who should be made to pay were right before his eyes—there in the big round tower in the moonlight!

The north wing was closer to the round tower than the other wings. It was only fifteen yards or so away. Upon receiving the assignment from Hsueh Chiang, Tieh-han silently rose to his feet and adjusted his clothing to fit tighter. Again he examined the terrain, then sent someone to the village for half a dozen bundles of sorghum stalks. After the man returned, Tieh-han removed the bricks in the lower left-hand corner of the doorway, crept halfway out and looked around. The enemy, watching the square tower, didn't notice him. He eased himself back into the room, then picked two guerillas and gave them each two bundles of stalks.

"Take these over to the tower, light them and come right back!"

The guerillas nodded. Tieh-han waved his hand through the opening. The machine-gun on the square tower began to chatter. Slipping through the hole in the doorway, the two guerillas ran around the short wall screening the entrance to the Japanese tower and placed the bundles of stalks against its wooden door. The scratching of the stalks alerted the enemy. They promptly dropped a melon-sized grenade, followed by four more.

"Down!" yelled Tieh-han. "Light the stalks!"

But just as the guerillas started to crouch, there was a string of explosions, and the two were enveloped in swirling smoke.

Tieh-han stood numb by the opening. A hand snatched him back into the room an instant before two more enemy grenades burst directly outside the north wing's door, shattering three bricks to powder.

"Bad luck!" muttered Hsueh Chiang. "They've seen us!"

Abruptly, Tieh-han stepped forward, unbuckling his cartridge belt. His eyebrows arched high.

"I'll go!"

He began shoving a bundle of stalks outside when a strong hand stopped him.

"You can't!" said a deep voice.

Tieh-han turned. Hu-tse's big eyes were fixed on him.

"Why not?"

"It's too dangerous. You can't be spared. Let me go!"

Tieh-han shook his head emphatically. "It's just as dangerous for you. I won't let you do it!"

"You've got to give me the job, Tieh-han! I haven't even earned half a citation yet!"

"I'm a Communist. I'll go first!"

"I'm a Communist too!"

Hsueh Chiang interrupted. "Is there any other reason why you think you should go?" he asked Hu-tse.

"There is. Look." He pointed to three quilts on the floor. "If I soak these with water and cover myself with them, the danger will be much less."

"I could do the same thing," protested Tieh-han.

"Nothing doing," Hu-tse retorted. "I'm not giving in to you. You've been fighting a couple of hours and, besides, your right arm is crippled. You couldn't hold the quilts on."

Hsueh Chiang stopped Tieh-han from arguing any further. "As long as he's made up his mind, Tieh-han, let him go. We need you to look after the troops."

Tieh-han made no reply.

Hu-tse spread the quilts open on the floor; Kan Pa sloshed them with two bucketfuls of water. Hu-tse stuck a package of matches in his pocket, then picked up a coil of rope.

"What's the rope for?" asked Tieh-han.

A brief grave smile flitted across Hu-tse's face. For the moment he didn't answer, but shook out the rope and tied one end of it to his left arm. Standing at attention before Tieh-han, he took from his pocket a small mimeographed Communist textbook and handed it over.

"This is a Party document. I'm giving it to you." From the same pocket he fished out two bills of Liberated Area currency which he also delivered to Tieh-han.

"This was for my living expenses last month. If I don't come back, please don't forget that I'm a member of the Communist Party. Pay these two dollars toward my Party dues!"

Tieh-han's fingers closed tight on Hu-tse's small possessions. His heart surged with warmth. At no time had he ever treated Hu-tse as a soldier of lower rank; now their friendship seemed to him stronger many hundredfold! Hu-tse's things weighed heavy in his hands. Putting them carefully in his own pocket, he couldn't think of what to say. At last he patted his pocket.

"Hu-tse, I won't forget. None of us will forget. You can go without a worry!"

Turning to Kan Pa, Hu-tse gave him the other end of the rope. "If I'm killed, pull me back right away. Don't let the Japanese mess up my body!"

This time Kan Pa had no wisecrack. He raised a clenched fist. "Right! You can depend on me!"

Hu-tse draped the soaked quilts over his head and body, put a bundle

of stalks under his left arm and walked toward the opening. As he passed Hsueh Chiang, he snapped to attention and saluted. He was very calm. The deputy commissar solemnly returned his salute.

"I wish you success in your mission," said Hsueh Chiang in a strong clear voice.

Hu-tse smiled. He turned and nodded farewell to his comrades. They were all holding their breaths. Several dozen pairs of eyes were fixed on the big tall figure, seeing him off, watching him plunge through the opening.

In spite of the intense machine-gun fire to which the enemy tower was being subjected, the Japanese continued firing and throwing grenades. Before Hu-tse had gone ten paces, a grenade burst at his feet. The quilts flipped up like a pair of wings and emitted a puff of smoke. Hu-tse fell forward. Every man in the north wing felt hit by the same blow. Their hair stood on end. Shocked, Kan Pa dropped the rope. Pressing with both hands, Hu-tse pushed himself into a kneeling position. Twice he tried to stand; twice he failed. Again he lay prone and began to crawl, pulling himself forward by his powerful arms. His legs dragged a bloody trail behind. Through smoke and flying iron splinters, he finally reached the tower's wooden door. He placed the bundle of stalks against it and struck a match. Immediately, a little flame writhed on the bundle and a thin column of smoke crept up along the outer wall of the tower into the sky. Tieh-han bit his lips. His heart beat so fast he thought it would leap right out of his chest.

Suddenly, a Japanese leaned from the roof of the tower and flung a stool down on the burning stalks. Another Japanese threw a bench, then came another stool. . . . Not only was the flame knocked out—Hu-tse was struck on the head twice. He lay motionless, flat on the ground.

Tieh-han's eyes blazed. The arteries in his forehead stood out to the bursting point. He ripped off his cartridge belt, his leather belt, his rucksack. His face was purple with rage.

"Why not let me go?" Kan Pa ventured in a small voice.

Tieh-han didn't even hear him. He continued removing all encumbrances and flinging them to the ground, until he was dressed only in a tunic and trousers. The latter he tightened so, he threatened to cut himself in half.

To Hsueh Chiang he said briefly, "Deputy Commissar, I'm going!"

Hsueh Chiang's eyebrows twitched. Very solemn, he nodded once. "The important thing to remember is that you must come back," he said resonantly.

Tieh-han nodded with equal gravity. "I will come back!" He strode over to the door and with one shove toppled all the bricks into the courtyard.

"What's the idea?" demanded Kan Pa.

"I can get out faster that way!" said Tieh-han.

He drew back a few paces, gathered himself, then streaked through the doorway and across the courtyard so fast that he reached the tower before some of the guerillas knew what was happening. They saw a spark, and fire again climbed against the wooden door of the tower. Tongues of flame twisted upward.

Again the Japanese showered down benches and stools. But Tieh-han had raised a bench over his head and was warding off the dropped missiles in mid-air. Now the flame had enkindled the wooden door, was burning through it. Tieh-han picked up some of stools and benches and added them to the blaze. The fire burned bigger, more fiercely. A tremendous cheer and yells of commendation rose from the tensely watching guerillas. They went wild with happiness.

Suddenly, there was an insane scream on the tower roof. A shower of hand grenades burst all around Tieh-han. He fell in a mass of smoke. San Sheng, who had been dancing for joy in the west wing, felt as though a wolf had sunk its teeth into his heart. The boy uttered a cry, and dashed through to the north wing. Just as San Sheng was about to go out the door, Tieh-han sat up. With bleeding arms he continued to toss wood on to the blaze. His clothes were already smoking.

LIII

Unnoticed, streaks of dawn began to appear in the eastern sky.

The round tower had turned into a chimney, sucking flames from its doorway up ever higher. The wooden flooring was ablaze. Smoke streamed from the rifle slits on the first and second storeys. Inside the tower there were terrible screams. Gradually, flame spurted through the second storey rifle slits; smoke billowing from the third storey and the roof immediately was transformed into fire. The enemy could throw no more grenades.

Rushing out, Kan Pa and San Sheng picked up Tieh-han. He seemed to feel nothing as they carried him back, staring fixedly at the smoke and flame shooting up from the tower. But as they brought him in the door of the north wing and his line of vision was being cut off, he suddenly shouted:

"Put me down! Put me down here!" He was pointing at the doorway.

"A little more inside the room is better," said Kan Pa. "It's too dangerous here."

Tieh-han doggedly shook his head. "Put me down, I tell you!"

They had no choice but to comply. Examining Tieh-han, Hsueh Chiang could see that blood was flowing from a wound in his side.

"It won't do," the deputy commissar said. "Carry him in!"

Tieh-han looked up at Hsueh Chiang. "No, Deputy Commissar," he insisted stubbornly. "I'm not going anywhere!"

Hsueh Chiang's voice softened. "First get your wounds attended to, comrade. It won't be good if you lose too much blood. . . ."

"Just let me lie here," said Tieh-han. "That'll be the best possible cure!" He lapsed into silence, keeping his eyes on the flaming tower.

Kan Pa exchanged a glance with the deputy commissar, then again approached Tieh-han. "Let's go inside," he urged.

Tieh-han made no reply, but twisted his body like a sulky child and snorted impatiently. His gaze never left the tower. In his eyes, two fiery infernos were also blazing. . . .

From the direction of Tajen came a column of guerillas. Behind them, under guard, marched a gang of disarmed Hirohito Helpers. Singing loud and strong, the guerillas advanced toward the thick column of smoke mushrooming out of Yakouchai.

Heavy smoke rose from the Tajen tower too. Seven miles to the northeast, black smoke spiralled up in four more places. . . .

The climbing morning sun bathed the countryside with millions of golden rays.

Translated by Sidney Shapiro

Tu Fu, Lover of His People

Feng Chih

Tu Fu is one of the greatest poets in Chinese history. His poetical works constitute part of our most precious literary heritage. He died in 770 A.D., but ever since his death—nearly twelve hundred years ago—his poetry has been widely read and continuously quoted; artists have used his verses as themes for their paintings, and the people have adopted his phrases for their daily conversation.

Tu Fu's poetry inherited the fine, realistic traditions of *The Book of Songs* and the songs of the Han and Wei Dynasties (206 B.C.-265 A.D.). It reflected the conflicts of his time, and its richness of content and variety of form set a great example for later poets. Ever since the Sung Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.), memorial halls or tablets have been set up in places where Tu Fu once lived, to honour him for his accomplishments. Many consider him China's greatest poet, and his poems are read as history. His works, in which he described the radical changes taking place in his time, have earned him recognition as one of the most outstanding representatives of classical realism in China's literary history.

Tu Fu was born in 712 A.D., when China was more prosperous than at any subsequent time in the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.). When he died, in 770, the Tang empire had fallen into the throes of social disorder and was being invaded by wave after wave of alien tribes, while the people were reduced to dire misery. There had been prosperity in the Tang Dynasty as a result of national unity lasting over a century. Labour was plentiful; waste land was turned into fertile soil; both private owners and the state held abundant stocks of grain. Trade flourished; communications by land and water were easy; cities grew and prospered. Trade routes to central Asia were crowded with merchants and travellers. Merchant vessels plied between China, Arabia and India over the South Seas; Buddhist monks came from Japan across the Eastern Sea. There was a great interchange of culture between China and foreign countries; handicrafts, the arts, music and the dance all had reached unprecedented heights. In 754, Census and Revenue Board figures showed the population to total fifty-three million, the highest figure recorded during the Tang Dynasty.

But how quickly decline set in! In 764, the population had dwindled to 16,900,000, or three-tenths of what it had been a mere decade earlier; labour became scarce; fertile soil lay waste; the price of rice rose till it was five times as dear. A revolt, led by An Lu-shan and Shih Sze-

ming,* lasted from November, 755 A.D. to January, 763 A.D. Areas affected by these disturbances included what are now the provinces of Hopei, Honan, Shantung, Shansi and Shensi. Then revolts of warlords and peasant uprisings on a small scale occurred in many areas south of the Yangtse River and in western Szechuan; and these disorders continued till long after Tu Fu's death.

In the Northwest and Southwest two tribes arose, the Hui Ho (Uighurs) and the Tu Fan (Tibetans), each controlling an extensive territory. Today they form part of China's family of fraternal nationalities; but at that time they were seldom at peace with the Tang rulers. True, during the An Lu-shan and Shih Sze-ming revolt, the Hui Ho sent troops to help the Tang forces in the recovery of Loyang and Changan, the then capital (today called Sian). But, made arrogant because of the service they had thus rendered, the Hui Ho made harsh demands on the Tang court, compelling it to purchase a great many horses from them at the exorbitant price of forty bolts of silk per head. The heavy burden of such exactions ultimately fell on the people. About the same time, the Tu Fan, taking advantage of the fact that the eastward dispatch of imperial troops left the western frontiers unprotected, were able to extend their influence. In a few years, vast territories in the Northwest came under the sway of the Tu Fan. Joining forces with other tribes in the West, the Tu Fan were able, in the year 763, to capture Changan, the Tang capital, burning, killing and plundering until the erstwhile flourishing city became a heap of rubble. Later on they evacuated Changan, but continued their raids on other cities in the West and carried away tens of thousands of captives, both men and women.

What of the Tang rulers during this epoch of rapid changes? In the year of Tu Fu's birth, Emperor Jui Tsung abdicated in favour of his son Hsuan Tsung (also known as Ming Huang). The early years of Hsuan Tsung's reign were those of good government and social prosperity and thus became known in Chinese history as the "Golden Age of Kai Yuan," Kai Yuan being the special name given the first part of this emperor's reign. But in Hsuan Tsung's whole reign there were incessant border wars, partly due to the expansion of their influence by alien tribes such as the Tu Fan, and partly owing to the emperor's ambition to extend his domain and his unwillingness to keep the peace with his neighbours. He did achieve initial successes in repelling the Tu Fan, suppressing the Khitan Tartars and conquering the Eastern Tu Chueh. After the year 750, however, he suffered repeated reverses in his campaigns against the Khitan Tartars in the Northeast, the Nan Chao in the Southwest and the Ta Shih (Arabs) beyond the Pamir Plateau in the West. These defeats made it necessary to strengthen the army, and this could be accom-

*An Lu-shan, whose father was of Hunnish and whose mother of Tu Chueh (Turkish) descent, was governor of three areas covering present-day Hopei and Shansi Provinces. Shih Sze-ming was his lieutenant.

HAN HUANG (723-787 A.D.): The Garden of Literature

plished only by imposing still heavier burdens on the people in terms of military service and similar exactions. Emperor Hsuan Tsung who ruled for more than thirty years, during which great wealth accumulated in the state treasury and grain filled the state granaries, fell a prey to the illusion that the inexhaustible resources of the whole empire were his to enjoy and fritter away as he saw fit. His degeneracy and that of the ruling circles in general grew worse. He was infatuated with his concubine, Yang Yu-huan, and bestowed upon her the title of Kuei Fei ("imperial concubine"). As imperial favourites, Yang Kuei Fei and her relatives led lives of debauchery. They built themselves luxurious mansions, dressed most lavishly, ate gluttonously, vied in keeping the finest horses, and outdid one another in the elaborate ceremonial of their retinue. All this, of course, was possible only by bleeding the people white, but it never occurred to any of these vampires that the long years of military campaigns were exhausting the country's manpower resources and causing a decline in agriculture, and that their endless extravagance was overburdening the people. To make matters still worse, first a flood and then a drought caused a great famine in Kuanchung (now Shensi Province) in 754. Nothing was left of the age of peace and prosperity but a husk —the fruit had long since withered.

An Lu-shan's troops, mainly led by alien tribesmen, overran the central plains, captured Loyang and Changan and half of what was then the Middle Kingdom. By the time Loyang and Changan were retaken, the country's strength had been irreparably sapped, the government was bankrupt. After 758, inflation became rampant. Manpower and material resources alike were levied from the people. When all able-bodied youths had been impressed into military service, the officials took even old people and children and sent them to the front. Those unable to pay the grain tax saw their household implements taken away instead. In these circumstances, even the pretence of peace and prosperity was futile when governors of the different areas usurped territory, in complete disregard of the country's interests, exploiting the people to the very end.

Such was the age in which Tu Fu lived: economically the country had gone from prosperity to decline; politically, from centralization to anarchy; socially, from stability to disorder; militarily, from victory to defeat. All this, of course, came about gradually, but the turning point was the outbreak of the An Lu-shan and Shih Sze-ming revolt in 755. Tu Fu was then forty-four years old. Most of his poems that are now read were written after that time; in them, he described with great penetration the changes of his time and the various conflicts of a society on the decline.

Tu Fu had spent more than thirty years of his life in a prosperous society. He passed nearly ten years after he was twenty as a well-to-do gentleman of leisure, travelling south of the Yangtse River and in Shantung Province. He wrote some poems at that time, but none have come

down to us. The few of his earliest poems now available to us were written when he was about thirty; their main themes are the charm and beauty of nature and of animals like the horse and the eagle. When Tu Fu came to the capital city of Changan in 746 at the age of thirty-four, he tried to obtain a government position through some influential persons. But as no opportunity opened to him, he fell into deeper poverty with the passing of time. As the Tang Dynasty began to decline, and he saw with his own eyes the increasingly sharp contrasts between the extravagance of the ruling class and the misery of the people, his attitude began to change. Concerned about the future of the country and the welfare of the people, he wrote the poems: "Ascending the Pagoda at the Temple of Compassionate Grace," "Ballad of the War Chariots," and "Ballad of the Beautiful Women." In the first of these he still used only allusive metaphors to express his anxiety about the hardships of the times; while in the latter two, his dissatisfaction became open and his exposures merciless. In 755, the turning point as we have shown in the history of the Tang Dynasty, he wrote the immortal lines that stand out as a landmark both in his poetry and in Tang history:

While there comes the reek of wines and meats that rot inside the red-painted doors of the rich,
The bones of many who have frozen to death are strewn on the road.

From then on, Tu Fu wrote poetry chiefly to describe the hard times, the crisis facing the country and the dire distress of the people who were driven from their homes by incessant wars and other calamities.

Tu Fu was a poet with a strong political sense, though his actual political career lasted less than three years, during which he held rather unimportant positions. When he first arrived at the capital, he wrote:

I want to make my Emperor a ruler as great as Yao and Shun,
And restore the good customs of my homeland.

Here he expressed himself with exaggerated self-importance. But in 755, in his poem "Thoughts as I Travel from the Capital to Fenghsien County," he said,

Year in, year out, I worry for the common people;
Sighing, my heart burns within me.

This shows that his thoughts had turned to the people, and in this respect he never changed. When he was old, he wrote:

Sleepless and worried by the thoughts of war,
Yet I feel impotent to set the world aright.

The last poem he ever wrote showed a feeling of deep sadness. Tu Fu could not forget that

Bloodshed continues as of old,
And trumpets of war blow the same.

Sympathy with the people permeated all his writings in more than two decades. Such an approach to reality and poetry made for rich content, opening up a new, vast domain for the poems and ballads of the Tang Dynasty. Practically all the political and social changes of his time were mirrored in Tu Fu's poems. Even before the An Lu-shan and Shih Sze-ming revolt, Tu Fu was concerned with social problems and the people's welfare and wrote poems like "Ballad of the War Chariots" and "Ballad of the Beautiful Women"; but these were objective descriptions of what actually happened around him. The revolt and the ensuing disturbances gave him a deeper insight into many things. When the strategic Tungkwan Pass was lost, Tu Fu became for a while a refugee, like so many others, wandering cold and hungry through wind and rain. In the fallen city of Changan, he had with his own eyes seen alien invaders indulge in killing and pillaging, turning the beautiful capital into a city of the dead. Eluding the enemy, he managed to escape from Changan. On his journey to Loyang, he saw the desperate plight of old men and women, recruits and their wives, faced with ruthless conscription and heavy extortions by officials. Wherever Tu Fu went, his thoughts were always for the people who suffered so cruelly from the wars. Although he did not have a long career in practical politics, he raised his voice on many important political issues. While spending days of intense suffering in the fallen city of Changan, he made observations on the disposition of enemy forces, about the battles waged around Changan and on the strategic importance of the Lutsekuan Pass. As junior censor, he risked his all to save the Prime Minister Fang Kuan from dismissal by a petition to the throne. He had serious misgivings on the question of securing assistance from the Hui Ho. He severely criticized the court for its lavish bestowal of titles and appointments and for its pretence of peace in the midst of turmoil. Later, while in Chinchou (now Tienshui, Kansu Province) he sensed the menace of the Tu Fan. In Szechuan and during the wanderings of his last years, he became dissatisfied with the arrogance of local officials who lorded it over the people, but he was constantly concerned for the imperial government, and submitted his views on various domestic and foreign questions. The capture of Changan by the Tu Fan and the disturbances in many parts of the country were all recorded sadly in his poems, while the recovery of lost territory and the defeat and retreat of the Tu Fan evoked songs of great joy.

Tu Fu's poems described not only the social and political events of his time, but also the parts of the country he had visited: What he had seen on his journey to northern Shensi and Szechuan, the trees and flowers

in the city of Chengtu, the mountains and waters of northern Szechuan, the local habits and customs of Kueichou in eastern Szechuan. These occupied an important place in his poems. None of his poems were based on fancy or preconceived ideas: all dealt with real places that he had seen with his own eyes and trodden with his own feet. Hence each poem had its local colour: the mountains of northern Shensi were entirely different from those of northern Szechuan, the river he saw at Chengtu was different from that at Kueichou. Tu Fu's works therefore became known as poems through which one could study not only history but also pictorial geography. Because Tu Fu loved and appreciated painting, we can also learn from his poetry much about the development of art in his time. The murals, landscapes, eagles and horses by famous contemporaries all aroused his interest and criticism. Thanks to Tu Fu's poems we have also learned much about the heights of achievement attained in music and dancing during the Tang Dynasty.

Tu Fu wrote his poems in a great variety of forms. He employed all existing forms to the best advantage and developed them instead of being bound down by them. He has given us such moving descriptions of his own wanderings, the hardships of travel, the social conditions and life of the people and many of their dramatic sayings and deeds, that when we read his poems what impresses us is not the restraints of the five-character metre but the apparent spontaneity of his language. Some of the best examples of this classical form are: "Return to Chiang Village," "The Hsinan Official," "The Officer at Tungkwan," "The Shihhao Official," "Lament of the Newly-wed Wife," "The Old Man Returns to War," "The Homeless," and "Invited by Elder Tien to Drink in Praise of Censor Yen."

Tu Fu found the classical metre with seven characters to a line the best means of expressing heroic sentiments, passionate grief or his views on various current and political questions. Poems representative of this form are: "The Tragedy of Chen Tao," "The Tragedy of Chin Fan," "Ballad of Shining Armour," and "Seven Songs of a Refugee in Tungku." In writing eight-line stanzas in the seven-character or five-character metres, hardly any other poet of the Tang Dynasty could surpass Tu Fu's artistry. This is best illustrated in "Looking Out on Spring" and "Hearing of the Recovery of Honan and Hopei by Government Forces."

Four-line stanzas in the five-character or seven-character metres were not Tu Fu's forte; yet he can stand comparison with any of his contemporaries who specialized in this form. Whether writing poems in the old or the new forms, Tu Fu made great and discriminating use of colloquial speech to describe the lives and feelings of ordinary folk, which could be expressed only in the most natural language. And in those poems in which the natural tone of prose has been perfectly absorbed into the regular lines of poetry, a sense of peculiar intimacy is achieved. He also used ancient words and expressions which had remained alive among the

people in poems and songs ever since the times of the Six Dynasties (222-589 A.D.). Tu Fu gave such phrases new life and converted local expressions, colloquial phrases and proverbs into verses of striking beauty.

The great achievements of Tu Fu's poetical works, which have enlarged the domain of Chinese poetry both in content and in form, were due to his profound love for his people and country and to the conflicts in his mind arising from this love. He had been born into a family of government officials. All his relatives belonged to the ruling class. Enjoying the social privileges of their class, he and his family were exempt from military service and taxation. Before he was forty years old, no appreciable change had yet occurred in his life or the society in which he lived. His poems then were not much different from those of his contemporaries. In other words, his poems were, by the logic of his circumstances, confined within the limits imposed on him by his class. Whatever inner conflicts he had were in the nature of those common to any intellectual at that time: Should he enter the political arena in the cities or lead a life of freedom and leisure in the mountains and forests? His personal inclination and family tradition urged him towards an official position in the capital city Changan. When he failed in this attempt, however, he naturally looked with envious eyes at the free life of the country. Such conflicts often troubled him in the early days of his stay at Changan, with his desire for a political career predominating.

But after forty, with the general decline of society, he was gradually reduced to poverty. Through the hunger and cold that he himself suffered, he began to see the distress of the people. As he turned his attention to the people, he recognized how degenerate the ruling class was. He realized that, though poor, he still enjoyed many social privileges and the hardships he had to endure were still far more tolerable than the sufferings of those who had no way out from heavy tax burdens and military service.

As soon as Tu Fu discovered the degeneracy of the ruling class, he did not hesitate to expose its corruption. He reached a better understanding of life when he became conscious that he, too, belonged to the class of the privileged and the parasitical. And so, when his own child died of hunger or when he was enduring extreme hardships on his journey from Shensi to Szechuan Province, his grief was not confined to his own misfortune but extended to cover all those who suffered so much more than he himself. Once, when the autumn wind blew down part of his straw hut and the rain poured in for a whole night, he wished that there were thousands of big mansions to accommodate all the homeless. If such mansions had appeared, he would not have minded dying of cold; so strong was his compassion for the people.

This was the time when the country was confronted with a serious crisis. Following the outbreak of the An Lu-shan and Shih Sze-ming

revolt, the Hui Ho had become unruly and the Tu Fan invaded the country, while local warlords lived lives of arrogant luxury and licence. These facts convinced Tu Fu that the crisis of the country deserved more attention than the sufferings of the people. But what could he do to help avert the national crisis? He could only hope that the emperor would use all available means to suppress the rebellion, not depend too much on the assistance of the Hui Ho and adopt a peaceful policy towards the Tu Fan; he also could only hope that the warlords, every one of whom controlled a sizable territory, would pay due respect to the emperor. Tu Fu further hoped that the reigning emperor would be as brilliant and capable a ruler as those of antiquity. But the emperors of his day and age in whom Tu Fu placed such high hopes were capable neither of defending their country against foreign invasion nor considering the interests of the people during this national crisis. Instead, all they cared for was their own position and imperial prerogatives. They did not hesitate to appease alien tribes that encroached upon the country, but they did not hesitate either to ruthlessly rob the people and impose military service arbitrarily.

Since Tu Fu came from a family of officials and was therefore deeply influenced by Confucian ethics, he could only intermittently laud, advise or sometimes satirize the emperor. He could not go a step further and condemn the whole system of feudal society and the emperor's place in it. He was troubled by intense conflicts: if he stressed the sufferings of the people through military service and taxation, he could see no means to defend the country against the aliens; yet he could not remain silent and shut his eyes to the distress of the people under the ruling class and alien invasion. His inner struggles found their clearest expression in "The Hsinan Official," "The Officer at Tungkwan," "The Shihhao Official," "Lament of the Newly-wed Wife," "The Old Man Returns to War," and "The Homeless." On his way to Loyang, he saw a group of boys too young to be conscripted, old men whose sons and grandsons had all been killed in the war, and young men who had been married just one day before, all impressed into military service to suffer unspeakable cruelties at the hands of the officials. If Tu Fu had not thought of the crisis facing the country, he could again have written poems like the "Ballad of the War Chariots" and directly described the people's sufferings. But now he could not do that. When he thought of the crisis facing the country, he had to find words of consolation and encouragement. The old woman, however, in "The Shihhao Official," was in such a pathetic condition that he could not bring himself to encourage or console her. Instead, he gave a vivid, realistic picture that touches the heart of all readers.

Since Tu Fu could not solve his own inner conflicts, he could not develop any further than this; and his best works are those that reflect his insoluble conflicts most sharply. His later works, written while he was living in western Szechuan or roaming the country, never reached

a higher development. He had no new ideas to offer the people for a way out of their troubles except his vain hopes that the emperor might reduce taxes and keep aloof from undesirable advisers—empty dreams that could not settle any immediate problem. Many of his poems written in his last days were, therefore, tinged with melancholy and despair. Nevertheless, he did not attempt to escape reality. Even in his last poem his thoughts were with the country in the crisis it faced.

Tu Fu's poetry shows how advanced he was for his age. And because he was so advanced, he was the logical heir and standard-bearer of the best traditions in Chinese poetry from time immemorial.

Tu Fu: Selected Poems

MARCHING BEYOND THE GREAT WALL

I

Sad it is to leave one's old home
For a long march to the North-west frontier!
Yet I must go: there are official times
For departures and arrivals,
And to desert would only lead to trouble.

We wonder why the Emperor,
Who has already so much good land,
Should want to send us to the frontier
To gain more;
Then, putting behind us love and warmth of parents,
And swallowing our tears,
We joined in the tumult of war.

II

So long have I been in the army
That my fellow soldiers
No longer treat me as a novice.
I have not forgotten the love of my family,
And yet at any moment a man may die,
When he has to pick up a dropped rein
Amongst pounding hoofs,
Or jump down a crag to seize an enemy flag
In the valley far below. . . .

Some of the poems here translated were included in Rewi Alley's anthology of Chinese poems entitled *Peace Through the Ages.* In some cases the versions are practically identical. In others the translator has, after further study of the original Chinese and in the light of suggestions sent to him by appreciative readers of the earlier versions, made certain changes.

III

I grind my sword by mournful waters,
Cut my hands, and the water runs red.
Ah! Could I but forget the stinging pain;
My mind is confused, my heart filled with bitterness.

Yet, fighting for my country,
How can I complain? Perhaps my name will be
Inscribed on a roll of honour,
When my bones turn to dust.

IV

You are in charge of the conscripts.
Yet I, a common soldier, have my rights.
So I go forward, either to live or die:
You need not scowl or bully.

I met an old acquaintance on the way
And asked him to take a letter home:
"Alas! Now we are parted for ever.
Sorrow and pain we can share no more. . . ."

V

After travelling these many miles
We have reached the armies here —
Armies where so many are bitter and sad,
And only the few are happy.
All this our general may not know.

Now, across the river, I see
Many groups of enemy horsemen galloping by.
I — I am but a slave of masters.
What hope for me to achieve great deeds
And be given honour?

VI

In picking bows
Pick the strongest;
In choosing arrows
Choose the longest;
In killing men, first kill their horses;
In taking captives, first capture their commanders.

There should be a limit to the killing of men.
Every country should have its bounds.
It is enough to keep aggressors away:
No sense in killing and wounding so many.

VII

Riding through rain and snow,
Our troops enter the lofty mountains
In dangerous places,
Clinging to frozen stones,
Fingers freezing and dropping off
To the icy ground.

My homeland is far behind. . . .
Shall we ever finish building ramparts and go back?
So thinking, I gaze up at the evening clouds
Floating easily southward,
And grieve that I cannot ride with them.

VIII

The tribesmen hurled themselves against our defences,
All around the wind was thick with the dust of their riders.
Wielding powerful swords, we routed the enemy,
Dragged their great chieftain, rope around his neck,
A captive through the gateway of our fort. . . .
But I am merely a soldier, fighting is my job. . . .
No sense in taking one victory too seriously.

IX

Ten years and more have I been soldiering.
Surely I have some claim to merit,

Yet feel ashamed to follow the example
Of the many who clamour and yet do not deserve.

Wars often break out in the Central Plains,
Not to say on the borders and frontiers;
A man who aims high should take the long view,
And be content to endure adversity.

LOOKING OUT ON SPRING

Our country has been completely crushed,
And only rivers and hills look the same;
The city is filled with tall trees
And the high grass of spring.
Even flowers seem to shed tears
For the sadness of our time,
The very birds
Grieve at the sight of people
Parting from their beloved.

Now for these three months
The beacon fires have flared
Unceasingly
While a letter from home
Is as precious as gold.
And, when I scratch my head,
I find my grey hair grown so sparse
The pin will no more hold it.

RETURN TO CHIANG VILLAGE

I

Towering clouds in the west grow crimson
As the setting sun comes down to the plain.
Sparrows twitter around the lattice gate,
And I, after all these miles, am home.

Wife and children, eyes wide with surprise,

Meet me, shedding many a quiet tear:
Not so easy, with all the world at war,
To have a man come home!

The neighbours' heads pop up over the garden wall;
Everywhere one hears sighs of surprise and welcome.
In the dead of night we sit by the light of a candle,
And I gaze into the faces of my dear ones, as if in a dream.

II

With my declining years consumed by war,
Even now home-coming yields me little joy.
My much-loved son staying close by my side,
Then, looking into my eyes, gets frightened, goes away.

I remember when I left it was summer:
A time to explore cool places, walk under trees and around the pool.
Now I am back, and it is already winter, the north wind whistling,
And I am harassed by so many cares,
Yet comforted to know we have taken in
Our harvest, that the still has run,
And there is wine enough to give me heart
Through my declining days.

III

Our cackling fowls were making such a din,
Fluttering and fighting when the guests arrived;
Only when I had chased them off up the trees
Did I hear the neighbours rapping at the gate.
There came a group of elders, four or five,
Each in his hand a present, greeting me
After my long journey. We sat, and together
Drank the wine that they had brought me
In wooden jugs.

"Poor stuff!" they said,
For the millet fields had not been ploughed,

The call for soldier's armour never ceased.
Sons had gone marching east with the army. . . .
And I replied: "Let me sing a song for you,
My elders, of how sweet a thing it is to have
Your help in days of trouble. . . ."
And after the song I sighed,
Gazed mutely at the heavens.
Then, looking into one another's eyes
We saw that all were wet with tears.

THE HSINAN OFFICIAL

As I travelled along the Hsinan road
I heard the conscripting official
Bawling for new recruits.
"Yours," I said, "is a tiny place.
I wonder you have men to be sent away."
"Last evening," he made answer, "came the order
For the younger lads to be called up."
"The lads," said I, "are short and puny.
How can they help to defend cities?"

The sturdier lads had mothers to see them off,
The lean ones trudged alone.
Beside them the white stream at dusk flowed east,
And the sound of weeping echoed from the green hills.
"No more weeping, lest the flow
Of tears leave no tear for shedding,
For neither heaven nor earth can help you."

"When our troops invested Yehcheng,
We looked for its fall night and day,
Yet the enemy held out long,
And our troops were forced to withdraw.
Now they are back in training,
In the ancient capital,
With their supplies near their old camp.
The trenches they dig are of no great depth,
And the grooming of horses is light work, too.
The Emperor's army, hopeful of victory,

Receives good treatment.
So no more weeping, you who have come
To bid your boys farewell:
They'll have father and mother in our general!"

THE OFFICER AT TUNGKWAN

The soldiers worked hard, building
Stamped earth fortifications
At Tungkwan; massive walls, stronger than iron,
And smaller walls run across the high hills.
I asked an officer,
"Are these walls built
Against the tribesmen after they have routed us?"
For a reply, he asked me to dismount,
And directed my eyes to the hilltop
Where the ramparts seemed to meet the clouds
So that a bird might hardly pass,
And said that if we stood by the defences at Tungkwan,
There was no need to worry about Changan.
Then he showed me how our defences
Admitted but one cart at a time;
How, when danger came, a single swordsman
Sufficed to hold the pass.
To which I made reply,
He should remember the battle of Taolin,
Where many thousands drowned in the Yellow River,
And tell all commanders to be vigilant
*And avoid the fault of Ko-shu Han.**

THE SHIHHAO OFFICIAL

One sunset I came to the village of Shihhao,
And shortly after there followed
An official, seizing conscripts.

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*In an earlier battle against the tribesmen at Taolin, General Ko-shu Han led his troops out of Tungkwan and encamped on the western plain of Lingpao County. The enemy took him by surprise, and in the resultant mêlée thousands fell into the Yellow River and were drowned.

In the courtyard of the peasant's house where I stayed,
An old man climbed quickly over the wall, and vanished.

To the door came his old wife to greet the official.
How fiercely he swore at her,
And how bitterly she cried!
"I have had three sons taken
To be soldiers at Yehcheng.
Then came a letter, saying
Two had been killed, and that the third
Never knew which day he might die.
Now in this hut is left
None but a baby grandson
Whose mother still suckles him....
She cannot go out, as she has no clothes
To cover her nakedness.
All I can do is to go back with you
To the battle at Hoyang.
There I can cook for you,
Even though I am weak and old. . . ."

Night wore on.
The sound of voices died away
Until there was left, coming from the hut,
Only the sobbing of the daughter-in-law.
At dawn I rose and left,
With only the old man
To bid me good-bye.

LAMENT OF THE NEWLY-WED WIFE

The gentle creeper that clings to the wild bramble
Cannot spread far and wide.
A girl married to a wayfaring soldier
Fares no better than an outcast on the wayside.

Betrothed, our wedding comes
The night before you march,
Scarcely have I warmed your bed,
And at dawn you must haste away.

Although you'll not be far away,
With the frontier only at Hoyang,
How can I, hardly yet a wife,
Go to your parents to bow and serve?

My family, when they reared me,
Kept me day and night in the home;
And when a woman marries, all she has,
Even the dogs and chickens, go with her.

Now you march to the place of death,
And my heart is torn with despair.
I wish I could go with you,
Yet this would but distract, not help....

So forget the joys of marriage,
And devote yourself to the fight.
In the army a woman's presence
Must lessen manly courage.

My old home was poor:
It took me long to get my wedding clothes.
Now I'll no longer wear my bridal silks:
I wash the colour from my lips and face.

As I look up, the birds,
Small and large, pairing together,
Think how ill-arranged human affairs are,
That you and I must long in vain for each other.

THE OLD MAN RETURNS TO WAR

War everywhere....
Though old I can have no quiet.
They are sending me to the frontier.
With sons and grandsons killed in the fighting,
What is the good of living on here alone?

Throwing away my stick, I leave the house,
An object of pity

To my fellow-conscripts; but I say:
"I still have some teeth left,
Although my bones are brittle."

Now I put on my soldier's armour,
Bow to the officer, and start to leave.
And, as I go, I pass my old wife,
Prostrate on the road, crying.
I notice how the winter wind
Blows through her threadbare clothing,
Think how unlikely it is that we shall meet again,
Then worry about her catching cold....
But all she says is: "Look after yourself,"
And I go....

The fortifications at Tumen Pass are strong;
The river crossings at Hsingyuan difficult;
So there the situation is better than at Yehcheng.
Perhaps I may still have some time left to live,
Though death must be awaiting me.
One knows that separation is common enough,
Regardless of youth or age.
Yet still one would linger on,
Sighing because one is no longer young.

The whole of our land is mad with war;
Beacon fires smoke from every fort.
Corpses lie among the grasses, stinking,
And streams are stained with blood.

So I wonder...wonder just where
Peace and happiness may be found.
Little enough reason to stay here,
And so I leave my old home, broken-hearted.

THE HOMELESS

After all those years of war
Weeds are growing over homes and gardens.
The hundred families in my own village

Have scattered in all directions.
From those who are still living comes no news,
And the dead are simply turned to mud.

After defeats in battle, I have returned
To my old home, to find all changed.
I walk through one empty lane after another.
The sky is dismal, and the day
Dreary and cold. Around are foxes;
And wild cats, their fur all bristling,
Spit at me in fury.

Now people are few and scattered,
And aged widows my sole neighbours.
Lonely as it is, I cling to my poor home,
As a bird clings to its old nest.

Now in the spring I take a spade
And work in the field from morn till night.
But again men are needed for war
And the county magistrate sends a runner
To lead me off once more.

Though I am on local service,
I have no one to say good-bye to me.
Here I am, alone, by myself; and yet I feel
Relieved at the thought that I do not have to go far away,
Though, with my home village wholly wrecked by war,
Near or far is very much the same.

My mind goes back to my old mother,
Five years sick, then dying wretchedly,
She who bore me getting no recompense:
Both of us led a life of misery.

Now, homeless again, and forced anew
To go and fight, I wonder
What good it is to be an emperor's subject.

SEVEN SONGS OF A REFUGEE IN TUNGKU (759 A.D.)

I

I, whom they call Tu Tzu-mei,
Came to live here awhile: a man,
Grey hair loose about his ears,
Picking up acorns others have overlooked.
Up the bleak sides of hills, that lie so steep
And cold on winter days, I plod.
No news from home back on the Central Plains,
So no way to return.
Hands half frozen, skin chapped and numb....
Alas! sad enough is this first song I sing:
Winds come sweeping down the slopes,
Enfolding me in bitterness.

II

My spade, my long spade with your white wood handle,
By you I live; but these days it is not easy
To find sprouts of yams
On hillsides lying deep in snow.
No matter how hard I tug my garment down
It will not cover my shivering legs.
Returning home at last, with nothing in my hands
But the spade, I find the family
Crying in their misery in a bare room....
Alas! this, my second song, wells to my lips,
A song that saddens all the neighbours' hearts.

III

Brothers, who are so far away, I know
You must be famished. Which of you, I wonder,
Is strongest? Life has forced us apart,
And we were borne away without a chance of meeting.
Long are the roads which divide us, and black with dust
of the enemy riders.
I watch the wild geese and cranes fly eastward.

Would that I could ride with them, and be with you!
Alas! this is my third song, and I sing it thrice.
Should I die here, how will you find my bones?

IV

In Chungli my little sister lives,
A widow with several pitiful children.
The river Huai is long, its current strong, its dragon spirits fierce.
For ten years we have been apart. . . . How may I see you now?
Take a boat and sail it to you? Hardly!
For with you too in the distant south
Arrows and banners fly wherever one sets eyes.
Alas! this is my fourth song, which I'll sing four times
Till even by day monkeys in the forest weep.

V

All round are windy hills. Waters rush in many streams,
The cold rain beats down, gaunt forest trees drip with moisture.
I look down and see yellow bushes by the ancient city,
Clouds lie heavily.
A white fox leaps and a yellow one stands stock-still,
And I ponder just why my life should be
Wasted in this lonely valley.
At night I rise up, plagued with troubles....
Alas! this is my fifth song...a long one, surely!
You may call my spirit and it will not come:
It has returned to my old village home.

VI

To the south there lies a dragon in its pool;
Old trees rise high into the sky,
Their branches entwined.
Yellow leaves turn and fall...the dragon lies dormant.
From the east come poisonous snakes: I wonder how they dare!

I would draw a sword, yet cannot strike.
Alas! this, my sixth song, lingers on the air....
The day is warm, and spring once more
Seems to have returned to streams and valleys.

VII

So here am I: a man who has grown old
And gained no fame.... In these three years of famine
While I have been tramping wild hill-paths,
In the Capital the great officials are still young.
One must expect young men to strive
For wealth and position.
Back in the mountains the scholars, old friends of mine,
Talk sadly of old times, hiding the scars of their struggles.
Alas! now my seventh song ends quietly.
I raise my eyes, and see how quickly the sun goes down.

Translated by Rewi Alley

How Life Unfolds . . .

THE ELECTION

Chin Chao-yang

The people in the village were holding a meeting to discuss whom they should elect in the first nation-wide general election. The population figures entitled them to elect three people's deputies to the *hsiang* people's congress. And so far, three candidates had already been agreed upon. The first, Chin Shih-hsueh, had been the village Party secretary for six years, the second, Wang Shun-teh, was a highly respected old Chinese medical doctor, and a model medical worker in the county, and the third, Chin Chia-kuei, a young man in his twenties, was the leader of a model mutual-aid team. But now, it turned out, the women wanted to propose another candidate, no other than Chin Chia-kuei's wife, Chang Chiao-feng.

Yin Hsiao-chen, a clear-voiced young girl, had the floor. She explained why she wanted to nominate a fourth candidate: "If it hadn't been for Chiao-feng, would her husband have done such a good job on the mutual-aid team? Two years ago, when we had just set it up, we women had never worked in the fields before. Who was it who took the trouble to go to every household and talk the matter over with our parents and in-laws? Who convinced the young women themselves? Later on, who was the first to do the hardest work, and by her example move us so much that we forgot our own aching backs? And then, when it came to assess the amount of work done and portion out the income, who argued for equal pay for equal work, whether done by men or women, and got this adopted at the membership meeting? Last year the women did all the work, from planting to harvesting, in the five *mou* cotton field, so that the men could get on with other work. *And* we had a record cotton crop, too. Who was it who led us in all this? Dear neighbours, I could just go on and on about Chiao-feng's merits. It is only because she always buries herself in work, and doesn't like to talk, and never brags about herself that some people in our village only know that Chin Chia-kuei is a model team leader—they have no idea of the things that Chiao-feng has done. . . ."

"I'd like to say something," a young woman called Li Kuei-hua cut in. Pink in the face with excitement, she said, "About a month ago I went to the county model workers' conference as an observer and heard Chin Chia-kuei report on his model deeds. This is what he said: '*I* called upon the women. *I* talked them into taking part in field work.' He claimed the credit for all that Chiao-feng had done. It came back to all

of us at that meeting that he'd said just the same thing at both meetings of our *hsiang* model workers. And when I came back and talked it over with our chairman of the women's association here, I heard then that the village leaders had already criticized him for this very thing. He admitted he was wrong then, but when he got to the county he forgot all about Chiao-feng just the same, and only remembered about himself. I *must* bring this up today. We can't let Chiao-feng's merits remain unknown!" She cast a glance at Chin Chia-kuei, tossed back her braids and sat down.

A sudden silence descended upon the meeting and all eyes turned to Chin Chia-kuei.

If he had stood up at this moment, said something nice about his wife Chiao-feng, and admitted his own shortcomings, he could yet have won the day. But he didn't. He was so used to enjoying the honours. He knew beforehand that the people would pick him as a candidate and would almost certainly ask him to make a speech. In fact he had put on his new blue cotton suit specially for the occasion. Now, with all eyes on him, this new suit made him more embarrassed than ever and he didn't know which way to turn. He stole a glance at Chiao-feng, sitting by his side, and wished to goodness she would say something. Now, if only she'd say something like this—"Fellow villagers, don't blame Chia-kuei unduly...after all, I owe what progress I've made so far entirely to his help." But Chiao-feng remained silent, with her head down and her hair nearly screening her face. She had never spoken at a full meeting yet.

"Fellow villagers!" Chin Chia-kuei simply had to get up on his feet. He felt dry in the mouth, and his voice was husky. "What Li Kuei-hua said just now is not true...."

"It is!" Li Kuei-hua interrupted loudly. "I fully admit you're a good mutual-aid team leader and you have done a lot to push forward production in our village; I approve of you as a candidate as well. But today's meeting is so very important. I simply *must* speak about Chiao-feng's good points and that makes me mention your shortcomings. I must tell the truth."

"I fully agree with Kuei-hua." Wang Tsui-yung, the chairman of the women's association put in. "This is a meeting for the election. We must exercise our rights as citizens properly. We shouldn't leave Chang Chiao-feng out. And I must say Comrade Chia-kuei *is* rather vain and he does love to brag about himself."

Silence fell. Only a few old people in the back rows whispered to one another: "These young women are taking it too seriously. It's so embarrassing for Chia-kuei. After all, the two are man and wife. What does it matter which one is elected?"

The chairman put the proposal to the vote. Raising their hands and cheering, the people unanimously accepted Chang Chiao-feng as a fourth candidate.

Chin Chia-kuei never dreamt that people thought so highly of his

wife. At first he was just astonished; then he got angry and bitter; he was particularly annoyed with the women in his team: "Well!" he thought to himself indignantly. "You made some progress, but it was I who led you forward. Now you turn around and criticize me like this. You've no sense of decency!" He wanted to leave the meeting straight away.... He had no ears for the Party secretary's speech, nor did he hear the people ask Wang Shun-teh, the old doctor, to speak. It was only when the chairman had twice called on him by name that he came out of his trance.

He pulled himself together, cleared his throat and walked to the rostrum. Even now, if he seized the opportunity to criticize himself and asked the people to elect Chiao-feng instead of himself, then the electors would certainly have thought well of him. What a pity that he again missed his chance and only tried to win back his prestige by an impressive speech....

"Dear neighbours, my mutual-aid team was the first one in this village...." He repeated once again the old, old story. He began two years back, went on to last year, and then brought them up to the present. It was a long-winded speech, without an atom of anything new in it.

"The same old story again, showing off as usual," one of the villagers whispered.

"No need to go on chanting psalms about your model deeds—we know them by heart already," said another.

Chin Chia-kuei was oblivious of the whisperers, and went on and on. At long last his speech wound to a close. And then deafening applause broke out, but it was not for him, not for Chin Chia-kuei and his long speech. It was for Chang Chiao-feng, whom the chairman called on to say a few words. Cries for Chiao-feng mingled with the clapping of hands.

Tugging and pulling, the women finally succeeded in getting Chiao-feng to go to the platform. Chin Chia-kuei saw her suddenly lift her head, pull her shoulders back and stand up straight. Her rosy cheeks glowed and her great black eyes sparkled. She even seemed taller than usual. She tossed back a lock of hair from her forehead and, to his astonishment, started to speak quite composedly.

"Dear neighbours, today, when I look back, I feel a bit uneasy. First of all, during the busy harvest time this year, I had intended to organize the team members and set up a seasonal nursery, to free the mothers with small children for work in the fields. But then, because I was a bit under the weather and because I thought it would be difficult, I didn't manage to get it done. I blame myself for lacking a resolute enough will to overcome difficulties. Secondly, although it's almost three years since our mutual-aid team was founded, it still hasn't become a co-operative. This also shows that I haven't done enough in working for it.... No matter whether I'm elected or not, I'm going to work for these two things."

She said the last sentence with particular emphasis. Another round of thunderous applause burst out.

"Look at our Chiao-feng, who only looks forward; *she* doesn't only talk of what has already been done!" cried the straightforward Li Kuei-hua, running over to hug Chiao-feng, laughing until she had to stop for breath.

All at once, Chiao-feng's mother-in-law stood up. Gesticulating with her hands, she fairly moaned out: "But this is terrible! We've only got three deputies for our *hsiang* and now you've put up four candidates. Of course everyone will want to vote for the Party secretary, and who wouldn't vote for our respected old Mr. Wang Shun-teh? And now, that leaves only two, my son and my daughter-in-law. Which one shall we elect?"

It was clear what she meant. If her daughter-in-law were elected, her son would be deeply upset; she knew this all too well. And she was not the only one to realize it either. But the chairman had already announced that the meeting was adjourned, and no one felt like troubling his head over such a small detail as this. After all, it was an election, wasn't it? One must be impartial, and elect whoever was really good, regardless of whether it was a man or a woman.

Chin Chia-kuei strode off. When he got home he threw himself down on the *kang* without a word. A few minutes later he heard Chiao-feng chattering happily with his mother in the kitchen, as she gave a hand with the cooking.

"Well, you...." He gnashed his teeth.

"Chiao-feng, comé here," he suddenly bawled out.

Chiao-feng came in, her hands covered with flour, and her face beaming.

"What ever do you think you were talking about in the meeting?"

"Why, what did I say?" Chiao-feng was startled.

"Why did you have to say all that in the meeting today? You even said that our team hasn't become a co-op in three years. What did you mean by saying that?"

"Oh! So that's the kind of person you are!" Chiao-feng, who was honest and gentle by nature, could not help getting angry.

Of course, one thing led to another; they quarrelled. Both of them were too upset to eat.

So was the old lady. She could not say her daughter-in-law was in the wrong, nor did she have the heart to reproach her son. Wringing her hands and stamping her feet in despair, she sighed and groaned. Finally she could no longer bear it alone. She trotted off to find somebody to pour out her troubles to without thinking about the outcome.

First she got hold of the chairman of the women's association: "My dear chairman, didn't I tell you you shouldn't have both of them as candidates? All the time they've been married, they've never quarrelled like

this; they don't even want to eat...." Then on she went to Li Kuei-hua and poured out the whole story to her, in great detail.

Both Wang Tsui-yung and Li Kuei-hua waxed wrath. Then there was Yin Hsiao-chen, who lived next door to the Chins. Of course she had overheard everything, especially all that was said by Chin Chia-kuei when he raised his voice. In no time all the women and quite a few of the men of the village were indignantly saying what they thought of Chin Chia-kuei.

In the evening, the meeting to elect the deputies was held. The result was a great surprise to them all, even those who had half expected some such outcome. Chin Chia-kuei only got three votes, while practically everyone voted for Chang Chiao-feng.

This was too heavy a blow for Chin Chia-kuei to bear. He left before the meeting was over, and his mother followed him wailing.... When Wang Tsui-yung and Chin Shih-hsueh arrived later with Chiao-feng, there he was lying motionless on the *kang,* his head buried under the quilt. He would not answer a word when they spoke to him, feeling like an outcast of the people. His mother, who had obviously failed to cheer him up, had already gone to bed; she could be heard tossing and muttering on the *kang* in her room.

As Chia-kuei persisted in silence, Chiao-feng sent the Party secretary and the chairman of the women's association home; she would talk to him herself. When they were alone she folded back the quilt from Chia-kuei's face and saw that there were even hot tears in his eyes. She kissed him on the cheek, and said tenderly: "I'm not angry with you, you old silly, but really you should think about it...."

"Yes, Chiao-feng, I know I should think it over...." He said in a choked voice, while a tear trickled down from the corner of his eye.

Translated by Chang Su-chu

NEW LIFE BECKONS

Lui Chia

In one of the lumber towns in the Lesser Hsingan Range, where many new settlements have sprung up in the past few years, live several hundred old inhabitants. Chao Fa is one of them. He came to this remote northern region as a child, and had a hard life felling trees and floating lumber. More than once his axe slipped and cut him, or drifting logs nearly rammed him into the river; but he survived every hardship and danger.

Last spring, Chao Fa's job was to salvage logs that had been carried off by the current. One day, like a tight-rope walker, he was stepping

cautiously on to a birch log when the director of the forest management called to him from the bank:

"Grandad, how old are you?"

"Sixty-two!" The crisp answer rang out as if the old man were a twelve-year-old announcing his age.

As the current drifted and carried the birch log further and further, the director stood gazing at Chao Fa's receding figure with something like admiration.

The next day, when they happened to meet again by the river, they fell to talking and the director asked Chao Fa about his life and work. Gradually he gathered that the old man was a fearless worker who had never given in through all the hardships of life in the old society. As the director listened he nodded with satisfaction, secretly approving the men's decision to send Chao Fa as their representative to the Workers' Congress which was to be held in Harbin a month later.

Chao Fa found himself respected by everyone at the Congress. When the meetings came to an end, the director asked him whether he would like to retire, since he was now over sixty. Chao Fa, however, answered briskly that he was not too old to work. The director then urged him to stay in Harbin where he could get work more suited to his age; but Chao Fa again turned down the offer. At last they reached a compromise. It was agreed that Chao Fa should return to the lumber town where he would be given lighter work in a hostel for visitors.

It was in this hostel that I first made Chao Fa's acquaintance. He had fixed up a wooden bed by the door of his room, while leaning against one corner were a long pole and a cant-hook of the type used by lumbermen. On the walls hung a tobacco-pouch, a blue cloth cap, a woollen cap with ear-flaps and a fur hat. On the window-sill I saw a Chinese pewter wine-set. Chao Fa loved to smoke his long Chinese pipe. He had been a heavy drinker, but was now virtually a teetotaller. As he showed me the souvenir badge and booklet he had brought back from the Workers' Congress at Harbin, he took off his dark glasses and I saw that his eyes in their network of wrinkles were bloodshot. I knew that this was a result of overdrinking.

"A stove and wine..." began Chao Fa. "If you go to the North Ridge, you can see the kind of stove we use in these parts. We burn firewood here, and keep our stoves going all the year round." As if anxious to explain the backwoodsmen's fondness for liquor, he described how often the raftsmen were soaked in the river, while when felling trees they had to work all day long in dense forests where they hardly ever saw the sun.

"Why didn't you see an oculist in Harbin?" I asked.

"No," he replied quickly, as if he knew what I was driving at. He had been about to strike a match to light his pipe, but now he held it in his palm. "Stay in Harbin?" he continued. "No, it's much better here. Forest after forest—when I close my eyes I seem to see them all! But

Harbin's just a maze of streets: a man gets properly mixed up there. I set out three times to see the eye-doctor, but each time I lost my way. I knew the directions all right, but somehow or other I still got lost, and it took me a long time to find my way back. But now that I know the place, Harbin isn't much bigger than my palm after all. How can Harbin compare with these vast forests here...."

I had heard strange tales from surveyors of men losing their way in forests where wild beasts prowled, and of all the freaks of Nature; but here was Chao Fa talking of Harbin as if it were a desert island and comparing life in the forests to paradise.

The following day I rose very early. In the room next to mine lived a group of primary school pupils, all sons of lumbermen in the adjacent areas. The day had hardly dawned when they set up a cheerful commotion like so many twittering sparrows. Suddenly I heard Chao Fa's voice:

"What's all this noise?" he scolded one of the older boys. "Don't you know that sleep is good for you? Crowing like cocks at the crack of dawn...."

He came out of their room with a broad smile on his face. When he saw me, he took my hand and said warmly:

"You'd better go to the North Ridge. You'll find a model worker there. I used to work with him. He's young, but a bit slow." After a pause he continued: "If I were in my thirties now, I could compete with him...."

Chao Fa gazed longingly towards the North Ridge as he saw me off. All the way there I was thinking: He must have watched this road every day. He will never forget this road, having worked here the best part of his life.

I took the train to the area where trees were being felled. At the first station we were carefully searched for anything combustible, and though I had left my matches in the hostel that morning, I could not help worrying that there might still be a few odd matches in my pockets.

Before long, we reached our destination where the conifers and broad-leaved trees grew together. Logging there was already partly mechanized.

One day, I took part in one of the small group meetings held by the lumbermen. The first to speak was a man who criticized his own mistakes, speaking slowly but with confidence. After him, the group leader put forward the season's production plan for discussion, and proposed that trees be so undercut that they fell towards the road, so that haulage could be speeded up and production increased.

"Eh?" one of the lumbermen interrupted. "Trees on shady slopes reach up for the sun, and naturally they lean *away* from the road. How can we cut them to make them fall towards it?"

During the debate which ensued, I found myself listening to many technical expressions which I could not make head or tail of.

"Isn't Chao Fa an experienced hand at felling trees?" said one man.

"But if he were with us now, he would use the electric saw instead of the axe, and I bet he would be a better hand at it than any of us here."

"I don't believe in all these mechanical contraptions. If a bullock-cart gets stuck in the mud, two men can pull it out; but who can pull a tractor out?"

"You wouldn't talk like that if Chao Fa were here, would you? Things have changed now, and we all ought to look forward, not backwards."

"So Chao Fa is always ahead of us, is that what you mean? But you know that we use hair-clippers, don't you, while he is still shaving his head with a razor?"

Chuckles were heard from the men sitting in the shadow; and after this Chao Fa's name cropped up more and more frequently. The lumbermen who favoured the use of new machines and instruments paid the highest tribute to Chao Fa and held him up as their example. But some of those who favoured the old ways felt they were closer to him, for they had the same affection for Chao Fa that a workman has for his old tools. I found myself in the midst of a heated debate. It was a struggle between new ways and old, between a progressive outlook and conservatism.

Many lumbermen remained behind to continue their argument long after the meeting was over. As I left, I saw the group leader whom Chao Fa had mentioned talking to a young worker. He was speaking in a low, earnest voice.

"The other day," I heard him say, "when we held a meeting, you went home. Today when we went to fetch you, you wanted to ask for leave again. Why didn't you give your opinion on this question of using machines?"

The young worker had sat silent during the meeting, and even now he would not utter a word. He hung his head, so that his hair fell over his temples and covered his left eye.

The group leader overtook me in the dark. He shook my hand and said: "That young fellow is Chao Fa's nephew.... He's just got married; but because we are always on the move, he can't go home as often as he would like. And now he's become a problem." He sighed as he bade me good-night.

When I returned to the hostel next day, out of curiosity I asked Chao Fa whether he had a nephew. He stared at me for a moment, then took off his glasses. His eyes dilated and brightened as if I had given him news about his own son. He told me that this nephew was all the family he had and that he had not seen him for almost a month now. The young fellow, he added, was a pretty good lumberman. When I heard this, I could no longer withhold the truth from the old man. I told him what I had heard and seen at the group meeting.

When I had finished, Chao Fa quietly put on his shoes and stepped to

the door, where he stood gazing at the forests beyond. His back, a little bent, loomed large in the doorway.

"It's a shame!" he said as he turned back. "I'm going out there."

"Where?"

"To the North Ridge."

"To see your nephew? But he came down with me today."

"My nephew? No, I am not going to see him. I am going to have a try and see whether I can make the trees fall towards the road. My hands aren't too old yet!" As he said this, he rolled up his sleeves. "I'll show them that the forest is my home!" he continued challengingly. "Do you know why I came back from Harbin? Why, because I saw the first tractor heading for the forest zone. I'll show those youngsters a way...."

He strode out of the room, to reappear the next instant. "I am *not* old!" he declared almost threateningly. "If the tractor has to be pulled out of the mud, I'll be the one to pull it...."

There was a smile on his face, but he was in deadly earnest.

Taking his cant-hook, he thumped it hard on the threshold as he had when setting out as a young man. Then he walked off briskly in the direction of the forest.

Translated by Huang Pin-chang

STAGES ON THE SIKANG-TIBET PLATEAU

Ku Kung

ALONG THE LANTSANG GORGE

The Lantsang is a long, shiny, blue ribbon, and so is all we can see of the sky above our heads. Our lorry skirts its way swiftly beside it, through narrow gorges. Even in the morning and at noon no ray of sunshine reaches us. We are in perpetual twilight. And from this twilight, when we do emerge from the gorge and see a stretch of willows bathed in the setting sun, and the streams glistening, we feel as though morning has come.

None of us in the lorry have ever met before, but we become old friends very quickly, playing cards and games, cracking jokes...and the lorry turns out to be a hilarious club. Soldiers with their carbines and officers with their Mausers alike join in.

The author was with the People's Liberation Army which took part in the construction of the Sikang-Tibet Highway. The highway links the remote border regions with the interior of China. It was completed in November, 1954.

Night falls. The lorry draws up and stops in a lonely place; there is neither hamlet nor roadside inn to be seen. But we pitch the tents quickly, like children with toy blocks. And with their white walls and grass-green roofs, they look like jaunty little villas.

"HERE STOOD THE HEROES"

Shaking the dust out of our bedding, our pillows and our dishevelled hair, we pack up and pile into the lorry again, groping our way through the dark before dawn.

On the wild Pangta grasslands the winds rove wildly and aimlessly, whistling without cessation. Snowdrifts linger still in the shadows where the sun never reaches, and furtively emit icy breaths. Far away in the distance, at the foot of the mountains, flocks of white sheep graze. They look like the downy clouds hanging in the sky, or the snowdrifts.

We stop off at a roadside booth, built of tree branches, and eat a hearty lunch. Then on we go again, this time for a mountain climb. The road is deep in dust, and we are more like a water cart, but spraying dust. It rolls in on us in thick yellow clouds and coats our faces with grey, as thickly as though we had put on grotesque masks.

Reaching the summit, we see the highway below us, looking like a long, tangled rope which some one has casually thrown down. The road down is very steep and dangerous, and there are constant landslides. The road repair gangs are just keeping pace with them. Now and again we have to stop for one, while the gang clears it. In some places the road is so narrow that we feel as though the lorry squeezes its way through like thread through a needle, rather than drives along.

We reach the River Nukiang...the name means angry, but here it belies its name. It is deep, and dark blue, so dark that one might be tempted to use it for ink. The flow is slow and quiet.

Ahead lies a steel bridge. Single-spanned, it arches across like a rainbow. On the other side stands a great cleft mountain, against the azure sky. It has been blown in half. "When that went off," one of the comrades in our lorry who took part in blowing it up told us, "the river was completely blocked with debris and rocks, and the water had to flow upstream for half an hour." There are still countless gigantic rocks heaped up under the bridge, which are now a stand for tents. At first glance, one cannot distinguish the tents from the rocks.

A lone section of a huge all-but-demolished cliff stands by the roadside like a pagoda. On the highest part of one side are inscribed four big Chinese characters, in red, "Here Stood the Heroes." Proud words, these, to describe a great exploit.... Here, to get to grips with their work, our soldiers had to suspend themselves high over dizzy heights, hanging from strings of ropes interwoven like grape vines. And now, where even monkeys could not pass, motor traffic flows freely.

We stop somewhere at dead of night. The word goes round that this is one of the billets of the troops building the highway. But where shall I find a roof over my head?

Where can I hear the sound of human voice? All I can find is pitchy darkness and deep silence.

BEAUTIFUL LAKE ANTSU

A veritable township has to move when scores of lorries carry the workers on to a new section of the road. All that is left on the weedy slope are some home-made poplar tables and chairs, some blackened holes in the earth where the cauldrons stood, and the basket-ball backboards minus their hoops....

As the convoys drive over the road, their passengers, who had themselves built it all, manage to get their heads out to have a look, and talk excitedly about the time when they worked here or there: how this bridge was built; how that culvert was cut; how that stretch of surface was laid; how that cliff was demolished.... "How d'you feel about it now?" one of them asks a companion. "Me? I feel grand. I feel as though I'm eating fruit from a tree I planted myself. And you?"

"Me too."

Lake Antsu gradually comes in sight. It is early spring and the lake still has a thin layer of ice, like cream on a bowl of milk. There is a fringe of unusually green pine woods standing, very still, around it, and above, the snowy peaks merge with the white clouds, so that you cannot see where one begins and the other ends. The beauty of the scene awakes the imagination of the onlookers.

"There'll be fishing boats on the lake one day."

"That small island would make a good site for a sanatorium."

"I vote we make this a park, and call it the Sikang-Tibet Park, and throw it open to everyone from all parts of China."

...Such flights of fancy fly as fast as the convoy, as we bowl on.

SOWERS OF HAPPINESS

Our little jeep scuttles through the forest like a nimble rabbit. Tall, straight poplar trees, like guards of honour, line both sides of the roads and rush backwards at our passing.

This is the Pomi district. A fall of rain has just passed over, and thick cottony clouds still lower on the peaks. There are some peach trees in bloom at the foot of the mountain, their fresh, charming rosy blossoms shining through a thin curtain of mist.

As this is an earthquake area, all the houses are made of wood. The walls are of tree trunks, and the roofs of bark, weighted down with heavy stones.... I suppose to keep the wind from tearing them off.

I go into what looks like a humble courtyard, and am surprised to find it a thriving place. On a small, dingy window there is a paper notice, saying, "Post Office." Opposite is the trading company. The door is narrow, and beside it stands a board, with the current prices of the goods chalked up. Next is a narrow staircase; upstairs is the Local Government Office. The courtyard, in fact, is the equivalent of a township. Government workers, the post master, the manager of the trading company and some others are squatting round a common dish in the yard itself, eating their meal. I muse that these civilians are, along with our People's Liberation Army, the sowers of the seeds of happiness in these border regions.

THE HIGHWAY TERMINUS

Dense leaves of countless tall trees form a continuous green arch over the highway. As we speed along we feel we are going on a sightseeing trip.

And now, at the present terminus of the highway in the tree groves, numerous tents of various shapes are thickly scattered...so many that you can see no end to them. Here is a merchant selling rubber pillows, an eating house where they serve North-Chinese-style food, the signboard of a watch repairer, a stage with a performance going on. Now you can hear a gramophone record, the voice of a young member of an art group practising a song, the metallic clang of gongs and the rattle of drums from a propaganda unit, a bugle blowing loudly from a camp....

The newly sprung up "city" and all its noises seem to have amazed the ancient snowy mountains. This is something they have never known since time immemorial.

NOW FOR THE RUGGED MOUNTAIN PATH

We stride along a rugged, slippery path over the mountains. It is an narrow and steep as can be—almost vertical! We are wrapped closely round with thick green foliage. Strong tree roots lie above ground here and there, like serpents; they are worn shiny from being trodden so frequently. In some places, as we skirt cliffs and precipices, the path is made of corduroy...small logs placed side by side. A false step would dash one down to the foaming river below. We need the mind of a monkey and the agility of a squirrel.

But this incredible path is as crowded as any city street. Cooks, shouldering their cauldrons, follow on the heels of soldiers carrying tools; yaks loaded with crates jostle with mules carrying tents.... A soldier slips off the path with his kit, rolls a dozen yards down a little ravine, and climbs out again. He wipes the mud off himself, picks the thorns out of

his fingers, hurries to catch up with his comrades, and resumes the song he was singing.

Groups of Tibetans, with their red-tasselled yaks hung with bells, help with army transport. They speak to the soldiers by signs and laughter. Two youngsters come up to me, each carrying a twenty-catty sack of rice. They are very like each other, and could be brother and sister. The boy has a thick mop of black hair, which at first glance looks like a black fur cap. The girl is wearing a beautifully worked brown coat of wild-ox hide. They smile at me with affectionate eyes.

I am greatly taken with them and ask, on purpose, "Who are you carrying the sack for?" Smiling, they both point to my uniform—the Liberation Army.

"Who told you to help the Army?"

Still smiling, they point to themselves this time.

"Why do you want to help the Army?"

The girl thinks it over for a minute, and then points to the west, and then twitches her coat. The boy agrees with her and follows suit. I guess what they mean. When the highway gets right up to Lhasa they will be able to wear better clothes and lead a better life.

I am deeply moved by the attitude and gestures of these two young things. To them, whom I met casually, it is clear that they know what they are doing, and what it all means.

THE SONG ON THE ROAD

The rain has made the path even more slippery and treacherous. Going downhill we have to jump from rock to rock, slide down holding on to twigs, squeeze sideways through crevices, and scale poles where our toes have scarcely a foothold.... Once down, when I look back, I see the column behind me like a long snake, seemingly rushing down the mountainside like an inexhaustible stream...

And on such a road there is a group of women marching along—including an assistant doctor, a nurse, a teacher, a secretary, and an accountant—all carrying their knapsacks and their share of canvas on their backs, and splashed with mud from head to foot, just like the men. On they go, singing gaily. Their songs stop the birds twittering and hearten their comrades of the road. They practically amount, in fact, to a little choir.

When evening comes we camp by the pebbly shore of a river. On the other side a crowd of monkeys come out of the forest and sit regarding us with curious eyes. The rapid torrent dashes against the great rocks and booms, but our soldiers' dramatic squad starts to beat gongs and drums nevertheless. Other sounds arise. An accordion, a clapper, story-telling, songs...the whole company of today's marchers are gathering together.

The shadows of night gradually fall like a black curtain, till the spectators can no longer see the actors' movements or the singers' faces. There is no lamp, or ray of light. But the people listen quietly with intense interest. Far off in the distance someone is calling, "Walk up! Walk up! Grand theatre performance now starting!"

THE BEGINNING OF A NEW STRETCH

The sight gets more fascinating still! Little starry red berries glitter among broken leaves, forsythias smile their golden smiles, and a white flower like cherry-apple is in full bloom, the blossoms lying like snow along the branches. It reminds me of my childhood home, and I come to realize why people compare this place to the southern banks of the Yangtse. Further ahead is a wide mist-laden river. On the bank stands a newly built two-storied house, with balconies and wooden balustrades on all four sides. As he catches sight of this, a soldier calls out excitedly, "Look! The song's come true! 'The tents will turn into high buildings!' "

In the middle of the river stand many piles, as firm in the rapid torrent as islands, proudly facing the far-off, snow-clad peaks. The piles are alive with workers wielding their hammers. Looking at them from below, we almost feel as though they are hammering the very clouds around them. Other workers in black rubber protective capes were waist-deep, carrying heavy beams. An engineer tells me that this bridge is modelled on Soviet experience, and will be entirely made of wood.

When we cross the river we take to the mountains again. And now we find huge trees with trunks as big across as a banqueting table. But soon these great trees are below our feet. The mountain range is so high that no sooner do we reach one peak than we find there is a higher one ahead.... Our clothes are dripping wet with sweat. One of the soldiers takes his shirt off and wrings it out, saying, "Perhaps these mountains haven't got a summit!" "There'll be one," he is answered confidently, "and we'll soon be driving cars over it." The troops are encamped here, and will soon be deployed for the decisive battle, the last stretch to Lhasa itself. These words will soon be true now. "We'll be driving over the summit."

Translated by Chang Hui-min

New Novels

"DEFENCE OF YENAN"

Tu Peng-cheng, the author of this 600-page novel is a young, new writer who participated as a journalist in the defence of Yenan. Parts of the novel appeared in the periodicals *People's Literature* and *Literature in the PLA* before the whole book was published by the People's Literary Press in June 1954. It proved extremely popular and received very favourable comments from the critics, so that Tu Peng-cheng is counted among the best-known writers in China today.

Defence of Yenan describes the decisive six months, from March to September 1947, during which the People's Liberation Army not only repelled the frantic attacks of the Kuomintang forces under Hu Tsung-nan, but was able to turn from the defensive to the offensive.

The historical background of this novel is widely known. In July 1946, less than a year after the War of Resistance to Japanese Aggression had ended, Chiang Kai-shek launched, with U.S. backing, civil war on an unprecedented scale against the liberated areas. His intention was to destroy at one blow the People's Liberation Army defending these areas. But, meeting with resolute resistance, his forces were so quickly weakened that, within eight months, he had to relinquish his dream of an all-out offensive and limit himself to what he called "concentrated attacks" on the two flanks of the front in north Shensi and Shantung. At that moment, the People's Liberation Army in north Shensi, which was the political centre of the liberated areas, numbered no more than twenty-five thousand. But the brilliant strategy, mapped out by Chairman Mao Tse-tung and ably carried out by the Deputy Commander-in-Chief Peng Teh-huai, eventually enabled it to defeat enemy forces ten times their number in six months' fighting. This was the starting point of the concerted, all-out counter-offensive that marked the historic turn in the Chinese People's War of Liberation.

The eight chapters of Tu Peng-cheng's first novel, *Defence of Yenan*, describe the chief battles and events of this stage of the war, the close relationship between the people's army and the people, mainly through the exploits and experiences of one company of men from the People's Liberation Army. Correct strategical guidance by Chairman Mao Tse-tung, and heroism on the part of soldiers who know what they are fighting for, are the two elements that form the warp and woof of this epic canvas.

In Chapter I the reader gets to know Yenan, the old cave-city that stands as a shining symbol in Chinese history. Since October 1935, when

the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army arrived in those parts of north Shensi to organize resistance against Japan after the Long March of eight thousand miles, Yenan had become the heart and brain of China, the lighthouse shedding brightness over the whole land. Thousands upon thousands came to Yenan in search of principles by which China could be saved. In Yenan they found what they were looking for—the irresistible ideological weapons forged by Communist Party and Chairman Mao Tse-tung, that carried them through eight years of resistance to Japanese aggression until the final triumph.

But the situation in the civil war as a whole demanded that this same city, which had such personal meaning for the Chinese people, be temporarily abandoned. The Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Peng Teh-huai, gave the reason for such a step: "If we try to hold Yenan, the burden is on our back. If we retreat from Yenan, the burden will be shifted on to the back of our enemy."

At first, when the PLA soldiers had heard of the approach of the enemy, they grieved over what would happen to the city as if "they were witnessing the murder of their mother," and the people evacuating Yenan "looked longingly back at the city." But at dead of night, barely two hours before the soldiery of the Kuomintang general Hu Tsung-nan entered the city, a light was still shining from a window half-way up a slope outside the north gate. From behind that window, the Deputy Commander-in-Chief was directing the retreat from Yenan, in preparation for the coming counter-attack.

A long column of people and pack animals was silhouetted in the light of a string of lanterns. "In the middle of the column were horses and mules carrying the radio equipment, the archives and general baggage, while the rear consisted of people marching like combat troops.... The appearance of this column heightened the extraordinary solemnity of the hour. The column marched slowly and in good order. Their steady tread mingled with the sound of the flowing river Yenho, the light clink of arms and the animals' hoof-beats...." A group of soldiers on the bank of the river watched the moving lights and shadows in complete silence. They were reminded of "a boat, with a bright lantern tied to its mast, heading steadily towards its destination along a charted course despite the dark, stormy night.... And, suddenly, these fighters felt cheered and in high spirits again. Their grief and indignation, caused by the withdrawal from Yenan, vanished entirely. It seemed to them that, instead of retreating from this great, holy city, they had just recaptured it."

The passing column, among the last to leave Yenan, consisted of Chairman Mao Tse-tung and the central organization of the Chinese Communist Party.

After the retreat from Yenan, the People's Liberation Army adopted a new strategy of mobile warfare in which overwhelming forces were

massed against separate units of Hu Tsung-nan's crack Kuomintang troops, in order to destroy them one by one. On the sixth day after the retreat, the PLA surrounded the Kuomintang's 31st brigade at Chinghuapien, about twenty miles northeast of Yenan and, in two hours, put four thousand enemy troops out of action. In two other engagements, too, large numbers of Kuomintang soldiers were routed and a great amount of supplies seized. The PLA fighters were saying: "The enemy is blind, he bumps against us here and there. Every time he takes a beating, and still he doesn't know where our main forces are!"

In order to get out of this predicament, Hu Tsung-nan resorted to pincer tactics, ordering his troops in the central part of Shensi northward, and the troops under two Kuomintang warlords, stationed in neighbouring eastern Kansu, eastward. He was hoping to surround and crush the PLA in the area north of Yenan by a drive by these two columns, co-ordinated with his main forces at Yenan. But the People's Liberation Army struck first. By forced marches towards the east Kansu plateau, through forests and across the desert, the PLA defeated the two props of Hu Tsung-nan's military strength in various engagements and recaptured two areas in eastern Kansu and northwestern Shensi. Finally, Hu Tsung-nan's trump card, the 36th division, was demolished in the battle of Shachiatien. This victory enabled the People's Liberation Army to shift from the defensive to the offensive and brought a complete turn-about in the conduct of military operations in the Northwest. Tens of thousands of the Kuomintang soldiery were drawn south to reinforce Hu Tsung-nan at Yenan. But the PLA straddled the highway, forced a battle and thereby routed the mobile forces of the Kuomintang in north Shensi. Hu Tsung-nan's situation became hopeless, for "every inch of soil became a trap, every blade of grass a hostile fighter."

Defence of Yenan ends with the people's army victoriously turning its face once again towards towering Laoshan, the mountain gateway to Yenan. This was the climactic moment at which "A great storm gathered in the north over the Great Wall. Lightning flashes and roaring thunder accompanied this storm that swept irresistibly over the forests and mountains near Yenan, across the Yellow River which had seen battles for several thousands of years, and on into the far distance. . . ." The curtain was rising over the prelude to the liberation of the whole country.

This novel makes manifest the steel-like will of the People's Liberation Army fighters and their optimistic dedication to the revolutionary cause. Chou Ta-yung, the company leader who, with his men, forms the main centre of attention, had often to break out of close encirclements under extremely difficult conditions. Yet they broke through at will, as if there had been no enemy restraining them. "Danger? We've sent back all the danger to the enemy on our bayonets!" In the desolation of the desert, where the sun scorched everything, the fighters felt like being in an oven. Not a single drop of water was to be found. They

bit their cracked and blood-stained lips in agony, but "with the great earth of China under their feet and the hopes of the Chinese people on their shoulders," they marched courageously on towards the Great Wall. Old Sun, the aged cook of the company, collapsed, never to rise again. The evening before, in spite of his almost insufferable thirst, he had handed a bowl of precious, boiled water to the company leader whom he loved like his own son. "For years Old Sun had marched with the troops, his cauldron on his back. Day and night were the same to him and wind and rain never deterred him. He never grumbled, he never complained. Quietly he lived and quietly he met his death, having dedicated his all to the long-suffering people."

The author has succeeded in bringing out the images of his group of heroes in sharp relief. Chou Ta-yung, the company leader, is the most prominent figure. He comes from a family of poor peasants, who were always the most heavily oppressed by the landlord. Both his parents lost their lives in the struggle against the powers arrayed against them. Chou Ta-yung was left an orphan, with no food, no clothes and no one to depend on. So he became a beggar and drifted aimlessly, learning through his own suffering to distinguish friend from foe. He was thirteen years old when, in 1936, he found the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army. He remained in its ranks, "fighting, learning and progressing" with the rest. At seventeen, he had distinguished himself as a light machine gunner and was later cited for distinguished conduct. Tempered by steel and fire, he matured and proved himself a leader of men, brave, ingenious and calm in an emergency. He deserved, despite his youth, to be called an experienced revolutionary. He felt tremendous affection for his comrades, and he loved the people more than he valued his own life. Even when badly wounded, he would sit on the ground, leaning his back against the wall, although the pain made him grit his teeth and sweat ran down his spine, rather than lie down on a bed, so that his blood would not stain the quilt belonging to the villagers in whose house he was billetted. His class-consciousness and heroism gave the men of his company courage to plunge into struggles even against the heaviest odds. He showed those who made mistakes wherein their errors lay, and educated the Kuomintang soldiers who came over to the PLA and to whom liberation meant new and unknown responsibilities. His influence cleansed their minds and souls of all dross, so that they, too, became people of integrity and worth. The feeling of strength, of light and warmth, which Chou Ta-yung communicated to all around him, makes him a memorable character.

Grouped around Chou Ta-yung are figures no less vividly drawn. There is, for instance, squad leader Wang Lao-hu, a man of few words who nurses a deep-seated hatred against the Kuomintang, the oppressor of the people. Once, Wang Lao-hu had only a handful of soldiers to repel an attack of a thousand enemy troops. When nineteen bayonets were pointed at him, he whirled about for ten minutes, stabbing to right

and left, till he felled several enemy soldiers with his own bayonet and scared the rest into fleeing for their lives. But he had been too embarrassed to look his comrades in the face when they applauded his being awarded the title of hero of the first rank.

Several high-ranking officers are also well portrayed in this novel. Li Cheng, a regimental commissar, stands out as typical of what a political instructor in the army should be. He kept in close touch with the rank and file and was always ready with help and advice. During night marches, he could tell the various companies apart by the difference in speed of advance. He could read the thoughts as they were arising in the fighters' mind and many felt he could even understand the flutterings of their hearts. When after a long and hard march the soldiers were exhausted, he cheered them with stories and tales, so that their courage to go ahead overcame the difficulties in front of them. And he did not neglect things which, to others, might have seemed trivial. When the father of one of the soldiers complained that he had not heard from his son for a long time, Li Cheng made the soldier write home at once. The soldiers were Li Cheng's sole concern but, in turn, his great enthusiasm flowed in the veins of the whole regiment.

The Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Peng Teh-huai, emerges as a man of great integrity and sincerity. Wherever he happened to be, behind the lighted window on the slope outside Yenan, or in a cave blackened by smoke, or under continued strafing by enemy planes at Shachiatien, he radiated calm and optimism.

The close relations between people and army, one of the important factors in winning the People's War of Liberation, is illustrated in the novel through old man Li and his family. When the Kuomintang troops forced him to be their guide, he did not hesitate to jump down a precipice, taking his small grandson with him, in order not to betray the People's Liberation Army fighters who were lying in ambush. The child, unfortunately, was killed, but old man Li was saved and continued to do his bit for the liberation of Yenan, hobbling around as best he could in the face of all sorts of danger. . . .

Inevitably, there is a sharp contrast in the novel between the people's heroes in the war of liberation and the pack of shameless wolves and hounds headed by Chiang Kai-shek, whose henchman Hu Tsung-nan had for years harassed the Chinese people in the liberated areas instead of fighting off Japanese aggression.

Defence of Yenan brings to life a period of recent history which had a most immediate bearing on the Chinese people's struggle for freedom. The popularity and emotional appeal of this well-written novel is therefore readily appreciated.

Introducing

"I-WEN"—WORLD LITERATURE

"In order that we may deepen our understanding of the life, struggles, ideas and feelings of the people of other countries; that we may cultivate in ourselves a spirit of internationalism, enrich our knowledge of human culture, enlarge our range of vision to take in the literature and art of all humanity; and so that we may improve our own literary work, it is of the utmost urgency that we immediately set about strengthening our translating forces, and introduce to Chinese readers not only contemporary work, but also the world's heritage of classic masterpieces."

These words come from a report made to the first national conference of translators of literature by Mao Tun, Chairman of the Union of Chinese Writers. This report, published in the October 1954 issue of *I-Wen*, sums up the Chinese people's pressing demand for knowledge of the literature of other peoples, tells us why the demand exists, and what a great future there is for the translation of the world's literary heritage and contemporary works.

I-Wen is a monthly magazine published under the auspices of the Union of Chinese Writers. It is devoted to translations of foreign literary work, both classic and contemporary, and of reviews, essays, and so on. Its popularity shows what a sincere and ardent respect the liberated Chinese people have for the achievements of the people of the world in the field of literature.

To those who are familiar with literary and artistic movements in China before the War of Resistance to Japanese Aggression, *I-Wen* is a familiar name. Twenty years ago, under the influence and with the help of Lu Hsun, a monthly periodical bearing this title first appeared. In those days its function was different. By introducing revolutionary and progressive work from the Soviet Union and other countries, it armed the opposition to the persecution of the Kuomintang and broke through its blockade of progressive literature and art. It encouraged writers of those days to study realism in writing, and educated young people and taught them the meaning of true patriotism and internationalism.

When the new *I-Wen* came out on July 1, 1953, Mao Tun, the editor, wrote, "The situation today, both nationally and internationally, is completely different from what it was in Lu Hsun's time. Now we, the Chinese people, led by the Communist Party, have won our great revolutionary victory; we have established a people's democratic dictatorship; we have started planned economic construction on a gigantic scale, and we are now advancing towards socialism. . . .

"It is more than ever the duty of our workers in the fields of literature and art not only to study the socialist realist masterpieces from the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies, but to acquaint themselves fully with the world's classics and with contemporary revolutionary and progressive literature from the capitalist, colonial and semi-colonial countries, so that we can learn from them while trying to raise the level of our own work."

That is the policy of the magazine. Equal attention is paid to contemporary and classical works. Novels, poems and songs, plays and essays in translation appear regularly. Other pieces also appear—sketches, memoirs, folk-lore and so on. Obviously long novels cannot be included in full, so normally the shorter are chosen to translate in full, with excerpts from others. "Savitri," from the *Mahabharata,* the great Indian epic, has been published, and the "Isles of Greece" from Byron's *Don Juan.* Many novels are too lengthy to be translated and *I-Wen* therefore has only been able to introduce them to the Chinese reader by episodes, as, for example, those from Rabelais' *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel,* Lesage's *Gil Blas,* Fielding's *Jonathan Wild* and Jaroslav Hasek's *The Good Soldier Schweik.* A contemporary note has been struck recently by the publication of part of *The Volunteers,* by Steve Nelson, an American who fought in Spain with the International Brigades.

Each issue has helpful editorial notes, giving a brief analysis of the works translated in the issue, notes on authors and the special features of their styles. The other, translated, articles go deeper. Sometimes they are critical analyses or appreciations of some famous writer; sometimes accompanied by a work or extract from the work of the author concerned. Articles on a newly translated author, like the one in the issue which presented *Life in the District Day by Day* by V. V. Ovechkin, and a critical article on it by A. Petrosyan, are always highly appreciated.

I-Wen publishes, too, translations of articles of general literary interest, as, for example, Ilya Ehrenburg's *The Writer and His Work* and Pablo Neruda's *Poetry and Obscurity.* Such articles are greatly valued both by writers and readers in China.

From the way readers have responded to the first eighteen issues which have appeared, it is obvious that peace is the theme which awakes the greatest response in their minds. In the very first issue, Nazim Hikmet's poem to a Turkish soldier used by U.S. imperialism as cannon-

TUNG HSI-WEN: Spring Comes to Tibet

fodder in Korea, struck this note. Carlos Augusto Leon's *Song of Korea* echoes the same theme. Peace is being slain! he cries—but peace will unfold her wings again and Korea will win freedom. A young German poet's voice is heard, Stephan Hermlin in *The Flight of the Dove*, and India's voice is heard from Harindranath Chattopadhyaya.

Peace is not, of course, only sung in verse. *I-Wen*'s audience has suffered and bled with the victims in fascist concentration camps, in *Emmanuel Nathan* by a young French writer, Georges Cogniot. From works like this readers realize that they must not relax their guard against the instigators of war who try to re-arm western Germany and reinstate Nazi war criminals. The reader also hears how the world peace movement is persecuted. F. F. Knorre, a Soviet writer, in his *Mother* tells of a Soviet woman, whose three sons fell in the anti-fascist struggle, prevented from crossing the frontier into Western Europe where she has been invited to join in a meeting for peace. Reactionary governments fear those who fight for peace. *I-Wen* also serves to remind its readers of others who suffer persecution for the cause of peace . . . Paul Robeson, for example.

China's peaceful socialist construction helps her people understand and love works from other lands which reflect the same reality. Through Boris Polevoy's sketches of the builders of the great Volga-Don Canal, and Sergei Antonov's and Vasili Grossman's stories, the heroism of the Soviet people can be gauged and the sublimity of the communist ethic, translated into human terms, realized more and more deeply.

The brother democracies, too, have similar stories to inspire and help the reader, such as the Czechoslovak writer Jan Drda's *Beautiful Tortisa* and the young Hungarian Erne Urban's *Uncle Goczan Takes a Crooked Path.* In these, and others like them, readers follow the struggle to build socialism.

But the heroic fight for peace and democracy waged by those in capitalist countries is not forgotten. *Housewarming Noodles*—Masaru Kobayashi's short story of the resolute struggle waged inside a Japanese prison, James Aldridge's short story *In Italy*, dealing with the anti-fascist struggle of the Italian people, and poems and songs from Korea, Viet-Nam and Greece, increase sympathy with their cause and bring the conviction of ultimate victory.

At the Yenan Forum on Art and Literature in 1942 Chairman Mao Tse-tung said:

> *We must take over all that is best in the artistic and literary heritage, critically assimilate from it whatever is useful and learn from it when we try to create new works of literature and art out of the people's lives of our own time and place.*

I-Wen has tried to follow Chairman Mao's advice. It has translated and published quite a number of works of classical realism, like Gogol's

Evenings on a Farm near Dikhanka, and *Mati Ludash,* a description of peasant struggles against feudal rule by the nineteenth-century Hungarian poet Mihaly Fazekas. Such works, with their penetrating insight, their integrity and truthful presentation of life, have been an inspiration to Chinese writers.

Coming near our own day, such works as Zsigmond Moricz' *Eat Well for Once,* Martin Andersen Nexo's *The Swede's Lottery,* Anatole France's *Crainquebille* and Boleslaw Prus' *Returning Wave* remind the readers of their own sufferings before liberation—only a few years ago—in the darkness of the old life. Such books, besides enlightening them on conditions elsewhere and arousing admiration for the writers who understood and dared to speak out, find an echo in the readers' heart.

In the spring of 1953 *I-Wen* asked its readers for their opinion. Hundreds of letters came in to the editorial board—from mines, workshops and factories, from soldiers and sailors, from government offices, schools and universities. It was clear from what they said that *I-Wen* was warmly welcomed. Many readers said that not only had their horizon been enlarged, but that a strong current of sympathy with the thoughts and emotions of other peoples had been set up. In spite of difference in lives, language, customs, ways of life and political and social systems, there was a profound realization that all the people of the world share a burning desire for a peaceful and happy life, that all people are against the destroyers of peace and happiness. This strengthens their faith in the cause of peace.

The demand for a deeper cultural life which goes side by side with our rising standard of living places a heavy responsibility on *I-Wen.* But with the help of translators all over the land, the magazine is becoming a living bridge across which China can meet the literature of other peoples. So it plays its part in the country's socialist construction, in the cause of world peace.

Cultural Events

The Controversy over the "Dream of the Red Chamber"

To create a new socialist literature of our own, we must correctly evaluate our literary legacy, accepting all that is best in our heritage and developing it on a new basis. With this end in view, scholars and writers of New China have begun to make a serious Marxist-Leninist study of China's literary tradition.

A realist tradition that is charged with a love for our country and people and a love for freedom runs throughout more than twenty centuries of Chinese literature from the *Book of Songs*, the poems of Chu Yuan, Li Po, and Tu Fu, the poetic dramas of Wang Shih-fu and Kwan Han-ching,* the novels of Shih Nai-an** and Tsao Hsueh-chin down to the works of Lu Hsun, the great revolutionary writer. These masterpieces have always been widely known and loved by the people, but distortion and slander on the part of the ruling class in the past have detracted from and obscured the glory of many of these works. Since the liberation, New China's intellectuals have endeavoured to combat the distortion and depreciation of the Chinese classics by bourgeois scholars while encouraging free study and free discussion in the field of learning. The recent controversy over the interpretation of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* is an example of the criticism of the bourgeois approach to classical studies and the attempt to reach a correct understanding of the classics from a Marxist-Leninist viewpoint.

The *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a great novel of nearly a million words by the eighteenth century writer Tsao Hsueh-chin. Manuscript copies of this work were circulated even before its publication in 1791; and for the last two centuries it has been very popular and had a wide influence on its readers. Scholars of the Manchu Dynasty, indeed, used to say: "If a man cannot chat about the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, all his studies of poetry and the classics are labour lost."

The *Dream of the Red Chamber* exposes the decadence of the bureaucrat-landlord class which presages the disintegration of the feudal order as a whole. Chia Pao-yu and Lin Tai-yu, the hero and heroine of the book, are rebels against the feudal-bureaucratic family. They are opposed to the social system of their time in almost every respect. They long for freedom and their love is based on their common ideal of a better life. Inevitably they meet with the opposition of their kinsmen who compel Pao-yu to marry Hsueh Pao-tsai—a girl who supports feudal conventions—instead of Tai-yu, his true love. In the end, Tai-yu dies of a broken heart and Pao-yu, in his despair, leaves home to become a monk.

As a realistic portrayal of the corruption and darkness of a feudal society on the eve of disintegration, the *Dream of the Red Chamber* was naturally banned by the feudal rulers as "heresy" and "pornography" from the time of its appearance. Most of the feudal intellectuals, however, held a different view. Fascinated by its tender romance, they regarded it as a light novel containing superb descriptions of feminine beauty. By the time of the 1911 bourgeois revolution some people considered the book as a political novel against the Manchu regime. With the development of the May Fourth Movement—the movement for a new culture which started in 1919—new moral concepts were advocated to replace the old, and the old literary style was con-

*Both dramatists of the thirteenth century.

**Author of *Water Margin*.

demned in favour of the vernacular. Works written in everyday speech, such as the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, were therefore read with a new respect. The bourgeois scholars of that time, with Hu Shih* as their representative, set out to re-evaluate these works from their bourgeois point of view. The true value of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, declared Hu Shih, lay in its everyday speech and its plain naturalistic representation of life. He completely denied its great significance as social criticism and its true value as a work of art.

Professor Yu Ping-po, who has pursued his study of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* for thirty years under the baneful influence of Hu Shih, published a volume of critical essays on the novel as early as 1923. In 1952 these essays reappeared, with a few insignificant changes, under the new title of *A Study of the "Dream of the Red Chamber."* Thanks to the importance the Chinese Communist Party attaches to classical literature, the people's interest in it has grown, and Yu's book quickly ran into six editions.

However, the critical approach adopted by Yu Ping-po in his work is utterly erroneous. Isolating the portrayal of the Chia family from the social and economic conditions of the time—the middle of the Manchu Dynasty — Yu considers the *Dream of the Red Chamber* as an autobiographical work full of the author's amorous experiences, wholly neglecting its profound criticism of feudal society. He treats the statement that "love is but an empty dream" as the central theme of the novel, viewing the characters in the book as mere mouthpieces of that idea rather than representative figures drawn from life.

Like many other bourgeois scholars, Professor Yu expounds the "traditional character" of the novel on the evidence of isolated incidents. Certain passages, he holds, are actually imitations of *The Western Chamber*, a poetic drama by Wang Shih-fu. The concept that "love is but an empty dream" is, according to

him, derived from *Chin Ping Mei*, a romance of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.). Here we can clearly see the evil influence of Hu Shih's pragmatism. Like a pragmatist, Yu commenced his study with certain preconceived ideas and proceeded to prove them by drawing on isolated passages or incidents in the book while shutting his eyes to the truthful picture of the time which the novelist has drawn. There can be no doubt that the conclusions reached by Professor Yu underrate the true value of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

This bourgeois distortion of classical literature is incompatible with Marxism-Leninism. In the autumn of 1954, to assess rightly the value of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* and to defend and carry forward the excellent realist tradition of Chinese literature, Li Hsi-fan and Lan Ling, two young students of literature, published a series of articles to criticize Yu Ping-po's mistaken approach. These essays at once attracted the attention of the reading public and plunged the whole world of letters into a lively discussion on the correct approach to classical studies and the correct understanding of the artistic value of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* and its affinity with the people.

It was no accident, Li Hsi-fan and Lan Ling pointed out, that the *Dream of the Red Chamber* appeared during the reign of Chien Lung (1736-1795); for it was during that apparently flourishing era

*Now condemned by the Chinese people as a war criminal in the service of Chiang Kai-shek.

that the Manchu Empire began to show signs of decay. The disintegration of feudalism is clearly forecast in the decline of the Chia family which is depicted in the novel at great length, and which was due in the last analysis to social and economic changes.

Realistic in approach, the *Dream of the Red Chamber* mirrors the corruption and ugliness of the feudal rulers of eighteenth-century China. Although Tsao Hsueh-chin felt a certain regret at the fall of his own class which made him wince inwardly even as he attacked the objects of his hate, and although he retained a trace of nihilism and fatalism in his outlook, his realistic approach enabled him to overcome his class prejudices and political bias to paint a convincing picture of the inevitable disintegration of the aristocratic feudal families and predict the collapse of the feudal system as a whole. In short, by exposing the darkness of his own time through the tragedy of the life he portrayed, Tsao Hsueh-chin inspired his readers to oppose feudalism and not to take refuge in escapist dreams.

The *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Li Hsi-fan and Lan Ling maintain, continues the excellent tradition of Chinese literature not through a slavish imitation of certain details of the plots of ancient works but through its fresh development of the creative realism, popular quality and national style which characterize Chinese classical literature. There is no lack of works of critical realism in China's ancient literature, such as the story-tellers' tales of the Sung Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.) and certain novels of the Ming Dynasty. By making a more penetrating exposure of the contradictions inherent in feudal society, the *Dream of the Red Chamber* carries forward the glorious fighting tradition in Chinese literature.

Many heroines in ancient Chinese literature, such as Cho Wen-chun, Chu Ying-tai and Tsui Ying-ying, opposed the feudal marriage system and sought for true love. The *Dream of the Red Chamber* keeps up this tradition by singing the praises of such lovers. Moreover, the love between Chia Pao-yu and Lin Tai-yu is of a higher order than that described in any earlier literary works, for they loved not only in spite of feudal oppression but because of their common opposition to all that was glorified under feudal rule.

The two young critics also made it clear that it was Professor Yu's subjectivist approach — that is, his bourgeois viewpoint and methods — which made him represent the *Dream of the Red Chamber* as the tragedy of one family or a few individuals only, and made him consider this beautifully integrated work of art as a naturalistic description of isolated phenomena. Marxist-Leninist literary criticism is diametrically opposed to this, for it starts from facts and not ideas. Only by adopting the Marxist-Leninist approach can we reach a correct understanding of the classics and learn from them properly.

The discussion of the correct method in classical studies has now spread all over the country, and many scholars engaged in classical studies have written articles on the questions raised. The Chinese Writers' Union has sponsored a number of meetings on the *Dream of the Red Chamber* which have been attended by such well-known classical scholars, writers and critics as Kuo Mo-jo, Mao Tun, Chou Yang, Ho Chi-fang, Yu Ping-po, Wu Tsu-hsiang, Li Hsi-fan and Lan Ling. Further research on the novel is now being carried out. In the course of the controversy Professor Yu has come to realize that his views and methods of research in the past were mistaken.

History shows that periods of free discussion in the field of learning have always led to vigorous development in art and science. The recent discussions on the *Dream of the Red Chamber* have not only set an example of how a classic should be studied, but have also given a new stimulus to free and healthy discussion in all fields of research.

China Welcomes Soviet Artists

The Soviet State Folk Dance Company, led by Igor Moiseyev, People's Artist and several times winner of a Stalin Prize, and the Soviet State Moscow Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theatre, headed by G. E. Polyakov, came to China on separate performance tours in October 1954. Their visit will be long remembered as a landmark in cultural exchange between China and the Soviet Union, as an event of great importance in the cultural life of the Chinese people.

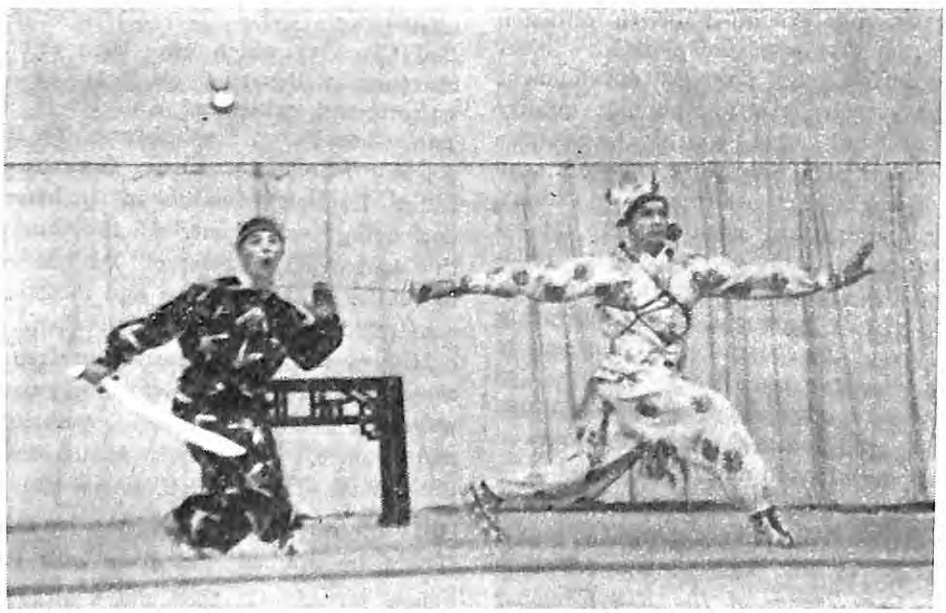
The State Folk Dance Company was founded in 1937—the first professional folk dance company in the Soviet Union. The Company not only by its art brings out the meaning of existing folk dances in all their richness and colour, but also creates, on traditional lines, new dance forms which reflect life there today. It has won great renown in the Soviet Union and, in the course of a tour in the People's Democracies, was acclaimed an "Envoy of Peace and Friendship" by those who saw it.

In China the Company's repertoire included three groups of dances. The first consisted of national dances—Russian, Ukrainian, Byelo-Russian, Moldavian and so on; the second portrayed old Russia and the new Soviet life of today. *A Day Aboard a Warship* gives us a glimpse into the life of Soviet sailors; *Two May Days* contrasts the grim May Days before the revolution with the glorious May Day celebrations in the Soviet Union nowadays. In presenting such new subjects, the dancers by their perfect technique contrived to express the buoyant, vigorous, new spirit of Soviet life.

The theme of the third group of dances was peace and friendship. It included dances from the People's Democracies, every one with its own national characteristics, style, and rhythm. In this group, too, were three Chinese dances: the *Waist Drum, Red Silk Dance*, and *San Cha Kou* (Fight at the Crossroads) from Peking opera.

San Cha Kou was greeted particularly

Scene from "San Cha Kou"



warmly. Moscow first saw it performed in the spring of 1952 by a Chinese troupe. It won a tremendous ovation in the Soviet Union, and Igor Moiseyev praised it highly as a brilliant piece of traditional Chinese art, vivid, dramatic and expressive.

This time, the Soviet artists Savin and Golovanov brought *San Cha Kou* back to Peking. Chang Yun-chi, who danced the leading role in Moscow, went to see their performance and said: "Dance roles in Peking opera have a style all their own; vigorous acrobatics and operatic-ballet technique are interwoven with superb skill. Even professional Chinese artists of Peking opera cannot master it without hard work and long study; but the Soviet artists not only showed swiftness, dexterity and accuracy in their performance but treated the most difficult feats of acrobatics in Peking opera with consummate skill and as to the manner born."

The performance of the Soviet State Folk Dance Company will assuredly serve as a great source of inspiration to Chinese choreographers, give them new ideas and hasten their development. After liberation Chinese artists began to pay much attention to China's rich folk dances as a form of art. In the spring of 1953 under the auspices of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs a festival of folk dance and music was held; Chinese choreographers now look upon the presentation of the people's dances and songs as one of their important tasks. The experience of the Soviet State Folk Dance Company in collecting and presenting folk dances serves as a guide to our Chinese artists, for their performances were a magnificent example of how appropriate stage forms for each kind of folk dance could be found and how the problems of staging were dealt with. Chinese choreographers made use of the opportunity to learn several Soviet dances from their visitors, while for their part the Soviet artists enlarged their repertoire of Chinese dances.

From Peking the Company went on tour to Tientsin, Shanghai, Hangchow, Canton, Wuhan, Shenyang, Fushun and Anshan, and everywhere it met with the same warm response.

At the end of October, Peking welcomed the Soviet State Moscow Musical Theatre. This theatre was directly inspired by Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko, two magnificent artists whom China's literary and art circles so greatly honour. Naturally this visit aroused great public excitement.

Carrying on the artistic tradition of its founders, the Moscow Musical Theatre has always concentrated on realism both in opera and ballet, and constantly strives to improve on its already high standards.

They have a rich and varied repertoire. Their operas included Khrennikov's *The Storm*, which some have termed the first typically Soviet opera, for it successfully deals with a modern subject and modern life—the struggle of the Soviet people to wipe out counter-revolutionaries in the early days of the Soviet Union. Chaikovsky's great work, the lyric opera *Evgeny Onegin*, was also in their repertoire. Stanislavsky himself used to produce this opera: it was one of his triumphs; and the Musical Theatre keeps closely to his production. Another important item in the repertoire was Gulak-Artemovsky's *Zaporozhie Cossack Beyond the Danube*—a Ukrainian opera-comique full of the healthy boisterousness and high spirits which we associate with Soviet light opera.

Three ballets were presented: *Swan Lake, Esmeralda* and *Dr. Oh-It-Hurts. Swan Lake* has been restored to its original form. In the ninety years since it was first performed, many changes were made both in the music and the choreography. Some directors even arbitrarily changed Chaikovsky's music for the sake of their ideas of stage effect. The Moscow Musical Theatre completely restored

Scene from "Esmeralda"

the original score and has retained the best traditions in choreography. Bovt, the premiere danseuse, in the role of Odette-Odile left a deep impression among the audience. They also presented *Esmeralda*, a ballet based on Victor Hugo's novel, *Notre Dame de Paris*. The third ballet was one for children, *Dr. Oh-It-Hurts*, with music by Morozov. These three ballets served to illustrate the versatility of the dancers and their mastery of different forms and styles.

Chao Feng, secretary-general of the Union of Chinese Musicians, rightly said of the Musical Theatre's performance: "It will greatly influence our theatrical art, first of all because our dramatic workers have studied the Stanislavsky school of acting, and it is our good fortune that we are, for the first time, able to attend such exemplary performances. Besides, this is also the first opportunity we have had to appreciate and study such a high level of accomplishment in modern technique as they have shown in stage art and skill. All this will exert a profound influence on the art of our own theatre."

While the State Moscow Musical Theatre was here, Chinese musicians and dancers organized themselves into small groups to discuss specialized subjects with the visiting artists: acting, directing, conducting, ballet, chorus work, production, and theatre organization. They also discussed the theory of ballet, opera and dancing, and exchanged experience. Chinese and Soviet artists also gave joint performances.

The performances of the Soviet State Folk Dance Company and the Soviet State Moscow Musical Theatre were seen by over three hundred thousand spectators, but the warmth of their welcome cannot be calculated in figures. Mao Tse-tung, Chu Teh, Liu Shao-chi and Chou En-lai all attended the Soviet artists' performances.

The Soviet artists have left a profound and indelible impression on the minds of the Chinese people, although their visit lasted only two months. Their valuable, artistic performances will be a permanent source of inspiration and encouragement to Chinese artists.

A Traditional Art Flourishes Today

The State Puppet Company, in Peking, recently held its first theatre season in its own theatre. The performances were sufficient proof, if proof were needed, that the ancient folk art of puppetry was indeed a living force, and a satisfying medium for many themes.

The puppets used in the performances were all rod puppets—the type most common in China. A rod puppet is rather like the well-known glove puppet, but instead of the figure being supported and manipulated by the hand and fingers, the head is fixed to a rod, which is held from below. The eyes and jaws work off the centre rod, and are moved by the thumb and fingers of the puppeteer's right hand. The arms have separate rods attached to the wrists. The puppeteer has one hand free, to use for the arms. Occasionally, for some parts, the legs as well are worked by rods, or a "third leg" — actually separate — can be manipulated by another puppeteer.

The programme throughout the season was of four items, each illustrating a different form of puppetry. The first was a Chinese peasant dance of celebration, now widely loved and performed all over China. The Yangko Dance—the name means rice song—may have started by being a work-song, used when the rice seedlings were transplanted. It is now to be found in many forms—as a group dance with its own characteristic running step, as an opera, and as a playlet. The form shown in the festival was of a group dance. This is very popular with the children.

The second was in classic Peking Opera style, with the puppeteers taking the vocal parts themselves, and the traditional accompaniment of drum, cymbal and Chinese fiddle supplied by separate players. The item chosen was an excerpt from a famous classic, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*—a fighting sequence of the rivalry between two generals of two of the warring kingdoms in the third century. This version, as a puppet play, originated in Hunan, and the costumes, action and accompaniment were in this tradition. The action includes typical Chinese opera acrobatics.

The third play, *Pigsy Carries His Wife*, is also out of traditional puppet repertoire, and is full of folk-lore touches. The actual story is a quasi-humorous sequence from the famous *Pilgrimage to the West*, the story of Hsuan Chuang, the monk who went to India to fetch the sacred Buddhist Sutras. But Monkey and Pigsy provide light, not to say broad, relief in this very popular act. Pigsy and Monkey are two disciples of the monk. Monkey, to test Pigsy's sincerity and discipline, turns him-

The Yangko Dance

self into a beautiful woman, to tempt him to stray from the narrow path. Pigsy falls for this, and when he is tricked into carrying this "beauty" does not know that his burden is none other than the sly Monkey, who, once on Pigsy's back, reverts to his own shape. It was in this play that an extra limb, to allow Monkey to stand on one leg and wave the other, was brought into play by an assistant. A dummy, second "monkey" was also used, for Monkey's somersaults and fights. Done by these expert hands, this had every appearance of reality, and fairly brought the house down. The raised front of the platform was also used effectively, and the puppets hoisted themselves into sitting postures, while their features were given full play.

The fourth and last play was Chekhov's *Chameleon*, a one-act adaptation of a satirical short story on the sycophancy of the petty tsarist officials. This was inspired by Soviet puppetry and was dressed and scened in tsarist Russian style. It introduces a naturalist animal puppet, a fluffy little white dog, who is worked "lengthways," so to speak, and barked, panted pathetically, and galloped around. The portrayal of such very different types of plays and the sure touch shown in characterization show how far the old puppet masters have progressed.

The history of puppet plays and players in China is a fascinating one. Despite the fact that puppets of one kind or another have been known to exist since 200 B.C., at the time of liberation only one puppeteer of the most famous Wuchiao tradition remained in Peking, once famous for its puppet shows. Indeed, within living memory some seventy itinerant players of this tradition were to be found there. Thanks to the warlords, Japanese occupation, and the Chiang Kai-shek regime, the players had dwindled almost out of existence.

Yet China has a very rich tradition. In fact there is a story which dates back to 200 B.C.! Mo Tu was besieging Pingchen, and the defendants, knowing that he had a very jealous wife, made life-size figures of beautiful women, and manipulated them on the city walls. The

Scene from "Pigsy Carries His Wife"

wife, fearing that her husband would be led astray by them if he did take the town, persuaded him to withdraw! But even if this is not, strictly speaking, a true record of puppets as such, there is an authentic record in the *History of the Tang Dynasty* (618-907 A.D.), where, in the chapter on music, reference is made to "puppet shows, plays by wooden figures." These performances, it is stated, originally were for use in funeral rites, but by the end of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) they were used for merry-making as well. According to another account, there were historical plays staged by puppets in the Sui Dynasty (581-618 A.D.), and in the Sung Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.), five kinds of puppets are recorded. Rod puppets, marionettes, swimming puppets, *yofa* puppets and—human puppets! How the swimming puppets were worked we do not know, nor do we know what *yofa* puppets were. But the human puppets were small children. Of the five types recorded in the Sung Dynasty, only the rod puppets and marionettes remain now, though other modifications exist, like the glove puppet, which flourishes today.

In general, puppet shows evolved in the countryside, and were only brought to the towns by peasant puppeteers. In Wuchiao, Shantung Province, there was a very rich tradition, and it was from this area that *Pigsy Carries His Wife* was

collected. In the slack season, when the earth was resting under the frost, young men would apprentice themselves to an expert, himself a part-time professional, who became an itinerant player for the winter only. After three seasons they would be expert enough to work on their own. The year's repertoire decided, the master puppeteer would set off with his long pole and his two baskets of props and work the cities and towns. These pole players led a dog's life, and as we have already said, the art nearly died out, and was only saved by the liberation.

Now, under the fostering care of the People's Government, this last survivor of the Wuchiao tradition, Yen Feng-wu, works in the State Puppet Company. The puppet theatre, recently inaugurated, is designed to fit its subject. The stage and auditorium (which seats 300) are so sited that all the audience can see the little figures, and the stage floor and sets are adjustable so that different forms of puppets can be used. There is a large foyer, decorated with puppets from divers districts of China, and with gifts of puppets from the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies. Preparations for salvaging China's puppets began in 1952, when the Ministry of Cultural Affairs sought out the old puppeteers, troupes, and interested persons, and gave them all facilities for research and demonstration. In 1953, the State Puppet Company was formed, and the old plays and shows were sifted and sorted out. Sergei Obratzov, the master puppeteer of the Soviet Union came in 1952, and performed for the Chinese puppeteers. Of course this was an unforgettable experience for them, to see what content, humour and artistry could be expressed in this medium.

Now, besides the actual performances, the Company continues to collect and absorb the examples of the wonderful heritage, not only of China but of the puppet plays and production techniques of the Soviet Union and People's Democracies. Now the State Puppet Company has a repertoire which includes not only the well-loved old stories, but fairy tales for children and satires. Satire, perhaps, is particularly suited to puppet plays, with their facility for suggesting reality through unreality, and their faculty of exaggeration; and our modern satirical puppet plays are an excellent medium with which to expose and criticize the decaying remnants of the old days. And these modern morality plays receive a very warm welcome.

The State Puppet Company's season played to full houses throughout. Peking welcomed back her puppets! But, of course, it is not only through the Company that puppets have come back in strength. Folk arts, old and new, live again in China, and itinerant pole players once again are in China's towns and villages. They all have a flourishing life now.

The Workers Enter into Their Heritage

Music, painting, literature, the drama —the whole realm of the arts, in fact— are nowadays enjoyed by the workers of New China, and, more than that, are created by them. For in old China, perhaps even more than in most other countries, the arts were the special field of the rich, of a "cultured aristocracy," and while workers and peasants had their art, it was either decried as crude, uncultured and primitive, or totally ignored.

There is little need to explain why this great change has come about. It is part of the release of the talent which the working class always had, in a state in which workers and peasants are the masters, in which their worth is appreciated, in which they have the chance of expressing themselves, and the time to create and enjoy.

That this is true a few figures will show. In industry as a whole there are no less than twenty thousand groups of workers—say half a million enthusiastic individuals — working together in the evenings and at week-ends in the fields of their choice, amateur dramatics, singing, orchestral, instrumental and band music,

painting, writing, and so on. And the activity of such groups is already spreading far beyond the homes, factories or mines around which they centre.

In a space of three months, between November 1954 and January 1955, practically every large city in China held its workers' festival of culture. And they were not poky little affairs, either. In Shanghai, for instance, the groups which took part in the festival put on 829 different items in which ten thousand people played their part and entertained audiences of 114,000 or more. In Chungking over 100,000 people saw two thousand items performed by over ten thousand amateur actors, dancers and musicians.

A Group Dance

Who are these working-class artists? They come from all trades and industries. There are miners, steel workers, builders, handicraftsmen, shop assistants, men and women, young and old. And the programmes are as varied: concerts, operas, plays, comic dialogues, acrobatics... many themes, many forms, but every single one breathing a new zest for life.

Shanghai had had a festival the previous year—in 1953. There were only nine plays among the items then. A year later, at the 1954 festival, the workers put on seventy-four, and their skill and confidence had increased out of all knowledge. Six of the plays, in particular, were a roaring success, and it was noticeable that these six were all a down-to-earth, truthful portrayal of real life. Folk plays and classical drama were also given, played by discriminating actors and enjoyed by equally discriminating audiences. There was a brilliant performance of "A Lad and His Lass Watch the Lanterns," a Huangmei opera popular in the province of Anhwei, which through its dance movements touchingly showed the affection and happiness of a young couple and the joy that surrounds them. Other dances and songs performed at this festival reached a high standard, as did the orchestras.

In Anshan, the great steel city, quite a number of items in the repertoire of the festival were entirely the work of workers themselves. Their talent expressed itself in drama for the most part —not all straight plays, as they included quick-patter ballads as well. The ballads dealt with national and local affairs, and ranged from titles like "We Must Liberate Taiwan," and "Father and Son Discuss the Constitution" to clapper rhymes, half recited, half intoned, to a rhythmic bamboo clapper, about their own work. "Emulation Drive" was a play about the difficulties encountered in introducing new methods, and overcoming conservative ideas, which the workers in the Ore Dressing Plant of the Anshan Iron and Steel Company put on.

Equally high levels were reached at the festivals in other cities—Peking, Canton, Wuhan, Tientsin, Shenyang, and so on. It showed what talent and creative ability the working class has. In the old days, "society" regarded workers as clods. They had no schooling provided and they could not afford, even if they could find, education or culture. Now, knowing their power, the workers can say, "These hands of ours, which were once skilled only at handling tools, are now equally skilled on a violin or an

accordion! Or we can conduct music or write an article." In the old days, working men, treated like beasts of burden, sang mainly to lessen their heavy load. Now workshops and building sites ring joyously.

Workshop blackboards and wall newspapers carry articles the workers themselves have written, as do local magazines and newspapers. These are the first fruits of the coming harvest of literature created by China's working class. The time between planting and reaping has been swift, considering the magnitude of the enterprise. In 1952, for instance, the workers' writing group at the People's Broadcasting Station at Shanghai had a membership of thirty, who had got as far as simple reports or quick-patter ballads. Now, in only two years, they are producing sketches and even quite good stories. One of their members, Tang Ke-hsin, had his piece of reportage "Spring in a Workshop" published by *People's China* in its English and Japanese editions. *Kiangsu Literature*, a provincial magazine, too, published articles from the workers which were highly praised. They included an industrial sketch, "Swapping Jobs," a musical comedy, "Auntie Kuo, the Model Learner," a one-act play, "Experiment," and a satirical essay, "What Does It Matter?" Gramophone records have been made of workers' songs, words and music. These, too, echo the workers' experience, as in "Campaign for Output" and "How to Increase Production."

The working class have come on, too, in the graphic arts. Shanghai Workers' Palace of Culture exhibited 177 subjects, chosen from nearly 600 sent in from 80 enterprises. These were seen and enjoyed by over 120,000 visitors. The exhibits ranged from woodcuts, New Year pictures in praise of the worker-peasant alliance, cartoons and posters, and paintings in traditional Chinese style. One thing was common to all of them—their direct apprehension of life, their fighting spirit, their simple and clear methods of representation.

The government has a network of cultural departments, spreading out from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Local governments and trade unions at all levels provide facilities, for instance, the city cultural palaces, but also making provision for every size of town or village. Every enterprise employing two hundred or more workers has a workers' club. Cultural palaces and centres, district libraries, workers' clubs and so on hold exhibitions, arrange for lectures on science, hygiene, literature, politics, economics—every conceivable subject of interest is covered. People gather together for club events, and classes, and for professional or amateur groups of singers, dancers, actors, etc.

The trade unions and the writers' and artists' associations also work together to arrange for individual writers and artists to spend some time working in factories and mines, both to enrich their experience and learn from the workers, and to help with cultural activities themselves. In this way, our writers and artists, in becoming workers, find themselves better able to understand the thoughts and feelings of workers, and produce works in tune with their needs and aspirations. Another means of help is shown in Peking, where six professional theatrical companies are under contract to six important enterprises to give guidance at regular intervals. One of them, the Central Song and Dance Company, helped to organize dramatic activities in the Peking Weaving, Printing, and Dyeing Works. This close working together helps to raise the artistic level of the amateur groups very quickly and thoroughly. The same goes for the spare-time art schools and short-term art courses.

With this great flowering of culture, writers, artists, musicians and actors appear from the ranks of those who were once the despised and down-trodden.

China's Music Comes Back to Life

The treasures of China's music — both folk and classical — are only now cherished as they deserve to be. Because this music so often expressed the hopes and aspirations of the people, it displeased the reactionary rulers of old China. In many places, the singing of folk songs was actually forbidden, while the common people were denied access to classical music. As a result, some of the ancient music was gradually forgotten beyond recall. Many outstanding performers of folk music were forced into misery and vagrancy.

With the birth of New China, such neglect has become a thing of the past. The People's Government attaches great importance to the assimilation and development of all that is best in Chinese music, as part of the people's cultural heritage which is theirs by rights. And the people have quickly learned to appreciate this rich and colourful music, classical as well as folk. Furthermore, the people are clamouring for new music, music that expresses their new life, their new thoughts and feelings, music created on the basis of the old traditions that can enrich their lives. Thus it becomes imperative to revive both the classical music that might otherwise be lost forever and the gems of folk music that are hidden among the people.

In 1953, an All-China Festival of Folk Music and Dance was held under the auspices of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, at which folk music from all over China was critically reviewed. The many different styles of singing and skilful performances on various instruments were eloquent proof of the richness and beauty of China's folk music. The Festival was a great inspiration to all engaged in reviving ancient folk music.

Nowadays the cultural affairs bureaux of all provincial governments have their music sections whose task it is to revive old folk music, besides sponsoring music for the masses. So far, more than 20,000 pieces of folk music have been collected in the different provinces, and even this must be only a tiny part of the folk music extant.

There was not much in the way of choral singing of Chinese folk music in the past. So here is another new task confronting China's musicians. Learning from similar choral groups in the Soviet Union, the Central Song and Dance Company has set up a choir of folk singers —young peasant girls from northern Shensi Province whose rural background and tradition fit them to render folk songs naturally and convincingly. After two years of training, their performances have been warmly acclaimed. Those who hear them understand the brilliant future ahead of such choral singing of Chinese folk music.

The Central Conservatory of Music has set up a Research Institute which is concerned with traditional Chinese music and folk music, as well as the music of China's national minorities. We are fortunate in that music dating back to the fifth century is preserved, that there is music copied by hand in the old Chinese notation of the eighth century, and that there survive several hundred volumes of printed musical scores of the fifteenth and succeeding centuries. There are still some musicians today who know how to play from the old notation, but many pieces from these books have been transposed into modern music notation. In assessing the worth of this heritage, Chinese musicians re-discovered the *Kuang Ling San* melodies, which had for centuries been considered lost. Dating back to before the Chin Dynasty of the third century A.D., these are melodies to be played on the *chin*, an ancient string instrument somewhat like the zither, but with a more delicate and stately tone. These melodies probably describe the assassination of a prime minister of the Warring States Period (403-221 B.C.) and it is known that the well-known musician Chi Kang of the Chin Dynasty, who lived 223-262 A.D., thought very highly of them. The re-discovery of

these melodies is a significant event in the research on ancient music.

Some of the re-discovered music has been performed at concerts, with great success. Hearers were struck by the strength and impressiveness of these melodies, which gave them a new understanding of how music developed.

Orchestral music has always been very popular in China. The Central Song and Dance Company and the Central People's Broadcasting Station in Peking, as well as orchestras and song and dance groups in other large cities of the country, now have orchestras performing traditional Chinese music on traditional Chinese instruments, besides orchestras in the Western sense of the word. These orchestras have improved some of China's musical instruments, particularly by strengthening the bass and baritone sections. There is little in Chinese classical music resembling the harmony and counterpoint of the West; but these orchestras have experimented in seeing how far modifications of Western harmony will blend with Chinese instrumentation. In this way unsuspected possibilities in the Chinese instruments have been revealed. The probability is that from now on both Chinese and Western orchestras will play their part in Chinese musical life.

The People's Government honours outstanding folk instrumentalists and singers who were despised in the old society. They are now given every encouragement for their art and facilities for their performances before steadily growing audiences.

In order to bring this classical and folk music closer to people in all parts of the country, the Union of Chinese Musicians sponsored a tour last year, during which music of both types was performed. The artistes gave 57 concerts in 16 of China's largest cities in 70 days before audiences totalling 110,000. This tour gave the participating musicians a chance of meeting musicians and people in the various parts of the country interested in music. The mutual benefit resulting from these contacts is bound to have a great influence on the future of the folk and classical music of China.

A Traditional Chinese Orchestra

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS BOOKS

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Ten Tang Dynasty Stories

These short stories with their elegant language and flowery imagery are typical of the classic form—*chuan chi*—which developed in the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Old favourites like the *Story of a Singsong Girl* and *The Man with the Curly Beard* are included. The stories treat of romantic love, fairies and monsters. There are five illustrations chosen from early editions of plays on the same themes, which appeared early in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

THE HURRICANE

BY CHOU LI-PO

An epic of the great sweep of land reform, as it came to a little village where a land reform team lived and took part in the struggle alongside with the peasants. Based on real life (the author himself took part in the movement) there is no playing down of the difficulties and hesitancies of the peasants. But it has humour and a strong respect for the individual.

Awarded a Stalin Prize *Illustrated with woodcuts*

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BY LIU PAI-YU

A short novel of the great campaign of 1949—part of the fight which brought liberation—when the People's Liberation Army forced the Yangtse. The incredible difficulties, the courage with which this supposedly invincible natural barrier was crossed, are vividly portrayed by Liu Pai-yu, who took part in this campaign himself.

WANG KUEI AND LI HSIANG-HSIANG

BY LI CHI

This is a long ballad about the love of two poor peasants during the Second Revolutionary Civil War in Northern Shensi. In the simple but lively form of Northern Shensi folk song, this poem describes the crimes of the reactionary landlords and militarists, and the victory of the revolutionary workers and peasants.

Illustrated with colour plates

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