

254

CHINESE LITERATURE



1978 6

CONTENTS

STORIES

- Around the Spring Festival — *Wang Wen-shih* 3
A Happy Encounter — *Kuo Cheng-ching* 24

Besieged in His Palace (excerpts from a novel) — *Yao Hsueh-yin* 35

NOTES ON LITERATURE AND ART

- An Introduction to "Li Tzu-cheng — Prince Valiant" — *Mao Tun* 87
The "Gang of Four's" Attack on Progressive Literature and Art
— *Chieh Cheng* 97
The Weifang New-Year Woodblock Prints — *Chang Chin-keng* 105

CHRONICLE 110

PLATES

The Weifang New-Year Woodblock Prints 96-97

Front Cover: Hsiaolungchiu — *Pan Tien-shou*

Wang Wen-shih

Around the Spring Festival

The Spring Festival holidays were just over. There was still an air of festivity over the village, but after breakfast, when the sun was bright and the day warm, the peasants were back at work. The men had started carting manure to the co-op fields while the women stayed at home spinning and weaving, preparing summer clothes for their families. Wheels rolled, looms hummed. Everywhere was a cheerful bustle.

But this did not apply to Ta-chieh of Nanchao Village. If you had told people that Ta-chieh had no appetite for work but was boiling with indignation, no one would have believed you. The sun had alighted on the window-sills, but she had not yet prepared breakfast; the bed was not made, nor the floor swept. She was standing in the courtyard shouting at the dog and shooing the hens. Then picking up a stick, she started chasing all over the place after the piglets that had broken loose from the sty. When she had quelled the hens, dog and piglets, she stood in the middle of the courtyard, feeling at a loose end and thoroughly bored.

She cast an indifferent glance at the outer gate, which was bolted and locked. The latches and lock were performing their duty well, shutting out everything, even the awakening spring, which could now only quietly climb the white poplar and peep in. In the yard, all was topsy-turvy: the neat stacks of hay and firewood had been scattered all over the place by the chickens and pigs.

Ta-chieh lowered her head. Suddenly she realized that the stick she was holding in her hand was the one used for mixing the cattle feed. As if it were unlucky or had burned her hands, she wrinkled her nose in distaste, looked at the wall to the north and, with all her might, sent the stick hurtling through the air over the wall.

In the room, the child was wailing. She stepped in and snapped at it, "Cry, cry yourself dead and stop plaguing me! Once you're all dead I'll have some peace!" After giving vent to her feelings, she sank listlessly on to the *kang*. Then, her heart softened by the child's cries, she reached out and hugged him closely to her breast.

The cheerful bustle in the village lanes made itself heard from time to time over the wall. People's voices, the cracking of whips and the rumbling of wheels intermingled with the sounds of the pedlars' rattles and the cries of the old beancurd seller. Occasionally the mobile stall vendor from the consumers' co-operative could be heard shouting through a megaphone, "Neighbours — crystal sugar, sweets, matches, kersosene, tea..." Trailing behind the medley of sounds were the merry shouts of swarms of children scurrying about. How tempting all this was! Ta-chieh looked at the lamp and thought, "It's time to get it filled. The sugar is running short too." She lifted one corner of the mat on the *kang*, took out a wad of brand-new bank-notes, stood there irresolutely a little while, then suddenly heaved a deep sigh and stuffed the money back under the pillow. Taking the child in her arms, she sat there stiffly, motionless as a statue.

A resonant bass voice broke in on her reverie, making her raise her head to listen intently. The voice said, "Give me that whip." Then again, "Yu, yu, yu!" — the call for the beast to halt. Then, sharp cracks of the whip and the man's roar: "Da, da, huo... huo... da, da, huo... huo... huo... yu!... See? That's the

way to handle it. The way you tried to force him uphill just won't do. You should have more concern for our cattle, old man! What if you kill one? You'll pay for it, eh? Ha... ha."

Ta-chieh was trying all the while to detect some trace of sorrow and loneliness in the voice, to find some crumb of comfort for herself. But no, there was nothing. In exasperation she told the child who was too small to understand, "Little Doggie, that ungrateful father of yours has abandoned us both. He's washed his hands of us!" She decided to turn a deaf ear to the goings-on outside. But that proved impossible. Her man's voice, so sweet yet painful to her ears, was tugging at her heart-strings. It was coming closer too. He seemed to have stopped at their gate.

"He's coming back!" she thought. For a second she didn't know what to do. Then she hastily put down the child, snatched up a cloth and wiped the top of the cooking-range and the table. Then she combed her hair, and looked into the mirror.

Bang, bang, bang! Someone was knocking at the gate.

"I shouldn't have shut the gate. How can I possibly go and open it for him?" she thought regretfully. Then again, "Well, maybe it's not such a bad thing after all! Let him just walk in as he pleases? Oh no, that's making it far too easy for him."

Bang, bang, bang!

Ta-chieh ignored the knocking, and went on tidying up the room.

Bang, bang, bang!

Mirror in hand, lips pursed, she gave a contented little laugh and murmured to herself, "Go on, go on knocking. You'll have to keep it up till all the neighbours have heard, I'll see to that!"

Bang, bang, bang!

"Ta-chieh, open the gate!" It was the voice of an old woman.

That caught her by surprise. Her strength seemed to leave her. The mirror slipped out of her hand and dropped on the *kang* mat. After a long pause, she answered faintly, "Coming!"

It was Auntie Chao. She was one of those people on whom fortune seems to smile. Blessed with a large family of children and grandchildren, all honest and hard-working, she managed her house in a strict yet open-minded way. She had let the wife of the eldest

son run the house for ten years now, stepping in only when there was a quarrel among the younger wives. So they all respected her, and she had time and energy enough to throw herself into the cop's activities. As she always treated others in a friendly, unassuming way, in spite of being older than most of them, the villagers had a high regard for her. She looked upon the youngsters as her own children or grandchildren, but never spared her breath when she felt criticism or praise was due.

As soon as Ta-chieh opened the gate, auntie scolded, "What's the meaning of this? The sun's up high now, but your gate's still shut, the whole yard's in a mess. Is this the way a wife should behave? You young people. . . ."

Setting foot in the courtyard, she rapped out again, "Just look! All this dirt and mess, isn't it a disgrace?"

Once in the house, she frowned and fulminated, "Well I never! For shame! So slovenly! This time of day, yet your quilts are still not folded, the place isn't tidied, the child's still crawling about in his birthday suit. . . . Do you call this a room? I call it a fowl run! You've turned this cosy nest into a shambles. And what for? Oh, I get so sick of you young wives. . . ."

Ta-chieh asked auntie to sit on the *kang* and began to fold up the bedding, saying sullenly, "Auntie, I'm fed up with this life! I'd rather close my eyes, jump into the river and be done with it."

"Oh, nonsense! Don't talk such rubbish. Aren't you afraid you'll offend the gods?"

"I must be paying for some sins in a past life: why else should I have such a wretched time of it now? Auntie, you don't know, first thing in the morning of the Spring Festival. . . ."

Auntie Chao cut her short. "It's all your fault," she said. "If you hadn't hurt his feelings so badly that day, it wouldn't have come to this. Seeing you going for each other like this really wrings my heart. All right, I'll go and fetch him back presently."

"No, don't. It's my own fault. I did the wrong thing. I shouldn't have agreed to take him in the first place, but it's too late now to cry over spilt milk."

The child began to bawl. Picking him up she gave him her breast, then drying her tears continued, "Look how he's let me down! If not for me, he'd have starved or frozen to death. Yet now that he's been made a stockman and is well thought of, this heartless wretch has become so puffed up that he has no use at all for baby and me. Don't you call him back! I won't let him in! Haven't I had enough of his bullying?"

Auntie Chao pursed her mouth and glanced sideways at Ta-chieh. "Ai, child!" she exclaimed. "Why was it you had no quarrel all these years, yet now you come out with this talk of being bullied. Your auntie knows what's troubling you. Don't be silly. You know the old saying, 'Men must make their way in the world.' You can't keep him tied to your apron-strings. You won't find another good honest chap like Cheng-hsu, not even if you look for one with a lantern. Besides, see how well he's done these last few years. He can go in and out of the county yamen and sit talking on equal terms with County Head Liu and Secretary Yang."

"I couldn't care less if he sat on a golden throne. He can go ahead and enjoy his wealth and honour, I'm quite content with my pickled cabbage soup. I've gone through enough in the past three days to last me for the rest of my life."

"It's not that your auntie likes to scold, but you're not being fair. You complain about feeling blue these last few days, but he's having a much worse time! Eating a snack or drinking a bowl of soup with different families. . . ."

"He's born to be a beggar. Even if he had a golden bowl, he'd go begging with it. What can I do?"

"I should really slap you, you know! Don't you ever talk such nonsense again. You've no idea where he's been sleeping these nights. Instead of a *kang* he has a door-board propped on two troughs with not so much as a roof over his head. His quilts are wet with snow. An ox broke loose the other night and did its business right by his ear, only just missed his mouth! Last night a donkey and a mule went for each other. They'd just been fed together and weren't used to each other. In their scuffle they kicked over the board he was sleeping on, smashed it. . . ."

Wide-eyed, Ta-chieh asked anxiously: "Oh-h! Was he hurt?"
"You should know. . . ."

"Where is he hurt? Is it serious, auntie?" She had a sinking feeling. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

Auntie smiled and said calmly, "You should know, anyone else would have been hurt, beyond a shadow of doubt. But not Cheng-hsu. He thinks so much about the cattle that he sleeps with one eye open, so to speak, and jumps up at the slightest stir. If it had been someone else, the mule would surely have kicked the donkey to death!"

Ta-chieh heaved a sigh of relief, then changed her tone again, "If I'd been the mule I'd have given him some good kicks on the backside."

"You said it yourself. I can see that you're a firebrand. When you're together, ten to one you're the one that stirs up the trouble."

Ta-chieh's face flushed red. She realized her slip and tried to cover it up. "You know, I didn't really mean that. In fact, I don't care whether he's alive or dead. He's only himself to blame. A snug room and a warm *kang* mean nothing to him. What can I do? He's completely wrapped up in those animals. He loves to sleep with a cow at his feet and a calf in his arms. What can I do about it? I can't grow two more legs."

"I can hardly believe my ears, the nonsense you talk. Aren't you afraid of being laughed at?" So saying auntie got down from the *kang*. "You wait here while I fetch him back for you."

"Auntie, you keep out of this. I'm not going to let him just step in so easily, I can tell you. If I don't stand firm this time, how's he going to treat me later?"

Auntie made a show of anger. "I'm going to call the tune this time," she snapped. "You'll listen to me, whether you like it or not. I don't hold with the idea that what your elders say doesn't matter any longer. I'm going to fetch him this minute. If he's offended you, let him apologize. If you don't want him to work on that job, let him give it up. There's no such thing as a couple never clashing, but how can you keep storming at him like this?"

After seeing auntie out, Ta-chieh hurried back. She dressed the child in his new suit made for the festival, took up a toy rattle from

the *kang*, and pushed it into his hands for him to play with. Then she went out, drew a pail of water from the well, fetched some wood, boiled the water, washed and scoured all the cooking utensils and bowls, and gave the furniture, doors and windows a good scrub. The house had had a spring cleaning before the festival. The paper on the top part of the window was new, with bright red paper-cuts pasted on it, while below were two panes of glass, each about one foot square. Four New-Year pictures were pasted on the wall over the *kang*. After this final cleaning, the gloomy house immediately brightened up, looking just as it should at the Spring Festival. She then took up a broom and went out to the courtyard. The sun was shining brightly. It was now getting on for noon. There was not enough time to give the place a thorough sweep, so she simply swept the middle of the yard and the gateway. All this was done in a few moments, for she was incredibly quick and deft in her actions.

"What shall I cook for dinner?" Ta-chieh wondered. "The old man selling beancurd won't have gone yet. Why, some dumplings! We didn't have dumplings even on the day of the Spring Festival." She put down the broom to wash her hands, then taking some small change from under her pillow and a large bowl from the table she went out.

Ta-chieh was well-known in the village for her smartness and dexterity. Her lot in life, however, had previously aroused sympathy. At the age of seventeen, she had been brought to Nanchao in a bridal sedan-chair. The next year, she gave birth to a boy. The following year, her husband chopped off his own fingers to avoid being conscripted by the Kuomintang, but then he contracted tetanus and died. Ta-chieh nearly cried her heart out. And worse still, before her tears were dry, that same winter pneumonia carried off her child. How unjust life had been to her! These sudden disasters striking in close succession weighed heavily on this helpless girl, not yet twenty, who had practically no experience of life, nor any preparation for suffering. How could she bear it? How could she live on? Would it drive her out of her mind? Her neighbours were worried about her and shed tears for her. But she did not go mad, indeed she could not afford to, because she had to look after her mother-in-law. This poor

woman of over sixty, having lost her only son and grandson too, had no one else to depend on. Ta-chieh still had her parents and she was young; but who would support this disconsolate old widow? So Ta-chieh hid her tears to comfort her mother-in-law, working as hard as she could to keep the wolf from the door. She learned how to farm, to sell her produce at the fair, to deal with debt collectors and court runners. Once she was hauled to court for failing to pay the land rent and drafted to dig trenches. Some of this young widow's neighbours had nothing but praise for her. The less sympathetic often made cutting comments.

Her patience and timidity changed into shrewdness and aggressiveness. As she was still so young and had no children, her mother-in-law, with tears in her eyes, had urged her to remarry, but she had refused. One day at dusk, she came back from her work in the fields to find the food ready, but her mother-in-law was nowhere to be found. She called several times without getting any reply. She became apprehensive. Then she noticed that the door of her mother-in-law's room was tightly shut and heard a sound from inside. She peeped in through a crack in the window and screamed with horror. Forcing open the door, she flung her arms round the old woman, realizing that she was attempting to hang herself to free Ta-chieh of the burden of looking after her. They mingled their tears then, lamenting their cruel fate.

Soon afterwards, things took a turn for the better due to the arrival of Chao Cheng-hsu, Ta-chieh's present husband. The old people said he had been a homeless waif, leading a vagabond life, till he begged his way to Nanchao fifteen years before. At first he worked as a servant for a landlord, then went off to work with an old stockman called Chang. As he had no name, they gave him the name Chao Kuan-tao.

In the last month of the year of Ta-chieh's misfortunes, Chao Kuan-tao was sent packing and went back to Nanchao Village to find what odd jobs he could. Some go-betweens urged Ta-chieh to marry him, and she had no strong objection as she knew him to be hard-working and had long had a good impression of him. Nevertheless, she hesitated, being afraid people might gossip about her for remarrying

before the customary three-year period of mourning was over. Just then, some of her relatives who were rich peasants butted in to veto this marriage to a man who was not native-born. Ta-chieh was stung to the quick. "You didn't do a thing when I was in difficulties," she thought. "You didn't stretch out a helping hand when we had nothing to eat, but treated me as if I were a total stranger. Now you expect me to defer to you as my elders! I suppose you're waiting until ma dies to sell me, and rob us of these few *mu* of land." So she made up her mind, with her mother-in-law's approval, and despite all opposition married Chao Kuan-tao. And from that time on, he changed his name to Chao Cheng-hsu, Cheng-hsu meaning to carry on the family line.

Her mother-in-law died six months after they were married. And things became steadily more difficult until the liberation of the whole mainland. Then life improved for them, especially after the rent-reducing movement and the land reform. The young couple worked hard to found their family fortune. Cheng-hsu was young and strong, and a good hand at farming. Ta-chieh was no weakling either. No matter what the task in hand, she worked alongside her husband and saw it through to the end. Besides this, she spent the evenings spinning and weaving cloth to sell in the market. In this way, she kept herself busy from one year's end to another, never idling for a single day. And as things became better for them, smiles and youth came back to Ta-chieh.

Now the custom in a household like theirs at this time was for the wife to control all financial matters; so Ta-chieh was naturally the head of the house. It so happened that Cheng-hsu was a man of few words. He only knew how to get on with the job in hand and was quite willing to leave all decisions to her. "Do whatever you think fit," he used to say. So for the last few years Ta-chieh had had her own way and done just as she pleased to her great satisfaction. It was only recently that things had begun to change.

During the last two or three years, Cheng-hsu had learned to read and write in the literacy class and he was roped into all the village affairs. After some time he not only spoke at meetings but also took to reading the newspaper as well. Then, just as Auntie Chao had said,

he could sit talking on equal terms with the county head. Ta-chieh was very glad, proud of having such a good husband. When a boy had been born to them the winter before last she felt life could hardly be better. She just wished her husband would spend more time at home, to dandle the baby, light the fire, and chat over the events of the day with her. Cheng-hsu, however, did not seem to care for such things. He spent most of his spare time outside, studying or attending meetings. Although Ta-chieh felt disappointed, she never nagged him.

The previous winter, when the co-operative was set up, she had joined it without hesitation. As she and her husband had such trust in each other, they had never talked it over seriously, and that was how the present trouble had started. They had both joined the co-operative eagerly, but each for different reasons.

Ta-chieh thought that since things were on the up-grade and they had a son it was time for a happy family life. It had been pretty tough for them before the setting up of the co-op. Back from a day's hard work, they had had to cut grass, clean the sty, and feed the cattle; but now with the co-op, the cattle would be taken care of collectively. In the daytime, they could work in the co-op's fields. In the evenings, they could sit comfortably together, she doing some needlework or learning a few new characters, and they could chat, or take the child into town to see a show. How happy and contented they would be! She lost no time in carrying out her plans. The day after the cattle were sent to the pool, she asked Cheng-hsu to remove the manger from the cattle-shed, lay a thick layer of fresh earth on the ground and tamp it thoroughly. Then the walls were replastered with fine mud. A few pieces of furniture were installed. So everything should have been fine!

However, things worked out quite differently. Cheng-hsu had been elected vice-chairman of the co-operative and also head of the cattle section. That was nothing to get keyed up about. The trouble was that he also agreed to be a stockman. It was like this: the co-op members were all concerned about the cattle. The first people chosen for the job had not proved satisfactory, but when Cheng-hsu offered to take it on everyone was happy. Some families who had rubber-

tyred carts and sturdy, barrel-chested horses and mules now joined the co-op too, because they knew that Cheng-hsu, who had worked for wealthy landlords and handled plenty of cattle, was hard-working and reliable. He was the right man to look after their animals. But Ta-chieh was most put out. Besides, at this stage, some members of the co-op were not yet used to the regulations governing the use of the cattle. They didn't handle the cattle carefully, and Cheng-hsu had offended them by taking them to task. A few had said a lot of harsh things about him, not even sparing Ta-chieh. Cheng-hsu turned a deaf ear to it all, and stuck to his guns. Ta-chieh, however, couldn't bear this sort of abuse. She put all the blame on her husband.

"You're barking up the wrong tree. There are lots of other things to do in the co-op, why don't you do something else?" she asked.

"Then who's to take care of the cattle?"

"You simpleton! You think the co-op will go to pieces without you? No one thanks you for it. Can't you hear them snarling at you all over the place?"

Cheng-hsu grunted, "Let them.... But I won't allow anyone no matter who he is to mishandle the cattle!"

"Doesn't it make your cheeks burn, all that foul talk?"

"No," Cheng-hsu answered calmly.

"Well, I can tell you, it does mine," she muttered, clenching her teeth.

"Just pay no attention," he replied just as calmly.

"But what's the point of it all? What will you get out of it? So many people are at logger-heads, can you guarantee the co-op won't go to the dogs, the cattle won't lose weight?"

"We must see to it that the co-op is well run, and that not a single head of cattle is lost. That's what most people say," argued Cheng-hsu. "Since they think I'm the man for the job, I can't back out. The people here have always been very good to me. Now that this co-op has been set up, they think I can do some useful work and they've asked me to take care of the cattle. And since this is the only job I know, shouldn't I do my best at it to help build up a socialist Nanchao?"

After this argument, Ta-chieh felt something was wrong. The more she chewed the thing over, the more convinced she became that Cheng-hsu had changed. He had once been a man of few words, but now he was always preaching to other people. He had once done whatever she asked, but now he no longer said, "Do whatever you think fit." The small world within the four walls of the house didn't seem large enough for both of them now. They seemed to be standing one inside the wall, the other outside. Was she demanding the impossible? No! She just wanted an ordinary family life. Couldn't she have such a simple thing? Yes, she should have it. She should. She was the head of the family, after all!

On the afternoon before the Spring Festival, Cheng-hsu came home late, because he had waited to dose the grey mule with medicine. Everything was ready at home to celebrate the festival, but Ta-chieh sat on a corner of the *kang*, spinning, glum-faced and withdrawn, colder than a stone statue. Cheng-hsu immediately sensed that something was wrong.

"Is dinner ready?" he asked with a smile.

There was no answer.

"I was held up a little; I'm a bit late, I know. Let's eat now, shall we?" he said with another smile.

"The pigs have all been fed!" she snapped at him.

"Who are you angry with?" he asked, still smiling.

"With myself!" She yanked the thread so hard that the yarn broke.

Not venturing to say any more, Cheng-hsu lifted the cover of the cooking pot. The pot had been washed and some cold water poured in it. He then went to the cupboard and searched in it for a while, without finding anything. Evidently she had left him nothing to eat. He shot a look at Ta-chieh, who ignored him as if they were strangers and went on spinning. Then in a jar he discovered some tempting looking snow-white steamed rolls. But as these were for the festival, he dared not touch them. At last, he found some cold hard corn-flour buns in a small pottery basin, and ate these with some peppers from the cupboard. He tossed out some cheerful remarks while munching, trying to draw her into conversation.

"Uncle Teh's cow's about to calve," he said.

Whirr, whirr, whirr . . . went the spinning-wheel.

"Haven't you taken a course in the new midwifery?" he joked.

Whirr, whirr, whirr . . . went the spinning-wheel.

Not daring to say any more, he ate the cold food in silence, fetched some bucketfuls of water, then returned to the stockman's hut.

That night, Ta-chieh heated the *kang* till it was hot, changed the bedding and quilts, took the new clothes out and put them under the quilts so that they would be warm to wear the next day. Then, having rocked the child to sleep, she settled down beside the lamp to start making dumplings for the festival. While doing this, she was thinking of the warning she had given her husband that afternoon, and of his recent attempt to humour her. She was sure she had brought him to his senses now, and he would come home early, say some pleasant things to her, and then. . . . The more she thought of all this, the happier she felt. "I made him smart this afternoon, but as soon as he comes back tonight he can stuff himself with dumplings." But when the dumplings were ready there was no trace of him. The water was boiling, still he hadn't turned up. She sat there on the *kang*, biting her finger-nails until the kerosene in the lamp ran out and the boiled water became quite cold, but there was no sound at the door and no one came in. Ta-chieh was on tenterhooks. She decided to go to the cow-shed. It was near, on the other side of their courtyard wall; but to reach it she had to go round to the next lane, as there was no gate through their north wall. She lit a small lantern and went out. The sky was dark, stars were twinkling high above, and because it was so late all around was still.

When she reached the next lane, she saw three people with lanterns coming out of the stockman's hut. One of them was Chao Feng-wa, a stockwoman. She flashed her lantern at Ta-chieh, saying mischievously, "I'm so sorry, but Cheng-hsu and I have agreed that I'm to go home."

Ta-chieh did not answer her but went to the cow-shed. She quietly lifted up the straw-matting that hung over the door, and squeezed in. All the windows were tightly shut, a pile of wood was burning briskly. The smoke-laden air was almost suffocating. Cheng-hsu, hugging

something in his lap, was sitting with his back to the door beside a cauldron.

"What on earth are you staying here for?" Ta-chieh flared up.

On hearing her voice he turned round. "So it's you! Coming here at this hour!" he said in surprise. Then in great excitement he burst out: "Come quickly and look!"

"What is there so good to look at?"

"Our co-op has had a windfall. We're sure to have a bumper harvest next year," Cheng-hsu said. "Look, a calf born to the old cow on the night before the Spring Festival. And a bull calf, too. Isn't it a lucky omen?"

It was only then that Ta-chieh saw the calf in his lap. He was stroking its soft wet hair.

"See what a nice colour his coat is! As red as fire!" Cheng-hsu exclaimed in admiration.

Ta-chieh glanced around the shed and saw that the cow, her head down over a wooden tub, was lapping up some thin gruel. The quilt over her back she immediately recognized as one she had made herself. Cheng-hsu explained, "She's like a human. While she's 'lying in' I mustn't let her catch cold. So I let her use it. It doesn't matter. As I'm here, I'll see to it that it doesn't get dirty."

Ta-chieh was happy and embarrassed at the same time. Torn between anger and amusement, she retorted, "Don't you have a family? Do you know what it is today? It's the eve of the Spring Festival."

"But how can I leave here? Feng-wa wanted to go back, and someone has to be here to see to things. You go back first. Don't bolt the door."

Ta-chieh was smouldering. She turned and went out reluctantly, forgetting to take the lantern. It was pitch dark outside, as she stumbled along the rough road. Suddenly, a burst of noise followed by a flash in the dark sky made her start. Then there was the noise of firecrackers being let off by those who were celebrating the festival early.

Cheng-hsu didn't go home until the next morning. Ta-chieh's glum and drawn face warned him that a storm was brewing. In

silence he laid the table, then went to make the fire. Ta-chieh put the dumplings into the cooking pot and ordered sternly, "Light it!"

Cheng-hsu hastily started working the bellows.

"Not so fast. It's bubbling over."

At once he stopped.

"Keep going! Why have you stopped? Can't you go slowly?"

Cheng-hsu manipulated the bellows carefully, and remained silent. A few moments later the dumplings were dancing in the cooking pot. He damped the fire down, then moved to the table. Ta-chieh was holding a bowl of dumplings in her hands. Just as he reached out to take it, she plonked the bowl down, splashing hot soup on his hands and shaking the dishes on the table. Cheng-hsu felt his blood rise, but tried hard to control himself. "Ai! Can't you be more careful?" he cried.

"What? Doesn't it suit you here?" Ta-chieh glared at him. "Then go somewhere you like better. Nobody is stopping you. It's you who came begging to be taken in here. I didn't send you an invitation card!"

When she first started scolding and grouching Cheng-hsu was able to control himself. But then, she really let herself go, like a string snapping, pouring out the whole story of Cheng-hsu's vagabond life. He didn't even know his own father's name, she jeered, but was fated to be a beggar. While working off steam, she never stopped to think how wounding her husband must find this. That was brought home to her when she heard a crash. She saw soup flowing past his feet, dumplings bouncing all over the floor, and chips of the bowl flying in every direction.

"What's the idea on the Spring Festival..." But as she turned round her reproaches stuck in her throat, so startled was she by the sight of Cheng-hsu's white face, his trembling hands and quivering lips. He was unable to speak. His cheekbones stood out above his hollow cheeks and his eyes were flashing. Ta-chieh was frightened, not knowing what he would do next. He bit his lips, raised one arm, but didn't touch her. Instead, he slowly pushed back his chair and stepped out of the room. She watched him walk away, feeling at a loss.

He had not been back since, and that was three days ago.

In these three days, Ta-chieh had been thinking. She had felt pangs of conscience and cried for shame. She often mumbled to herself, "He can say what he likes to me, even hit me, anything would be better than this." She couldn't help going out and inquiring about where he was having his meals, or where he was staying for the night. She would often cook something and take it to a neighbour, asking her to give it to Cheng-hsu to eat, without letting him know where it came from. The neighbours told Auntie Chao of all this, which was why she had gone there to sort out the trouble.

Ta-chieh was sitting on the *kang* again making dumplings. These dumplings meant even more to her than the last. While her fingers were working nimbly, she thought over the events of the past few days. She reviewed all that had happened before to her as well as others, weighing its meaning. She realized that she was in the wrong. Now and then she looked through the window at the north wall, and listened intently for any sound on the other side of it. She bent her head low, racking her brains as to what her next move should be.

After a while, she heard rustling in the courtyard. She lifted her head and saw a tall, broad-shouldered man with a prominent forehead and a firm jaw, his eyes keen and penetrating. With a big wooden rake in his hand, he was stacking up the hay scattered by the chickens. He was working in silence, without even glancing in her direction. The joy she felt was not unmixed with annoyance. She wrenched her eyes away from him and gazed at the ceiling instead, pouting. The rustling continued. It was such a temptation to look again that soon her eyes turned back in Cheng-hsu's direction. He was giving the yard a thorough sweeping with a large bamboo broom. Another couple of strokes and it would be clean. The courtyard seemed suddenly spacious, the sunshine streaming down on it brilliant and warm. Cheng-hsu laid down the broom, and went over to replace some stones that had fallen off the wall of the pigsty, still in silence, not once glancing in her direction.

Ta-chieh's pout became more pronounced, she fixed her eyes most resolutely on the ceiling. A sudden slapping sound made her look

outside again. She saw that Cheng-hsu had taken off his black waistband, and was using it to beat the dust off his clothes. He was now advancing with measured gait towards her door. For a moment she panicked, then regained her composure. She turned her back to the door, staring at one corner of the room. Footsteps approached her, then stopped. She pretended not to have heard them. Head bent over the board, she busily kneaded the dough. The silence was suddenly broken by the clatter of the carrying-pole and the pails. She stole a glance around, but he had gone.

All she glimpsed was a pail disappearing through the doorway.

The large jar was replenished with fresh water pail after pail, while Ta-chieh sat staring at the corner at the sleeping child. She was wondering what was the right thing to do. Finally when she was through with the last dumpling, she heaved a deep sigh, as if she had come to some important decision.

Auntie Chao came in at this moment. On seeing how the two of them looked she called out, smiling, "Eh, you're both grown-ups now, why do you sulk like children? Ta-chieh, is your back so pleasant to look at? Turn round!"

"Auntie! Come and sit on the *kang*." Ta-chieh turned to greet her eagerly with a smile. But actually, her eyes had flashed past auntie's shoulder to meet those of Cheng-hsu. Her glance was reproachful, as if to say, "Don't you know you've got a home to come back to?"

"Aha! Dumplings! For me?" asked auntie merrily.

"Of course!" said Ta-chieh. "Who else would they be for!"

"Now, now, no fibbing. I know the truth of the matter." Auntie turned towards Cheng-hsu and continued, "Thanks to you, I'm in luck. You'd better take my advice next time, instead of ignoring it."

"I've never ignored your advice," he answered, laughing.

"That's the way. Well, I must be going," auntie said.

"No, how can you just walk out like this?" they protested. Ta-chieh pushed her back to the *kang*, and Cheng-hsu went out to fetch faggots.

When he had left, auntie whispered into Ta-chieh's ear, "Don't worry. I've given him a good talking-to. He didn't argue back, but kept saying he was wrong to have smashed that bowl on the



Spring Festival of all days. And I've just been to the co-op head. He says they only considered the fact that he's a man the co-op can't do without, but they forgot about you. The co-op committee will think up some better arrangement."

She broke off there because Cheng-hsu came in with the faggots and sat down at the cooking-range to make the fire. When the water boiled, Ta-chieh stood beside the cooking pot, putting the dumplings in. She didn't complain about the fire this time. It seemed as if, after three days, Cheng-hsu had become an expert in handling the fire.

A piece of dark oil-cloth was spread on the *kang*, on which the dishes were placed. Auntie sat on the *kang*, leaning back against the wall, saying, "Cheng-hsu, you come up too." He took off his shoes then and sat beside her.

Ta-chieh brought over a bowl of dumplings and put it in front of auntie. Next she took up the bowl which her husband always used. Then Cheng-hsu began to speak, affably and slowly but gravely and firmly too, as if he had prepared a speech for some formal occasion.



"Don't get me anything to eat yet," he said calmly. "We have to get things straight first, so that you don't snatch the bowl away again!"

There was tension in the air as he continued, "Any work for the co-op that I can do, I will do. They want me to take care of the cattle and I'm not going to stand out against them. Nothing can change my mind about this!"

An oppressive silence ensued. Auntie opened her eyes wide, her face all screwed up, glancing from one to the other. Then she suddenly put down her bowl and chopsticks and cried, "What on earth are you saying? Are you trying to blacken my name? To make me look a fool, eh? What

did I tell you? You didn't even listen."

Ta-chieh, however, kept her presence of mind. "Auntie, don't get excited," she said calmly. "Let him go on, let him finish."

Auntie scolded Cheng-hsu, "Husband and wife should talk things over together. No one's like you, so stubborn and uncompromising."

Cheng-hsu took this without any sign of being perturbed. Just then the child woke up and called, "Papa!" Cheng-hsu picked him up and hugged him, caressing his head gently as he looked at Ta-chieh, waiting for her answer.

She asked, "Are you through? Go on. Get everything off your chest, since auntie is here."

"That's all I want to say."

"All?" she snapped back. She scooped up some dumplings before continuing, "The solemn way you started, I thought it was going to be something really important."

"I just wanted to make this clear, for fear you might get wrong ideas," he said.

Ta-chieh put the large bowl of dumplings in front of him, dried her hands on her apron and said heatedly, "Don't underestimate me! I've weathered some storms in my life; I'm not a weakling. You want socialism. So do I. And I love the co-op just as much as you do. If you sail the sea, I'll be rowing in the same boat. If you climb mountains, I'll be at your heels. I'll follow no matter where you go, you can be sure of that!"

Auntie had been on tenterhooks at first, not knowing whether this was another squabble or they were coming to terms. She sat there in a quandary with no idea what to do. Cheng-hsu was gazing curiously at Ta-chieh, trying to fathom her meaning.

"What are you staring at?" she asked. "Never seen me before? Or didn't you get me? Do I have to say it a second time?"

"No!" he said hastily, then took up the bowl and said, "Auntie, the food is getting cold, let me give you a fresh helping."

She picked up the bowl and said, smiling: "No, no. The food's not cold. It's only that I can't make out whether the two of you are blowing hot or cold!"

Three days later, a small gate appeared in Ta-chieh's north wall. This gate linked up her tiny enclosure with the outside world. North of the gate was the stockman's hut of the Red Banner Co-op. Further north again were two rows of sheds, one on the left for oxen and cows, the other, on the right, for horses and mules. Between the sheds was a big gate, through which, across a lane and an open yard beyond, could be seen a vast expanse of wheat fields extending to the river bank. The last traces of snow had disappeared, the fields were green with young wheat. Men and women co-op members in threes and fives were starting the spring raking. Fresh warm breezes played leisurely over the fields and lanes. The courtyard before the stockman's hut was bathed in all the splendour of golden sunlight. Cheng-hsu had taken off his padded coat and was busy getting in dry earth. Ta-chieh was standing beside a trough, and mixing feed for the cattle with the stick she had thrown over the wall three days ago. Their small son was playing on the stacks of hay, sunning himself.

Cheng-hsu finished his task of wheeling in the dry earth, took the child up, and went over to his wife. Looking at the feed, he said

critically, "Don't pour the bran in too quickly. Stir it thoroughly. Remember the old saying, 'With bran or no, to four corners the rod should go?'"

Ta-chieh pursed her lips and cast a knowing glance at Cheng-hsu, as if to say, "Huh! You think you're the only one who can do things properly!"

The child paid no attention to his parents, as he was busy playing. But when Cheng-hsu leaned forward to tickle the nose of a calf with a straw so that it leaped away, shaking its ears, the little boy laughed with glee and urged his father to run after the calf.

Illustrated by Hung Tu



A Happy Encounter

After graduating from middle school, I was appointed to work as a propagandist in a rural commune. The first day when I arrived at the main office, I found only the commune chairman's assistant there washing some clothes. Knowing who I was, he poured me a cup of water in a friendly way and introduced me to the commune's set-up.

"Where are all the others?" I asked.

"Away in the villages." Pointing to the telephone on the desk, he complained, "It's just that thing that keeps me here, otherwise I'd follow suit."

"But the clothes benefit," I joked pointing to the basin before him. "Otherwise you wouldn't have time to do much washing."

"Benefit? It'll be all right if I'm not blamed for it."

"Blamed? Who'll blame you?"

"Secretary Hsiang, of course."

"You mean for washing your clothes?"

"Oh, no, they're not mine, they're his," he explained with a smile. "They haven't been washed for half the summer save by Old Man Heaven's rain-water."

"When did Secretary Hsiang leave?"

"This morning. After returning last night he made a report over the telephone to the county Party committee about his work. He read once more Chairman Mao's work *On Practice* this morning and then went away again."

"Where to?"

"Let me see." He stepped out of the office and looked towards the southeast corner of the courtyard. Then he replied, "He went south."

In the southeast corner there was only a thatched hut. How could he know where Hsiang had gone just by looking at the hut, I wondered?

Probably reading my thoughts, he continued, "That's Old Hsiang's habit, see. If he goes south he carries his shotgun. When he goes north he carries his basket. Today his shotgun has disappeared which indicates that he's gone south."

"Why does he carry different things on different roads?"

"On the northern road there're plenty of horse-drawn carts and much dung. If he goes that way, he can often gather a basketful of it. The southern one passes through some scrub land where there's plenty of game. So he hunts there."

"Then we'll have some good meat now and then, eh?"

"No, the game he gets he always sends to the disabled and old bachelors without families."

Full of curiosity, I asked, "How about his marksmanship?"

"He's a crack shot!"

"Where did he learn?"

"I don't know," he replied as he wrung out the clothes. "I've only been here a month. We seldom have time to sit together and chat, because he's always off visiting the villages."

I wished that I could have met him right away and had a talk with him about my work. At the same time I would have asked him to teach me how to hunt. But his assistant suggested, "I've no idea when he'll return. Suppose you go and look for Old Hsiang yourself."

"Which way shall I go then?"

"I'd suggest you go south. There're only a few villages along the way."

"But I don't know him."

Pointing to his own mouth, the assistant suggested again, "You have this, haven't you? If you ask anybody old or young in any village, anyone will tell you who he is."

Thanking him and saying goodbye, I set off along the southern highway which was shaded by weeping willows and fringed by fields of standing green crops. The *kaoliang* was as tall as I am, while the millet already waist-high rippled in the pleasant breeze. Other plots were covered with peanuts and cotton, all promising a good harvest. Walking along, I overheard some peasants in one field gossiping together.

"Hallo, comrades," I shouted out to them. "Have you seen Secretary Hsiang?"

"Yes, I have. He's just passed by on his way to Fangchuang Village," a girl shouted back. "Follow your nose till you reach a pumping station then turn right. After you reach a vegetable plot turn left again and climb up Loess Mound till you reach the orchard in Fangchuang. If you hurry, you'll catch up with him, I think."

Her instructions were accompanied by several old peasants' remarks about Hsiang's appearance. But I didn't pay much attention to them, for I knew what a commune secretary should look like.

After another half mile, I came up to a man of about thirty squatting by the road. By the looks of his muddy shoes and soiled trouser-legs, I took him to be a peasant, for obviously he had been working in the fields. Holding a shotgun across his knees, he was gazing at a plot of cotton. Noticing the shotgun, I thought, he might be Secretary Hsiang.

"You're . . . you're Secretary Hsiang, aren't you?"

Smiling he said, "You're only half right."

"Why?"

"I'm Hsiang all right, but not a secretary."

When I told him why I wanted to find Party Secretary Hsiang, he shook hands with me heartily, telling me that he was the vice-chairman of the commune. Then he went on to say that Secretary Hsiang had

worked for a while with the peasants in the cotton field and discussed with him some points to remember about the care of the cotton crop. After that he went on towards Fangchuang. Pointing to the south he added, "Probably he's not crossed Loess Mound yet. Why don't you run after him? He. . . ." Not waiting to hear him out I hurried off.

At Loess Mound, however, I did not see Secretary Hsiang. The only one I caught up with was a middle-aged bare-foot peasant pushing a cart, his trouser-legs rolled up to his knees, wearing a worn-out old straw hat with a lock of gray hair sticking out from a hole in its brim. From one shoulder hung a faded jacket. His bare sun-tanned back glistened in the sun as though oiled. A pipe was stuck in his belt, from which his tobacco pouch swung to and fro like a pendulum against his hip as he walked. I caught up with him to ask if he had met Secretary Hsiang. But I didn't know how to address him. From his square, swarthy and unshaven face I guessed he was perhaps about forty-seven. Should I call him uncle? No, maybe not. What about addressing him as brother? I'd heard that some people rather disliked that.

"Hallo, neighbour," I finally called out boldly. "Where are you going?"

"To Fangchuang." He stopped to wipe the sweat from his face. "Where are you going, young chap?"

"To Fangchuang too."

"Good. You can lend me a hand then, eh?" He tied a rope to the front of the cart and handed me the end of it. "Come on, help me. Pull for a while, for the next stretch of road ahead is a bit steep."

I'd no choice but to comply. No sooner had we started than he began asking me how old I was, where I came from, how many years I'd spent at school, and so on. Puffing a little I answered one by one. When we stopped for a short rest I asked him:

"What's in the bags on the cart, neighbour?"

"Something grain needs," he replied.

"You mean manure?"

"No. Chemical fertilizer."

"Where d'you get it?"

"At the cross-road."

"Did you buy it?"

"I didn't steal, anyway."

"Who're you working for?"

"For others as well as for myself."

He appeared a bit flippant. What surprised me more was that he didn't appear at all grateful for my help but started picking on me.

"Oh, it's too bad, you need more practice. You don't have the right knack of pulling a cart. What? You don't know how. Well, I'll show you. Straighten up. Stick out your chest. Lift your head up. Look ahead. Why do you look down at your toes? You are afraid they'll be stolen? No, no! Swing your arms more. To pull a cart you need to walk correctly. If you don't, you'll never learn the ropes."

When we arrived at Fangchuang, it was already dusk and the villagers were returning home from the fields. At the sight of the man behind me pushing the cart, they all greeted him warmly. One young man ran over to him calling out, "Let me push the cart for you, Old Hsiang. You can carry my hoe for me, eh?"

Hsiang didn't refuse. "Iron Egg," he said staring at the young man's hoe, "look at that. It's so dirty. You're not like a serious peasant. If your father were still alive, I've no doubt, he'd criticize you."

Iron Egg smiled sheepishly.

"You're smiling, are you? You should never forget you're a peasant's son. If you don't learn how to work properly, you'll never make a good peasant, and you'll let your dead parents down."

The youngster flushed then at Hsiang's scolding. "Right, I'll not forget," he muttered. After a pause, when he grasped the handles he inquired, "What's in the cart?"

"Just what you might expect." Abruptly, as the young man began pushing the cart Old Hsiang shouted, "Wait a minute!"

"What's wrong?" Iron Egg looked puzzled.

"Wait, I say!" Old Hsiang stepped forward. "You don't walk well either. Why don't you grasp the ends instead of the middle of the handles?" But saying this he patted the young man on his tanned back. "Just because of your clumsiness alone no girl will ever love you." At Hsiang's joke everyone around began laughing.

Just then an old granny came up, saying to Hsiang, "You're soaking wet with sweat. Come on home with me and have a meal."

"Old Hsiang," another woman called from some distance, "come to my house, eh?"

"Oh no!" cried still another woman, standing in her doorway. "Don't go to the others. Come here, I want to ask you to do something in the house."

Fanning himself with his old straw hat, Hsiang waved to the last old woman laughingly. "All right, Aunt Wang. I'll have lunch in your home. Please cook enough for the two of us. But let me go to the brigade office first."

"No, you should come to my house," still one other woman begged.

"No, to mine."

"Why are you all so anxious?" He chortled. "I'll be glad enough to have a meal with you all in turn."

Just at this moment a group of children gathered round him, shouting, "Tell us a new story please, Uncle Hsiang?"

"Don't let him go if he doesn't."

Smilingly Hsiang stroked a small boy's head, promising, "Sure, I will. But not until this evening."

"No. Right now."

"Okay." With this, he squatted beside the road and began: "There was once a lazy boy, who was very fussy about his food. One night he dreamed a sweet dream that his body was covered with sugar. He thought he could eat his fill from then on. He scraped the sugar off his body again and again." While speaking Hsiang rubbed his rough calloused hand over the boys' bare backs. This was anything but pleasant so that after a little while Hsiang's rubbing was so uncomfortable every one of them ran away. Chuckling he slipped off into a lane.

I watched all this spellbound. Only after he'd disappeared, did I remember why I'd come to the village.

"Hallo, comrade, where's Party Secretary Hsiang?" I asked a middle-aged villager at my elbow.

"You want me, do you?"

"Are you Secretary Hsiang?"

"Yes," the man replied. "What can I do for you?"

But before I could finish my introduction, he began to laugh. "I'm afraid, comrade, you've mistaken me. Most of us in this village are surnamed Hsiang. The man you want is the commune Party secretary. I am a brigade Party secretary."

"Who's the commune Party secretary then?"

"The man who pushed the cart behind you is the one you're looking for. Don't you know him?"

"Him?"

"Yes. Shall I take you to find him?"

It was incredible! "Is he really the commune Party secretary Hsiang?" I asked again to be quite sure.

"Yes, of course he is." Reading my thoughts maybe, he then added, "Don't underestimate our Old Hsiang. Besides doing all the field work, he's a good shot and a writer too."

"You mean he can practically do everything."

"I think so," the brigade secretary answered. "He's been a farm-hand since he was fourteen years old. At twenty he was already very skilful. But he never worked hard for his landlord. Later he was driven away from his own village by his landlord. During the War of Resistance Against Japan, he enlisted as a guerrilla, becoming well-known for his marksmanship. After Liberation, he realized how important education was. So he studied hard. Now he's mastered arithmetic and writing, and often contributes articles to newspapers."

When he mentioned "contribution", I remembered that I had once read an article written by him published in the provincial paper. In it in the light of his own practice he verified the significance of studying Chairman Mao's works and the Party's policies. From his article I had imagined that he was a well-read man and had a correct and deep understanding of revolutionary theory. I'd decided that such a writer must be an intellectual cadre, used to sitting in an office all day. It was almost beyond my comprehension that he was the peasant I found him to be just now. So I exclaimed with delight:

"That's wonderful!"

"Although he's mastered the pen, he doesn't give up his hoe or gun even for a day." The man cleared his throat then continued,

"He often tells us that the hoe, gun and pen are all indispensable for the building of socialism. Especially those who lead the people in agricultural production must never throw away their hoe."

Arriving at the brigade office, we found it deserted.

"Where has he gone now, eh?" the brigade secretary muttered to himself. Suddenly we heard laughter next door. "Ha, that's Old Hsiang, he's talking with his teacher now."

"Teacher! Who's his teacher?"

"An old peasant. He was very poor before Liberation. Now he loves the commune dearly. Since he's very skilful in all types of farming, Secretary Hsiang often goes to his room to talk and learn from him." At this the brigade secretary stopped to shout over the wall, "Old Hsiang, someone's come to see you."

When Hsiang strode in, I promptly went up to him respectfully addressing him as "Secretary Hsiang", and introduced myself.

"You've already told me once on the way, haven't you?" he replied, cutting me short.

"Oh yes. Excuse me, Secretary Hsiang."

"Sit down please, Comrade Tsui."

"I'm not tired, Secretary Hsiang."

His formal address "Comrade Tsui" embarrassed me. "Would you please call me Young Tsui, Secretary Hsiang?"

"You address me as 'Secretary Hsiang', so why shouldn't I call you 'Comrade Tsui'? That's giving you tit for tat, eh?" But he said this with a chuckle.

"What should I call you then?"

"Have you forgotten what you called me on the way?"

"Neighbour." I held my head down to hide my blushes.

He laughed and patted me on my shoulder, "You can call me Old Hsiang all right, Young Tsui."

Satisfied then I grinned.

Suddenly we heard a call from outside. It was Aunt Wang calling Hsiang and me to have a meal.

While we were eating, many cadres and villagers crowded into Aunt Wang's room. Some discussed their work with old Hsiang; some asked about him and his family. They made such a din that



Aunt Wang protested, "You must let Old Hsiang have a snooze after lunch. Go away now, every one of you!"

After the villagers had dispersed Old Hsiang, pointing to a board by the wall, suggested to me, "Use this for a sleep. Then he handed me a stump. "Good, this will do for your pillow." He gave me a palm-leaf fan too. I could see he felt quite at home in Aunt Wang's house.

"Where are you off to?" I asked.

"I want to stretch my legs outside. You stay and have a rest here, Young Tsui. We'll find some time later to have a talk about your work."

At this moment Aunt Wang hurried out of her other room.

"You're going to visit some families again, eh? It's so hot today. Why don't you have a rest first? You'll be exhausted." But before she could finish, Old Hsiang had left and was out of sight. "Good gracious! He's so speedy." Seeing me lying on the board with a stump for a pillow, she laughed and clapped her hands. "So you're learning from Old Hsiang." From her inner room she brought me a mat and a pillow. Spreading them, she continued, "Old Hsiang is really a good cadre educated by Chairman Mao. Whenever he comes here, he goes to visit every former poor family."

Being quite tired, I fell asleep as soon as I lay down. When I awoke it was already afternoon. I rushed out to find Old Hsiang. The villagers said that he had gone with some peasants to work in a field. Arriving there I saw them having a break and chatting while resting under a willow.

"For your illness I have an effective cure," said Old Hsiang to a young man.

"What is it?"

"It'll cure not only your illness, but your poor appetite, insomnia and tiredness."

"Good, please give me the prescription." The young man fished out his fountain-pen and notebook.

"There's no need for them. Look here." Old Hsiang then drew the two characters "Physical Labour" on the ground with his fingers, which raised hearty laughter from the men around him.

"What shall I do, Old Hsiang?" I interrupted.

"Ask the team leader, please."

"You're new to this village," the team leader said. "I'll assign you to a light job." Pointing to a cart, he went on, "Push that back to Hochuang, please."

"Isn't that the cart we brought the fertilizer in this morning?" I asked. "Why should it be taken back to Hochuang?"

"It belongs to Hochuang," he explained. "We asked them to help us fetch some fertilizer from the county warehouse. On his way here, the Hochuang leader who was pushing the cart met Old Hsiang who said, 'I'm going to Fangchuang. I'll push it there for you. That'll save you time to do some other work in your brigade, right?' When the man asked about his returning the cart, Old Hsiang promised to take it back to the village this evening. But when he came here to our village, he found we had some problems in our work. We asked him to stay overnight to help solve them. We don't want to delay our brother brigade in using it for their work, so please help us by pushing it back there."

"Anyway, this is all practice in your work as a propagandist," the brigade leader added. Old Hsiang smiled as he waved to the peasants. "Let's hurry," he said to them. "The sun's setting."

"Old Hsiang, you're a glutton for work," the team leader said approvingly.

"Don't you know I was a farmhand before Liberation? But I never did my best work for the landlord."

As I started pushing the cart, Old Hsiang stopped me. "When you get there, you'd better have a talk with their cadres this evening. Find out if they have any difficulties in their work. Well, I'll see you later."

On my way Old Hsiang's laughter was still ringing in my ears. His enthusiasm for work reminded me of a report I'd read in a newspaper which praised him for his never-failing revolutionary quality. It encouraged me to forge ahead.

Illustrated by Chao Kuei-teh

Besieged in His Palace

The following two chapters from the historical novel, *Li Tzu-cheng — Prince Valiant*, reveal the complex struggle within the Ming court, its corruption and its inevitable decline and fall. In forthcoming issues we shall present a further three chapters.

— The Editors

Chapter 29

There are two kinds of ways of being besieged. One is obvious such as when in the thirteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tsung-chen, Chang Hsien-chung was besieged in the border region between Szechuan, Shensi and Hupeh, while Li Tzu-cheng was trapped in the Shangle Mountains. The other is not apparent. Few realized that Emperor Tsung-chen himself was under siege in his own imperial palace. Without the least awareness of his predicament, the emperor was none the less trying to find a way out.

The second watch had sounded one night early in the third month, but Emperor Tsung-chen paced the courtyard of Chienching Palace,

unable to sleep. Either side of the steps, two palace maids, silk lanterns in their hands, stood silently, while other maids and eunuchs in attendance waited in the darkness further away, not daring to make a sound. A blast of cold wind would occasionally set to tinkling the iron bells hanging from the eaves, but the emperor seemed oblivious to all. He was preoccupied, worrying about the deteriorating situation, and sighs would sometimes escape from him. With heavy steps and head bowed, he returned after a while to the east pavilion and sat down dejectedly at his desk.

From the Yellow River Valley to the Yangtse Valley, from the eastern seacoast to Szechuan in the west, over half of his empire was struck by famine or in revolt. The largest force of insurgents amounted to some tens of thousands of men; others were several thousand strong; while pockets of several hundreds were everywhere. Even in central and southern China, south of the Yangtse, were found minor revolts and small-scale famines. Wealthy areas such as Soochow and Chiahsing were suffering from drought or locusts, so that the price of grain soared, causing looting and other unrest. The situation had grown steadily worse since his ascension to the throne, so that nowhere was there peace and prosperity. Recently, his ex-minister of war, Yang Ssu-chang, had been victorious at Manao Mountain, yet he had failed to kill or capture Chang Hsien-chung; while his generals T'so Liang-yu and Ho Jen-lung had restrained their forces from giving pursuit. The soldiers had not been paid for a long time and their morale was low. Yang Ssu-chang kept making repeated requests for funds. If money was not forthcoming, despite the improvement in the military situation, the campaign against the peasant insurgents would collapse and the advantages gained would be lost. The emperor knew that only with sufficient funds for his troops could his orders be carried out and the army press on to annihilate the remnants of Chang Hsien-chung's insurgents and then crush Li Tzu-cheng's forces in the Shanglo Mountains. But where to find the necessary money? The previous year, the addition of seven million three hundred taels of silver to the land tax to cover the cost of training new troops had caused an uproar throughout the whole country; even within the government there had been strong

opposition to the measure. To levy further taxes was out of the question, and so the emperor kept asking himself:

"Since the treasury is empty, what is to be done?"

In the last few days, apart from Yang Ssu-chang's requests for money, the emperor had received some from various provinces for either more money or troops. Hung Cheng-chou, in the northeast, had sent dispatches with the intelligence that the Manchus were preparing for another invasion. Without more money for his army, he would be unable to defeat them outside the Great Wall and his position might become impossible. Now he had sent another petition saying that since he had gone beyond the Shanhaikuan Pass with his men he had urged them to fight bravely for their country. Yet short of funds, the situation was more difficult, and though he would repay the emperor's beneficence with his life, he hoped that the emperor would order the Ministry of Finance to send more money post haste, since his officers and men could not fight well on empty stomachs. The desperate tone of the petition deeply moved and disturbed the emperor. Suddenly he pushed aside all the reports on his desk, exclaiming:

"Money! Always money! What can I do without money?"

That night his sleep was broken and disturbed by nightmares. The following morning after he had attended his court, his mind was still troubled by the problem and he felt ill at ease. One effective solution would be to borrow money from his imperial relatives, since they had received many benefits from the government and their fortunes were linked to the fate of the state. They might be willing to make contributions in the present crisis and thus set an example to others. Another advantage would be that it would seem as if he was impartial. Having set his mind on this, he only wondered which of his relatives to choose.

Of the imperial relatives, three families were said to be the wealthiest. One was Empress Chou's family; another the Tien family of his favourite concubine; the last the Marquis of Wuching's Li family. The first two were wealthy parvenus, who had risen in fortune through the emperor's favour, annexing land and property in the environs of the capital and engaging in trade during the last ten years, so that

their new-found wealth surpassed that of many older noble families. The Marquis of Wuching, named Li Kuo-jui, was the emperor's uncle, and relative of Empress Dowager Hsiao-ting, mother of Emperor Wan-li. Before Emperor Wan-li had come to the throne, his mother and her prime minister, Chang Chu-cheng, had been in control of the government. Rumour had it that the empress dowager had taken gold, silver and other valuables and transferred them to her own family, sometimes quite openly as gifts and sometimes secretly. Thus several generations later, the Li family was still among the richest of the imperial relations. Who could be made to set the example? Unwilling to hurt the feelings of his empress or his favourite concubine, the emperor decided that the marquis Li Kuo-jui would be the best choice. There was, however, one drawback. What if his relatives objected to his scheme and resisted it? Would he have to reprimand them or even punish them? Such actions would be without precedent and perhaps the spirits of their ancestors would be offended! And how would his other relatives then react? He felt the problem was too complicated to make a decision.

The next day, all over north China and especially in the vicinity of the capital, a sandstorm occurred, which at moments blotted out the pallid sun with its menacing dark clouds. Shops on the main street closed their doors and visibility was reduced to a few yards. Inside the homes candles burned all day. This was considered as an ominous portent, and the emperor was afraid lest it be some warning from Heaven that some terrible calamity was about to befall his dynasty. Anxious and restless, he went to the Fenghsien Hall to offer incense and pray to his ancestors for their protection and explain his desire to borrow money from his relatives. As he was making obeisance and praying, a great crash in the courtyard startled him. Turning round he called out:

"What was that noise outside?"

A eunuch kneeling outside a window reported: "One of the big branches of the tree has just been blown down by the wind."

The emperor continued praying, but felt so forlorn and sad that tears sprang to his eyes. Finishing his prayer, he left the hall and saw the broken branch of the old locust tree lying on the ground,

partly across the steps. Perhaps his ancestors were offended by his plan to raise money, otherwise why should that happen just as he was offering his prayers? He felt as shaken as when, two years earlier, a tile decoration had fallen off the roof of the hall during a storm.

For two days the wind never let up, but on the third it ceased and the sky cleared. The temperature, however, had dropped sharply to be as bitter as the coldest winter days, so that the fuel department of the palace had to procure charcoal to feed the braziers in the various pavilions and halls. At the court session, the emperor warned his officials that Heaven and the spirits of his ancestors had sent signs and that they must cultivate virtue to placate them. He then asked his ministers what could be done to raise money for his armies. They either remained silent or mouthed some empty phrases, except for one censor, Hsu Piao, newly arrived from Nanking. He made no suggestion about raising money, but instead had the audacity to report to the emperor the real situation he had witnessed in the countryside. As he had travelled north, he had seen all the villages en route in ruins; for many miles at a stretch there had been no signs of human habitation but only wild beasts prowling around. Weeping as he spoke, he begged the emperor to abolish the additional tax for training new troops lest all the people should finally be driven to revolt. After he had finished, several provincial officials reported on the serious famines in Honan, Shantung, Shensi, Hukuang, Chiangpei and other areas. They said it would be impossible to levy further taxes from the peasants. This intelligence worried and frightened the emperor. There was no alternative and he decided to force himself to borrow money from his relations, even if such an action displeased the spirits of his ancestors. Later they would pardon him, for if he managed to amass a few million taels of silver and successfully exterminate the "bandits", then his ancestors might be appeased.

Thinking of summoning his ministers to the Wenhua Hall to discuss his plan, he hesitated, however, once there. What if his relatives resorted to trickery to foil his scheme? Not only would the problem remain unsolved, but also he would have offended these relatives. He stayed a long time in the hall procrastinating. It

was in the Wenhua Hall that the emperor often heard lectures given by Confucian scholars. On the pillars at the front and back of the hall were hung couplets about scholarship, which in the present situation seemed to have a sarcastic ring. In his leisure time, the emperor normally enjoyed relaxing there reading the couplets, but now they held no attraction for him. Returning to the front hall, he paused out of habit before one couplet which he liked because of its fine dignified calligraphy, a good example of the imperial academy style, and its elegant verse. Involuntarily he glanced at it again, reading:

Peace reigns over the empire; while the emperor quietly studies
the classics behind his emerald curtain.

Free from cares of state, he passes his leisure-time wisely with his
jade-bound volumes.

Having read it, he said to himself in disgust:

“What nonsense to talk of peace reigning over the empire or being free from cares of state!” Shaking his head and with his hands clasped behind his back, he retraced his steps towards the back hall. As he was walking up the marble steps, he raised his head and his eye caught the inscription above the entrance, which read:

“Learn from the two sage kings and three good monarchs and rule the empire in a lawful and principled way.” As this was written in six lines by the Empress Dowager Hsiao-ting, grand-aunt of the Marquis of Wuching, Li Kuo-jui, the emperor felt ashamed and lowered his head as he went into the east chamber. For some time he sat in silence finally deciding not to consult his chief ministers over his scheme to borrow money from his relatives.

Anxiety and various conflicting emotions filled him as he made his way back to the palace. In despair he sat at his desk, unable to bring himself to look at the reports or to speak; even the slightest sound of the maids' or eunuchs' footsteps outside the door-curtain irritated him. With his finger he traced the character “money” twice on his desk and sighed deeply, feeling restless. It was at this moment that Wang Cheng-en approached him with a report, bowing, and said in a low voice:

“Your Majesty, here is a petition from one of your subjects.”

“Who sent it?”

“Li Chin, a scholar from the imperial college.”

The emperor replied in aversion: “Take it away. I'm in no mood to read petitions from scholars!”

But Wang Cheng-en continued meekly: “He's proposing how to fund your armies.”

“Oh? A proposal to collect funds? . . . Then read it at once.”

Li Chin had written of his concern for the situation in the south.

There was a time when the south had known peace for many years, but then powerful families started to annex land and engage in commerce, living in an extravagant and luxurious style and ignoring all difficulties of state. In northwest and central China, the unrest was caused by the rich annexing lands and exploiting the poor, so that while the rich increased their wealth, the sufferings of the poor also increased. Despite a year of good harvest, the poor were still hungry and cold; while in a year of poor harvest, the feeble would die of starvation by the roadside and the strong would rise up in revolt. The seeming stability south of the Yangtse belied the actual inherent dangers of the situation. Unless measures were taken to curb the rapaciousness of the rich and powerful families and relieve the wretchedness of the poor, the land south of the Yangtse would share the same fate as the rest of the empire. Li Chin, therefore, urged the emperor to issue an edict ordering these families to contribute to the army fund and, should they resist, their properties should be confiscated and no leniency shown. He also proposed that further annexation of land be prohibited and boundaries clearly demarcated to help the poor. He cited examples of past dynasties when the country had enjoyed peace until the rich families started to annex lands, creating problems and even causing dynasties to be toppled. His petition was long and written with great passion.

The emperor was so moved that he took the petition and read it once more himself. He felt the suggestion of re-allocating lands could not be promptly and easily carried out, so he put that aside. But it seemed like a good idea and it was perhaps feasible to force the rich families to contribute to an army fund. Two winters pre-

viously, when the Manchus had threatened his capital, his prime minister, Lu Hsiang-sheng, had proposed asking local officials and gentry to make similar contributions. The emperor then had been tempted by the idea, but now he was more in favour of it. It was certainly true that south of the Yangtse had known peace and prosperity for a long time, unlike the north which had been ravaged by the invading Manchu hordes and afflicted by natural disasters year after year. Since the government was in such desperate straits, why should the rich in the south not help to save the country from ruin? Still he hesitated. There would be opposition both from the officials whose families lived in the south and from the families themselves. The Yangtse Valley supplied most of the revenue, most of the grain needed for the armies and civilians around the capital also came from the south, and so it was unwise to arouse the opposition of the rich there unless there was no alternative, in case they stopped supporting the government. Yet the emperor hesitated, reluctant to abandon the proposition. Finally he took up his brush and wrote:

"Li Chin has proposed that the rich families in Kiangsu and Chekiang should be asked to contribute to the army fund. Let the Inner Cabinet and Ministry of Finance discuss whether or not this is practicable."

If the emperor's note had expressed his approval of the proposal, officials with families in the south who might try to oppose it in some way would not dare do so openly; if he had been firm, those from poorer or northern families would have favoured it. But in a non-committal tone, he had only ordered them to discuss it and thus none would express their support openly. A few days later, the proposal was returned stating it could not be approved, and that even if it was, it could not be implemented as it would cause turmoil in the south. They emphasized that as practically all government revenue came from the south, trouble there would make the situation in the whole country more serious. Fearing that someone might support Li Chin's suggestion and in order to strengthen their case, these officials persuaded some lower provincial officials to send in a joint report vehemently attacking Li Chin himself, part of which read:

"Although Li Chin is only a student at the government college and not yet an official, yet he has had the audacity to discuss state affairs to win imperial favour and fame. He has felt dissatisfied that the lands south of the Yangtse have been preserved as a region of peace for the emperor and so he has suggested a scheme to force rich southern families to contribute to the army fund and to investigate and confiscate their property. Such a bad policy has only been adopted when the country has been on the brink of disaster, yet this unscrupulous and impertinent young upstart has been brazen enough to present his proposal to our wise sovereign."

The eunuchs in attendance at the palace later told of how the emperor, on reading these words, shook his head, snorted and swore to himself in a low voice: "Like a pack of baying hounds!" He evidently despised their advice and rejected their objections to the proposal. Then he read another passage:

"Li Chin hates the rich because they annex the lands of the poor. But the rich families are in fact the source of sustenance for the poor. It is too easy in times of war or famine to lay all the blame at the door of the rich. If we force them to make more contributions and confiscate their properties, there may be opposition. Even the First Emperor of Chin did not resort to such an action against the rich widow of Pa, nor the Emperor Wu of Han against Pu Shih. Following such a policy can only lead to trouble with hooligans and ruffians seizing their opportunity to attack the rich families. The result will be disaster. We therefore beg Your Majesty to have Li Chin executed as a warning to all such vermin who seek their fortune at the expense of our state."

The violent opposition to Li Chin's proposal disappointed the emperor, but he liked the sentence about rich families being the sustenance of the poor. Nodding, he thought to himself: "Quite so. How can the poor survive without the rich? Who would give them land for farming?" Rising, he started to pace about the room, wondering what to do. Finally he decided to file away the petition and ignore it. Yet it gnawed at him. He knew it would solve his immediate problem, yet he feared unrest in the south. The rabble would make use of the situation to attack the rich, but the latter were

the pillars of the state and he could not afford to let the poor and destitute rise against them. The proposal was, therefore, out of the question and so he turned his mind once more to his plan to borrow money from his relatives, who were easy to reach and who could contribute as soon as he asked. He still had misgivings, however, because it was a serious step to take. To a eunuch waiting outside the door, he called:

“Summon Hsueh Kuo-kuan and Cheng Kuo-hsiang!”

Hsueh was the first minister and Cheng the second in the Inner Cabinet, which consisted of seven altogether. But there was another reason. Hsueh came from Hancheng in Shensi Province and had little connection with southern families; Cheng, though he came from the Yangtse Valley, did not belong to a rich family. When all the others had objected to Li Chin's proposal, these two had remained silent. Having noticed this, the emperor now hoped they would approve of his plan to borrow money from his relatives. Not wishing to summon them to his office in the main palace where all the reports lay scattered over his desk disturbing him, the emperor went to the Hungteh Hall and waited for them on his dragon throne, his head bent and lost in thought.

Presently Hsueh and Cheng entered in great haste, anxiously wondering why the emperor had suddenly summoned them. As they kowtowed to the emperor, Hsueh tripped on a corner of his robe and nearly fell down, while Cheng's legs trembled beneath him as he struggled to catch his breath. After telling them to be seated, the emperor sighed and spoke in a roundabout manner:

“I've summoned you here because I am concerned about so many bad omens that have been occurring, like that dust storm the other day. It was most unusual. What would you suggest I do when Heaven sends these signs?”

Hsueh rose and said: “The laws of nature are most subtle. Your Majesty works hard night and day and acts with reverence towards Heaven and your ancestors. This is evident to both the gods and men. The sages have said that a man can only do his best and submit to the will of Heaven. Since Your Majesty has always worked diligently and your subjects have fulfilled their duties, as human beings we have

done all that can be expected of us, and the will of Heaven must certainly turn in our favour. We beg Your Majesty not to worry yourself over such matters but to pay attention to Your Majesty's own health.”

Then the emperor spoke: “In the thirteen years since I ascended the throne, not one day has passed when I have not acted with the utmost caution. I rise early and retire late, wishing to fulfil my responsibilities well. Yet the situation in the country deteriorates with more omens and natural disasters. Heaven shows us no favour and the country is on the brink of disaster. That great dust storm not only struck us here in the capital but also a fortnight ago it occurred in Taming Prefecture and Hsunhsien. According to a report from Inspector Han Wen-chuan, on the twenty-first of last month, in those and other places, a black and yellow cloud like a streamer was seen in the northeast. It then divided into two, spreading to the west and south, until it had rapidly covered the sky. Then a raging wind arose, uprooting trees and the day became dark as night. White and blue vapours and red lights flickered through the yellow dust from time to time, like a gate opening and closing. When there are such unusual signs from Heaven, I naturally feel anxious.”

Trying to soothe the emperor, Hsueh continued: “Despite these many bad omens, through the divine might of Your Majesty, the campaign to crush the peasant insurgents has made great progress. As a result of the battle at Manao Mountain, Chang Hsien-chung has fled with his remnants to the mountains. His days are numbered and he will be finished at any moment. Surely this means that Heaven is weary of these wars and that the fortunes of state will now improve. I beseech Your Majesty not to worry, but await news of victory.”

The emperor gave a bitter smile: “Yes, Yang Ssu-chang is a good commander and has reported his successes and of course this news pleases me. But Li Tzu-cheng is still resisting in the Shanglo Mountains and there are other bandit forces in the eastern part of Hukuang, the southern part of Honan and the western part of Anhwei. Smaller groups swarm all over Shantung, Honan and Hopei; while tiny bands occupy mountain fortresses, larger forces roam over several prefectures. I cannot help but worry over the general situation. Year



after year of natural disasters and heavy taxes leaving many homeless or dying have made people rebel. I am sick with worry day and night, unable to enjoy my food or sleep. My government ministers, however, remain deaf and dumb, refusing to share in my anxiety. Whenever I have mentioned the needs for funds, they have been silent and they are not of the calibre I expected."

Hsueh, seeing that the emperor wanted to ask him about ways to raise money, lowered his head and said nothing, waiting for the emperor to voice his proposal first, lest if the emperor changed his mind, he should later get into difficulties. When the emperor saw his bowed head and silence, he made a sign dismissing all his attendants, and then said in a low voice:

"The military situation demands funds urgently, but the treasury is empty and the Ministry of Finance has no means to raise money. As my chief minister, I ask what good plan you propose?"

Kneeling, Hsueh replied: "In the past few days I have been discussing this with the Ministry of Finance, but without result so far. Yes, the country is impoverished and I cannot sleep at nights, yet I have not thought of a feasible plan. As your chief minister, I truly deserve death."

"Please rise, sir."

After Hsueh had kowtowed his gratitude and got up, the emperor decided to stop being indirect and so he asked bluntly: "I'm considering borrowing money from my imperial relatives, hereditary nobles and other gentry in the capital to raise funds. What is your opinion?"

Hsueh had thought beforehand that the emperor would resort to this and he rather approved of it. He knew, however, that this was a serious step which might have grave consequences, and so he answered in some trepidation:

"Imperial relatives and hereditary nobles are linked to the fortunes of state, unlike ordinary official families, and so I must consider the matter carefully before expressing my opinion. Many ministers who have served in the government for years know these imperial families and other nobles well and I hope Your Majesty will also consult with these men."

Understanding his purpose, the emperor turned to Cheng who was kneeling, and asked: "Sir, as an old official and resident of the capital, what is your view?"

In the early years of the emperor's reign, Cheng had been an ambitious government adviser, known for his courage and frankness. Later, seeing that the emperor was suspicious by nature as well as conceited and wilful and that high officials attacked each other embroiling many high or low officials in their squabbles, Cheng, fearful of being involved himself, became cautious and reserved on controversial issues, sometimes only voicing assent when there was a consensus of opinion. Gradually this became a habit. Since he had stopped being ambitious and taking a stand over issues, he remained aloof from factionalism, so that other officials belonging to different cliques favoured his neutral presence in the cabinet as a buffer. Because he was older and senior in status, he ranked second only to Hsueh. His colleagues had nicknamed him "Minister Yes-yes" because he invariably mumbled "Yes, yes" in answer to everything. On his way to the palace, a weeping cabinet secretary had accosted him, kowtowing, saying that he had just received news that his mother had died and that he wanted to return home immediately. "Yes, yes," Cheng replied automatically before inquiring what was the matter. When he realized that the secretary was asking for leave, he said "Yes, yes" again and signed his permission. Now hearing the emperor's question, he involuntarily warned himself: "Don't commit yourself. Don't give an answer." Sweating profusely, he prostrated himself. The emperor waited for a while, but when Cheng still remained silent, he asked again:

"What is your opinion about my plan to borrow money from the imperial relatives or the nobles and other wealthy families in the capital? If you think we should first approach the imperial relatives, with which family should we start?"

Cheng timidly said: "Yes, yes."

The emperor asked: "What do you mean? Will either be appropriate?"

"Yes, yes," came the reply.

"But *which* family should we approach first?"

"Yes, yes," Cheng whispered half-choked.

"What does this 'yes, yes' mean?"

"Yes, yes."

At this the emperor flew into a rage. Banging his fist on the desk, he swore: "You are an important minister yet your wits are so feeble that all you can do is repeat 'yes, yes' like some parrot, saying nothing. How can I trust you? Naturally the government is tottering when the highest ministers like you hold office doing nothing. I could have you arrested for this, but as you've never committed any serious errors in the past, I'll be lenient and just dismiss you from your post. Henceforth your name will be struck off the official list. . . . Now go!"

With the emperor in such a fury, Hsueh dared not plead for his colleague, and in fact he was not sorry to see Cheng dismissed as a more active person would be more suitable, so he remained silent. Cheng, trembling with fright, kowtowed and thanked the emperor for his mercy, withdrawing in confusion. Later at his home, his friends and former students all came to inquire about what had happened and soothe the old man. Cheng dared not disclose what the emperor had said and so when questioned about his dismissal, he just replied, "Yes, yes." That same evening he received the emperor's edict confirming his dismissal and kowtowing he thanked the emperor. He immediately wrote a petition and presented it to the court, but then he worried lest he had perhaps written one word wrongly. Torn by doubt day and night lest the emperor discover it and punish him severely, he lost his appetite and was unable to sleep, so that he became ill and died soon afterwards.

After Cheng's departure, the emperor again demanded an answer from Hsueh. And as there were no attendants within earshot, Hsueh said in a low voice:

"The plan is excellent. If an example is set by one of the imperial families, the nobles and other officials in the capital will certainly follow suit."

Sighing the emperor said: "We are forced to adopt this scheme, but I fear there will be opposition."

Hsueh replied with deference: "The other ministers and I will attend to the official families, but we must rely on Your Majesty's decision regarding the imperial and noble ones."

"Of the imperial families, with whom, in your opinion, should we start?"

"Since the imperial families are not like ordinary subjects, Your Majesty is in a better position than I to judge."

The emperor asked again: "What about the Marquis of Wuching?"

"As he is one of the wealthiest, he would be a good choice."

"What other families are as wealthy as his?"

Hsueh knew that the emperor's favourite concubine's family and that of his empress were also wealthy, but he was afraid to speak. The marquis, however, was only distantly related to the present emperor and before the latter had ascended the throne he had been annoyed with the marquis over some matter and bore him a grudge. Hsueh, therefore, decided not to mention the other two families, but concentrate on the marquis.

"I do not know about other families," he replied, "but you can see from the marquis' garden that he is very rich indeed. His family used to have another garden with beautiful trees and fountains, but recently he has had a bigger one constructed outside the city to the south. Water from Sanliho is channelled into it. It is so magnificent that to enter it is like seeing some of the beauty spots in the Yangtse Valley. Work on the garden has been going on for several years. When people spoke of the family being worth hundreds of thousands of taels of silver, they referred to his former wealth. If all his manors in the vicinity of the capital and his commercial enterprises in Tientsin and in the south are counted, then his wealth must far exceed the former estimate."

The emperor spoke in disgust: "I try to economize on food and clothing and cannot afford to waste a single cent, while these imperial relatives are extravagant and pay no heed to the problems of state." Pausing, he then continued: "Li Kuo-jui is my uncle and if the treasury was not empty and I was not forced to do it, I would not ask him to contribute."

"Since all the imperial families are related to Your Majesty, then an example has to be made of one of them."

"Exactly, one has to make a start. Years ago, when my grandfather was young, rumour has it that Empress Dowager Hsiao-ting transferred large sums of money from the palace. Now the situation forces us to make that family give us some money, but when the empire is once more at peace we shall return it. This is a matter I shall attend to myself and I do not wish you to mention this to anyone."

After Hsueh had left, the emperor felt more relaxed. If the marquis contributed some money, then other imperial relatives, nobles and others would follow suit. Once an example had been set by the capital, the provinces could follow and thus several million taels could be amassed, sufficient for a whole year's pay for the army. Although Hsueh had recently annoyed him in various ways, now that he had given the emperor his support, he was once more in his favour.

On his way to the main hall of his palace, the emperor happened to raise his head and catch a glimpse of an inscription hanging on a wall of the hall, which read: "Be reverent to Heaven and show respect for the ways of the ancestors." It had been written on his order in the eighth month of the first year of his reign, by Kao Shih-ming, a eunuch in charge of the imperial seal and a fine calligrapher. Seeing the inscription reminded the emperor that there was no precedent in preceding reigns of an emperor forcing his relatives to contribute money. For three days the emperor's mind was in conflict, but as many reports kept being received from different regions asking for funds and more troops, he felt helpless. On the third day, however, he received a report from Li Kuo-chen, half-brother of the marquis and a spendthrift who had often quarrelled with Li Kuo-jui over money matters. He wrote that his father had left four hundred thousand taels of silver and half of that sum belonged to him, so he wished to present it to the emperor as a contribution for military funds and as a token of his loyalty. Li Kuo-chen had been informed by some palace eunuchs with whom he was in contact that the emperor was considering borrowing money from his imperial relatives and other nobles. He thought this might be to his advantage, and when

he heard that his half-brother was to set the example he decided to write immediately to the emperor, hoping both to make trouble for the marquis and win favour for himself. Through intelligence received from the government spies, the emperor knew about the feuding and backbiting among the nobility. When he read the report, he swore: "The cunning swine!" Then dismissing all his former misgivings, he summoned Wang Teh-hua, the eunuch in charge of the imperial seal, and told him to go to the marquis with the order that the government was required to borrow a hundred thousand taels of silver from him. After his departure, the emperor sat at his desk lost in thought staring at the smoke from the Hsuan-teh incense-burner on the stand near by. He asked himself:

"Is this going to succeed?"

Since there were many eunuchs in the palace, there had been no need to send the chief eunuch on such an errand, yet in the hope of accomplishing the mission, the emperor had ordered Wang Teh-hua to go himself. Two hours later he returned and the emperor impatiently asked him:

"Well, has he agreed to lend us the money?"

Bowing, the chief eunuch replied: "I dare not speak. Please do not be angry, Your Majesty."

"You mean he refused?"

"When I went to his house and gave him your message, he started to tell me all his troubles and said he could only contribute ten thousand taels and not a cent more. I could not accept such a small sum and so I came back to make my report."

"What? A paltry ten thousand taels?" The emperor glared and, stamping his foot, swore: "What a dog! It's disgraceful! How dare he refuse me?"

The chief eunuch had been hoping to make a lot of money on the side and so when he had delivered the emperor's message and the marquis had only offered him a mere two thousand taels as commission, he was greatly disappointed. In disgust he had answered: "His Majesty is very strict and I cannot accept your generous gift." Then he had left in annoyance. And seeing the emperor still in a temper, he continued:

"Your Majesty is right. How dare Li Kuo-jui refuse? He does not care in the least about Your Majesty or the state."

"What else did he say?"

"He complained that because of recurring famines over the last years he had derived no income from his estates and that his few manors near the capital had been burnt and raided by the invading Manchu hordes the year before last. His shops at Linching and Tsinan were looted. In fact he was hoping that Your Majesty would help him financially, never dreaming that you would wish to borrow from him. He also said that if Your Majesty could not forgive him in this present difficult situation, then all he could do was to die."

The emperor's eyes blazed with anger as he paced to and fro in the hall. The frightened maids and eunuchs held their breath. The emperor thought to himself: "I've worked so hard to prevent the empire from collapsing, not just for my own family but for everyone. My imperial relatives have benefited from the state and are involved in its fortunes. Now the empire is verging on ruin and yet you, an imperial relative, remain quite aloof and won't even lift a finger to help." Then he suddenly recollected an incident of fifteen years ago which further incensed him. At that time he had been just a prince, and though he was a half-brother of the former Emperor Tien-chi, yet because the eunuch Wei Chung-hsien and the emperor's wet-nurse were very powerful, he had to be very careful not to offend them. Obligated to present Wei Chung-hsien with a rich gift on his birthday and unable to afford it, he had sent a eunuch to the marquis to ask him to lend him thirty thousand taels, promising to return the money without fail. Li Kuo-jui, however, had only complained to the old eunuch, Wang Hung, about his difficulties and sent only five thousand taels. The emperor, always rather petty, felt his pride had been injured and two years after his reign commenced he still recalled it and vowed to revenge himself. But the cares of state had intervened and he had almost forgotten his past grudge. He had not asked the marquis for money on this occasion out of spite, but since the latter had not obliged him he was reminded of his old score still unsettled.

"Whenever I wanted to borrow money from him, he always made the same old excuse about difficulties." Pausing, he said to the chief

eunuch behind him: "It doesn't pay to be polite to characters like him. One needs to be firm with him and then see if he'll agree or not."

"Yes, he's the type who always learns the hard way."

"Go immediately and order him to bring me two hundred thousand taels at once, and not one tael less."

After the eunuch's departure, the emperor laughed scornfully as he left the hall and went down the steps into the courtyard, where he paced up and down. He had to be firm in carrying out his plan now that the situation had developed so far. If he backed down now, he would not be able to force his relatives and others to contribute any money, and his prestige and authority would be irrevocably damaged. Yet he had deep misgivings about whether or not he could punish the marquis very harshly. Just at that moment, a wind from the north carried to his ears the sound of bells and chimes, which if from a temple could not be heard in the palace. The emperor, puzzled, asked a eunuch:

"Where is that music coming from?"

"Your Majesty, today is the birthday of the Goddess of the Nine Lotuses and the eunuchs in charge of the sacrifices in the Yinghua Hall are making an offering."

The emperor was startled: "I'd forgotten that it was her birthday."

During her lifetime, Empress Dowager Hsiao-ting had often fasted and worshipped Buddha in the Yinghua Hall, practising yoga sitting on a throne with nine lotus flowers carved in relief. After her death, therefore, the people in the palace said she had become a goddess and called her the Goddess or Lady of the Nine Lotuses. Although her shrine was in the ancestral Fenghsien Hall, another hall was specially built for her behind the Yinghua Hall, where there was a gilt image of her in clay, wearing a Buddhist gown and sitting on her lotus throne. People would sacrifice to her as to Buddha. When young, the emperor had seen her practising her yoga and this had left a strong impression on him. Now remembering her, he felt he must have deeply offended her spirit and was very worried about his affair with the marquis.

As the empress dowager had been dead for more than twenty years, according to court etiquette it was not necessary for the emperor and empress to offer sacrifices themselves on her birthday. It was many years since the emperor had last done so. But now feeling uneasy, he sent a eunuch to the Kunning Palace where the empress lived, to order her to go quickly with the two imperial concubines, Tien and Yuan, to the back hall of the Yinghua Hall to offer sacrifices on his behalf.

Having demanded from Li Kuo-jui the two hundred thousand taels of silver, the emperor waited to see whether or not his order would be obeyed. At the same time he told Tsao Hua-chun, the eunuch in charge of the East Bureau and Wu Meng-ming, head of the Imperial Police, to send out spies to find out and report on people's reactions to this matter in the capital. Heaven had sent fearful omens and famines plagued the country and in the past two days the emperor had decided to fast and practise virtue. Yet worried by financial affairs, he had no time to leave his office and retreat into meditation. Afraid that his ancestors would be offended over the confrontation with the marquis, he decided to go and pray. The previous evening he had eaten only a simple vegetarian meal and had bathed, informing his court that he would not attend their morning session. He sent a eunuch to tell the Inner Cabinet that from that day he would go to the Hermitage and remain there for three days in quietness, and that he was only to be disturbed if some urgent or serious matter arose. Helped by his maids, he quickly changed into a plain dark silk robe, and then went to offer incense and prayers at the shrines of his ancestors in the Fenghsien Hall and in an adjoining hall at the shrine of his mother, Empress Dowager Hsiao-chun. Then he rode by carriage to the Hermitage.

Erected behind the Wenhua Hall, the foundation of the Hermitage was of wood, three feet above ground and open on all four sides. This was to signify that it was above worldly things. Unused in the preceding reign, its railings and wooden staircase had been covered with dust, while cobwebs had hung from the eaves and windows and bats' droppings were strewn over the floor. The pathway had been choked with weeds. After the emperor had ascended the

throne, it was once more in use and kept clean and tidy. As the emperor entered the Hermitage, he kowtowed before the shrine of the Jade Emperor and then sat down, his eyes closed in meditation. Wishing to confess his sins to the gods, he found it hard to concentrate, however, as many problems kept surfacing in his mind.

At noon the emperor ate a frugal meal. The eunuchs in the imperial kitchen, following the tradition of their predecessors, played tricks unknown to the emperor. Using vegetarian ingredients like winter mushrooms, fresh bamboo shoots, beancurd, gluten of wheat, turnips and cabbages, they cooked them in chicken or duck soup with other delicacies, making them very tasty. But the emperor, in his anxious state, had no appetite for such dishes, only nibbling a few mouthfuls and drinking half a bowl of silver-mushroom soup. The dishes were then removed and tea served in a plain white Chien ware cup, which glistened like jade and was superior to the Ting ware of the Northern Sung period, since the emperor was fasting and no colourful designs could be used. The emperor took a sip of tea, and gazed at the cup lost in thought. The pale yellow tea and its faint aroma suggested the odious features of the marquis and the image of Empress Dowager Hsiao-ting sitting on her lotus throne. The emperor blinked his eyes and these illusions vanished.

Troubled by the financial situation and the problem of the marquis, the emperor was unable to meditate about his own faults in peace. As it was impossible to rest at the Hermitage, he decided to cut short his three-day retreat to one. He was impatient for the sun to set so that he could return to the urgent business at the palace.

Since his sleep had been poor for some time, he soon dozed off sitting in his chair and had strange dreams, all connected with the need to raise funds for the army. In his dream thousands of government troops were besieging Yang Ssu-chang's camp clamouring for pay. Yang, flustered, appeared to try and calm down the men, but their demands increased and the situation grew serious. Yang then ran into the palace and, kowtowing, begged him for money. The noise grew louder and seemed to be within the capital itself until it reached the Forbidden City. The emperor awoke in terror, drenched in sweat. Looking out of the window, he saw that it was only four or

five o'clock in the afternoon. The sun was still bright. The day seemed to drag on.

One eunuch brought some warm water in a silver basin and knelt before the emperor, while another covered his legs with a piece of white satin and rolled up his sleeves. Such duties were usually performed by maids, but since he was observing a fast, they had to be done by eunuchs. The eunuchs were young men in their teens, handsome and splendidly dressed, and gentle in their movements. Yet the emperor found them clumsy and irritating, and he unwillingly bent his head to wash his face, sighing either out of dissatisfaction at their service or because of cares of state. After the basin and satin had been removed, another young eunuch came and kneeling offered him a black lacquer tray inlaid with mother-of-pearl bearing a plum blossom design made in the reign of Yung-lo. The emperor took the proffered cup from the tray and having rinsed his mouth put it back. He then turned to an older eunuch and asked:

"Where is Wang Teh-hua?"

"Your Majesty, he went just now to the Wenhua Hall to report something, but he did not wish to disturb your meditation and neither did we."

As the Hermitage was purely for meditation, no affairs of state could be discussed there. The emperor decided to break the rule and go to the hall to find out what Wang Teh-hua had wished to report and then return to continue his meditation. Kowtowing three times to the shrine of the Jade Emperor, he left the Hermitage.

Reaching the back chamber of the hall, he sat down and told an attendant to summon Wang Teh-hua. Then he asked him impatiently:

"So what did Li Kuo-ju say when he received my second order?"

The chief eunuch replied: "Your Majesty, he has not yet made an answer."

"Damn him! Anything suspicious going on in his house?"

"After lunch, Tsao Hua-chun came to the palace, but finding Your Majesty was at meditation and not to be disturbed, he left. According to him, after your first order, the marquis knew he was in trouble and dared not appear in person. But he has been discussing the situation with his trusted protégés and stewards incessantly and has secretly

sent men to some imperial relatives and other nobles to decide what to do."

"What kind of things did they discuss?"

"They asked others to beg Your Majesty to be lenient with him, but we don't know yet what they are going to do. Probably insist on his poverty and their own."

"Damn! To whom can I say that I have no money? Which families are closest to him?"

Wang Teh-hua knew very well that the Empress Chou's own father was a close friend of the marquis, but decided not to mention it. He was not afraid of the empress, who never interfered in politics, nor did he fear that her father would revenge himself later, but only that the emperor might change his mind. If he took the emperor into his confidence and later the emperor relented, he would land in serious trouble. He therefore answered evasively:

"Li Kuo-jui is a cousin of Empress Dowager Hsiao-ting's grandson, and his family have been nobility for many generations. His family is the most exalted and ancient of the imperial ones and so all have close connections with him and it is not possible to single out just one or two."

Then the emperor inquired: "Do the people of the capital know this?"

"All walls have ears. Everyone is talking about it."

"What do they say?"

"According to Tsao Hua-chun, the agents from the East Bureau and Imperial Police have heard many people commenting favourably about it, praising Your Majesty's wisdom and correctness. They all say that when the government has such difficulty and the people contribute grain and money sharing Your Majesty's burdens, the imperial relatives who have been so fortunate ought to have made voluntary contributions long ago. Now that Your Majesty has made this wise decision, the people feel it is only just and are all pleased with it."

"Any other comments?"

Wang Teh-hua knew that the imperial relations had different ideas, but he was afraid to mention this to the emperor and so he simply

said there were none. The emperor then dismissed him and told another eunuch to summon Hsueh Kuo-kuan from the Inner Cabinet. As the Inner Cabinet was near the hall, Hsueh came immediately and knelt before the emperor, who asked him:

"Yesterday I twice ordered the marquis to contribute money to the state as an example for others, but he seems to be deliberately resisting and relying on his privileged position. This deeply angers me. What should be our next step in your opinion and what do the officials at court think?"

Hsueh had been of the same opinion as those court officials who, whether they came from the north or south, all sympathized with the emperor on this matter and thought he should start with his own relatives. In the last couple of days their usual differences and factionalism had vanished. They all hoped that the emperor could raise a few million taels from the imperial relatives and other nobles, so that the campaign against the insurgents could be concluded successfully without having to demand further contributions from the officials. If the imperial relatives and nobles resisted and the scheme failed, the emperor could hardly turn to the officials for money. Naturally Hsueh would not speak frankly to the emperor and so raising his head he just said:

"All the officials at court know that the treasury is empty and that Your Majesty has been forced into this course of action. Yet since it is an affair concerning your imperial relatives, we as outsiders cannot express an opinion and it has not been discussed. In my opinion, however, it is imperative that this plan be carried out before we can achieve any further successes. I hope Your Majesty will be resolute and not find it necessary to consult your subjects."

The emperor nodded and asked a few more questions before dismissing Hsueh. Now aware that all the people of the capital supported and praised him for his wise decision, he felt more confident, and he decided to punish Li Kuo-jui severely if he dared to resist the order. Then fearing that some of the more influential imperial relatives would plead for the marquis and thus hinder his plan, he felt worried again. He decided not to return to the Hermitage and finish his meditation, but instead he walked out of the gate wearing an anxious

expression, shook his sleeves and returned to the palace by carriage.

After he had changed his clothes and taken his seat once again before his desk in the east pavilion, Wang Teh-hua came and presented him with a report from Li Kuo-jui and other documents. The emperor thought that after his second order, the marquis, despite his secret discussions with others, must be frightened and that he would write to apologize. If he would only admit his mistake and contribute even a hundred thousand taels as a gesture, the emperor planned to forgive him and even praise him for his action. He never dreamt that the marquis would complain in his reply about his poverty again or mention the empress dowager as his trump card. The marquis begged for a respite for some time on behalf of the empress dowager so that he could borrow thirty thousand taels from his relations as his contribution. Having read this, the emperor asked his chief eunuch:

"Did this report just arrive?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Have you read it?"

"I have, Your Majesty."

The emperor stamped his foot: "Damn! A mere thirty thousand taels! How dare he even speak of such a miserable sum?"

"It is an outrage."

"We'll see who is stronger, he or me!"

The emperor had lost his appetite because of this problem, but since he had planned to fast, there were only a dozen or so vegetarian dishes for supper and there was not the usual music played during the meal. In the quieter atmosphere, he was able to take a few bites. Just as he finished, a eunuch informed him that Liu Wen-ping, the Marquis of Hsinlo, and several other imperial relatives were seeking an audience and were waiting at the Tunghua Gate. Knowing that they had come to plead for Li Kuo-jui, he asked:

"Who are the others?"

"The prince consort Kung Yung-ku, the old earl Chang Kuo-chi, and the old prince consort Jan Hsing-jang."

The emperor thought to himself: "So Chou Kuei, the empress' father, has had the sense not to come with them." He did not wish

to see them, but as both the old earl and the old prince consort were senior in status and seldom came to the palace, he felt obliged to listen to what they had to say. So after a pause, he said:

"Ask them to wait for me in the Wenhua Hall."

Chapter 30

The affair of the Marquis of Wuching had serious repercussions among the imperial relatives. They felt alarmed and indignant. Those hereditary nobles whose ancestors had been ennobled for their services were also concerned for they knew that after the imperial relatives, their turn would be next. Many of the nobles were also connected by marriage to the imperial families and felt required to help in times of difficulty, and so they secretly supported the marquis and hoped that he would resist. As a result of secret meetings and discussions, it had been decided to send these few as representatives to intercede on behalf of the marquis. Most senior in status was the old prince consort, Jan Hsing-jang, the son-in-law of Emperor Wan-li; he was now over sixty and his hair and beard had turned white. Next in importance was Chang Kuo-chi, the Earl of Taikang, and the father of the late empress. Cautious by nature, he neither interfered in other people's affairs or mixed much with the other nobility, but he made an exception over this matter since he felt everyone was involved and he had been urged to help by both the marquis' family and the father of the empress. The emperor's hot temper and suspicious nature were well-known, and so they waited nervously for his arrival.

Arriving at the back of the Wenhua Hall, the emperor seated himself on his throne. His relatives had first kneeled by the path leading to the gate to welcome him and now they went to kowtow before him. Having bade them be seated, the emperor asked gravely the reason for their visit. They had previously arranged that the old prince consort, Jan, should speak first, but on seeing the emperor's stern expression, he kept silent. The Marquis of Hsinlo was a cousin of the emperor and he was a bold speaker, but since his dead sister had been Li Kuo-jui's daughter-in-law, he felt that he was too closely

related to the Li family to speak first. The youngest of the four was the prince consort, Kung, who was only twenty-five years old and a brother-in-law of the emperor. The emperor liked him and he was always very frank in his speech, so when he saw the others hesitating to be the first to speak, he stood up and said:

"We have come here on behalf of the Marquis of Wuching and we hope that Your Majesty will reconsider the matter for the sake of Empress Dowager Hsiao-ting. . . ."

At this the emperor interrupted him: "Since I have made my decision about the marquis, you need not waste your breath."

But the young prince consort repeated: "Your Majesty is very wise and all-knowing, and of course as this is Your Majesty's decision, we would not presume to advise against it. However, Empress Dowager Hsiao-ting. . . ."

The emperor snorted and said: "You keep on dragging her into it. The empire is not only mine, but hers as well, and our ancestors'. You may not understand the difficulties of government or my worries, but our ancestors will. Unless I had been absolutely forced into it, I would never have asked my relations for money."

The marquis, Liu Wen-ping, joined in: "We are well aware that Your Majesty is doing this for the state, but the present difficulties are such that even by borrowing money from relatives won't improve the situation. Besides, our government is not yet in such a critical state, and if Your Majesty presses Li Kuo-jui too hard, the spirit of the former empress dowager will. . . ."

Shaking his head the emperor interrupted him: "You don't understand the situation at all. It is desperate, though of course you must not breathe a word of this outside." As he gazed at them, the emperor's eyes grew moist and sighing he continued: "I have tried to govern the state in a spirit of filial piety. Surely you know this. The empress dowager was my great-grandmother and I would never have taken such an action had not the treasury been empty and no other way to raise money feasible. Throughout history there have been numerous cases of loyal families giving all their property to the state in times of emergency. The marquis as an imperial relation should be all the more ready to contribute money to set an exam-

ple. I'm not even asking him to do as much as people in ancient times."

At this the elderly prince consort, Jan, rose and spoke: "We fully realize the present difficulties, but imperial families are not as rich as before. With famines and unrest, their lands bring in little wealth. Yet since they are your relatives, they cannot reduce their expenditure too drastically. The marquis' family certainly was comparatively rich in the past, yet in the last few years their fortunes have dwindled."

The emperor smiled scornfully and said: "You are all my relatives and so naturally you have your own interests at heart. But don't you see that if the empire is at peace and the government secure, you will all benefit and have no complaints?"

Not daring to speak further, they returned to their seats with bowed heads. The emperor again looked at them and asked:

"Have you anything more to say?"

They stood up and looked at each other, but no one spoke. The young prince consort knew that the earl would keep silent and so he nudged the old prince consort with his elbow, but the latter did not respond. He therefore stepped forward and kneeling down said:

"Of course I cannot ask Your Majesty to pardon Li Kuo-jui, but I believe he has a real problem to find the two hundred thousand taels immediately. If Your Majesty could show him special favour and ask for less, then this matter could be concluded speedily."

The emperor had been reconsidering the matter many times and knew that he had demanded too much and that the marquis would have great difficulty in procuring it. But he did not wish to concede this too quickly. He wanted the marquis to admit his powerlessness before bargaining with him. So he just smiled grimly and said:

"No! Not one cent less. In the time of my grandfather, his family received much gold and silver from the palace treasury. Now that the government is in difficulty, I am only asking him to return what was taken." Turning to Jan, he asked: "You're the eldest. You remember what happened, don't you?"

The old prince consort bowed and answered: "When the prime minister, Chang Chu-cheng, died in the tenth year of the reign of

Emperor Wan-li, the emperor assumed control of the government. That was nearly sixty years ago. Despite the rumours that the empress dowager often gave expensive gifts to the Li family, it is my humble opinion that even if such stories are true, it must have occurred before the prime minister died. But sixty years have passed, so the riches will have depreciated."

"Nonsense! On the contrary when you add sixty years of interest, the amount should be more." The emperor smiled and continued: "The Li family asked you to come here on behalf of the marquis and though I have not agreed with your plea, yet you have done your best. Now I am very tired. Many things trouble me, but I won't speak of them. Just leave now."

They kowtowed to the emperor and then withdrew in silence. As they went out of the Wenhua Gate, a eunuch came after them with the order that the young prince consort should return to the hall. The others not daring to leave remained waiting to be summoned. They were surprised by this sudden development, Jan and Chang exchanging looks of satisfaction, assuming that the emperor had changed his mind and that the marquis' case was still hopeful.

The emperor had left his seat and was pacing about looking harassed and worried. On seeing Kung enter, he went to the middle of the hall, his back to the desk, facing south. His expression was extremely grave. Kung kowtowed and waited prostrate for the emperor to speak, very uneasy but a little hopeful. After a while, the emperor asked his brother-in-law:

"What kind of complaints are my imperial relatives making over this affair?"

The young prince consort in alarm kowtowed again and replied: "None against Your Majesty."

"Rubbish! Impossible!" After a pause the emperor continued: "During Emperor Wan-li's reign they often received gifts, and in the first years of mine, though times had changed, still I gave them many presents each year. Now I am trying to borrow from them. Of course there must be complaints!"

Kung Yung-ku had actually heard many complaints about the many princes of the imperial family who lived in different cities, such as

the Prince of Tsin in Taiyuan, the Prince of Chin in Sian, the Prince of Lu in Weihui, the Prince of Chou in Kaifeng, the Prince of Fu in Loyang, the Prince of Shu in Chengtu and the Prince of Chu in Wu-chang, just to mention a few. Each of these could afford to give several million taels, or at least a few hundred thousand, so why did the emperor not ask them? If three or four of these made contributions, it would be sufficient to pay the army for a whole year. But the emperor was partial to members of his own family and ignored their vast wealth, only wishing to extract money from his other relatives. Kung agreed with these complaints, but he knew that the emperor was very opinionated and though he was a close relative and in favour with the emperor, he did not dare tell him what others had said behind his back. Kowtowing, he remained silent.

When the emperor saw that his brother-in-law would not speak, he dismissed him and with a heavy heart left the hall and returned in his carriage to the palace.

It was already midnight and the drum-tower had sounded the third watch, but the emperor lay on his couch preoccupied with worry over the affair of the marquis. He hoped that after he had flatly refused to consider the request, the marquis would not remain intransigent. If Li Kuo-ju would send him a note of apology the next day and offer to contribute a hundred thousand taels, he would be lenient and pardon him. Also as the empress' birthday was approaching, he wanted to settle the matter before that date, otherwise everyone would be upset and in no mood to celebrate the occasion.

When the marquis learned that those imperial relatives who had interceded for him had failed, he knew that he had offended the emperor and felt that even if he offered to give some tens of thousands of taels, it would not be sufficient. He had already spent thirty thousand taels in the last few days bribing the emperor's chief eunuchs, and other minor ones had asked him for money also. He had thus frittered away nearly fifty thousand taels and not one had reached the emperor. Worried, he discussed this secretly with his trusted protégés and decided to write again pleading with the emperor and promising to contribute forty thousand taels, but not more. Since

he was the grand-nephew of the empress dowager and the emperor's uncle, and since he had never committed any crimes, it seemed to him unfair for the emperor to ask him for a large sum of money without good reason, and if he did not comply, it could hardly be regarded as a criminal offence. Some of the other imperial relatives urged him to procrastinate while they tried to persuade the empress and favourite concubine, Tien, to speak on his behalf to the emperor. If either of these ladies would agree, the situation would undoubtedly improve.

Day after day the emperor sent eunuchs to harass the marquis to produce two hundred thousand taels, but the latter only complained of his own poverty. The emperor's anger increased until he sent an ultimatum demanding four hundred thousand taels from the marquis within ten days. The emperor's rage and wild demand so frightened the marquis that he sent messengers to consult secretly again with the other imperial relatives. They felt that the emperor must be very frustrated and desperate, but as it was only ten days till the empress' birthday, they encouraged the marquis to stand his ground till then, when the empress could plead on his behalf and he would be pardoned. Some suggested that the marquis should sell some of his properties publicly to attract attention. Then his family servants began to put on display in the street various kinds of furniture, clothes, trinkets, calligraphy, paintings and other curios. Anything which could be sold was brought out and marked with a price. After a couple of days they even dismantled part of the house and wooden arches, filling two whole streets with building material. On these items they stuck a piece of red paper, on which was inscribed: "Since, by imperial order, this family has been told to lend money to the government by a certain date, money is urgently required and hence all these items are being sold cheaply. Buy them quickly if you want them." Nothing like this had ever happened in Peking before and it caused a sensation. The whole city was in an uproar as every day crowds of people would congregate to watch the fun as if going to a country fair. But nobody dared to buy anything in case they got involved in the affair. The action of the marquis roused much comment. Some felt that he was deliberately casting aspersions on the emperor while really trying to resist the order. Others felt

that the emperor had acted too harshly, since when the marquis had found it difficult to produce two hundred thousand taels the emperor had doubled his demands, and so the marquis had been forced to take such a drastic step. One morning, by the Taming Gate, on Chessboard Street and East and West Changan Boulevard, there appeared some posters praising the emperor as the wisest of sovereigns, saying that his action was just what the people wanted. The writer remained anonymous.

All the gossip was reported to the palace by Tsao Hua-chun, the eunuch in charge of the East Bureau, and the emperor was enraged. He immediately issued an order that Li Kuo-jui should be stripped of his hereditary title, arrested, and forced to pay four hundred thousand taels. The street posters at first encouraged the emperor to fight his relatives, but on the following day he heard that there had been some criticism of his conduct. He at once ordered the East Bureau and Imperial Police to forbid the citizens to gossip about state affairs or paste up anonymous posters, on pain of severe penalties.

The emperor had hoped that the affair would be satisfactorily concluded before the empress' birthday, but having failed he was still in a quandary about what to do with the marquis. Although he felt he had to see the matter through to the end, he regretted that it had come to this. With Li Kuo-jui in jail, he felt there was nothing more he could do, so he summoned his chief minister Hsueh and asked him, not bothering to conceal his own anxiety:

"Since Li Kuo-jui has resisted so stubbornly my plan to borrow money from my imperial relatives, it cannot be easily carried out. I never thought it would be so difficult to raise money. What do you suggest now?"

Hsueh objected to the reckless way in which the emperor had pursued this affair, but he could not say so frankly. He knew that the other imperial relatives and nobles were all secretly planning to resist the emperor and he feared that if the situation suddenly changed he might find himself in bad trouble. Kneeling on the ground he therefore answered in an ambiguous manner:

"Li Kuo-jui was very wrong to behave as he did; yet he is a grand-nephew of Empress Dowager Hsiao-ting and thus not like ordinary

men. I dare not presume to propose to Your Majesty how you should proceed with him."

This annoyed the emperor, but he did not show his anger. Instead, testing his minister's honesty, he asked with a smile:

"And how did you pass the evening at your home last night?"

Surprised, Hsueh's heart beat faster. If he spoke the truth, the emperor might reprimand him saying: "So! You are the chief minister, above all other officials, and should be the most concerned about the serious famines and government problems and work day and night. Yet you find the time to enjoy yourself, drinking with your concubines and playing chess with your protégés late at night." Hsueh also knew that spies from the East Bureau often found out about people's private affairs and reported them to the palace. It seemed likely that the emperor knew already about his activities the previous night and so if he lied to him, then he could be charged with deceiving his sovereign. Swiftly assessing the pros and cons of the situation, he kowtowed and reported:

"Your unworthy and humble subject has been most remiss. I have not worked hard enough to relieve Your Majesty of his cares of state. Instead, last night I sat drinking with members of my family and playing chess with my protégés. That was all that I did."

"What about the two chess games you won with your knight?"

"Yes, Your Majesty, I was lucky in both games."

The emperor's anger was assuaged, satisfied that what Hsueh had said corresponded exactly with the report he had received from Tsao Hua-chun, the eunuch in charge of the East Bureau. Smiling, he nodded:

"You have not lied to me. You are a minister deserving of my trust."

Hsueh withdrew from the palace, but the emperor remained worried as he had noticed that his trusted eunuchs Wang and Tsao seemed to be working with less enthusiasm in the previous couple of days. Perhaps they had been bribed by the imperial relatives, but there was no proof. Suspecting this, the emperor swore to himself:

"Damn it! Is there no one I can trust?"

At this moment Tsao arrived to deliver his daily report to the

emperor about what was happening in the capital, including citizens' private business. Recently he had accepted large bribes from the marquis and had been asked by various noble families to put in a good word on his behalf to the emperor. So now he reported frankly to the emperor that all of the imperial relatives, nobles and other gentry in the capital were very worried over the affair of the marquis. He even hinted that Li Kuo-jui was not as wealthy as had been supposed.

This report made the emperor even more suspicious. Smiling he said nothing but looked straight into Tsao's eyes, while Tsao tried to avoid his gaze by lowering his head. The eunuch felt uneasy and broke out in a cold sweat all over his back. Although he was in charge of the East Bureau which wielded vast power and was feared by all, yet before the emperor he was a mere slave who could be arrested at any time. He was terrified lest the emperor begin to have doubts about him. After a while the emperor suddenly asked:

"Friend Tsao, are you making money these days?"

Turning pale with fright, Tsao fell on his knees and kowtowed repeatedly, saying: "I have always been most scrupulous and never act unlawfully. Your Majesty knows this well. I have never done anything wrong. I do not understand to what Your Majesty is referring."

The emperor gave a scornful laugh and then after another long pause said slowly: "Just watch your step. Somebody has sent in a report saying that you have been making use of your position in the East Bureau to accept many bribes. There seems to be a lot of gossip about you in the city."

"But I am innocent, Your Majesty. Innocent!" Tsao repeated and knocked his head hard on the ground.

It pleased the emperor to see how frightened the man was. He thought to himself: "He is after all a family slave. They would never dare to be too disloyal." So as to encourage Tsao to be more loyal, he said in a gentler tone:

"Of course I do not suspect you, but you must be more careful in future. If there should be any evidence of your guilt, I won't be able to save you."

"I'd rather die than act in an improper way."

"Then I'm quite satisfied that you won't play any of your tricks behind my back."

"Never! I would not dare do so."

"How is Li Kuo-jui getting on in jail?"

The marquis was in fact ill and Tsao had wanted to report this, but now he feared to do so lest the emperor think he was pleading for him. Instead he said:

"He is afraid and weeps and sighs all the time. I do not know anything else at present."

"You and Wu Meng-ming must force him to hand over the money. Don't be lenient."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Despite the marquis' imprisonment, his trusted men and some imperial relatives who were closest to him were still active following an agreed plan. They knew that if Hsueh had not supported the idea, the emperor would not have dared to implement his scheme. They also had heard that two months earlier, the emperor had summoned Hsueh to the Wenhua Hall to discuss affairs of state. When the emperor had said that the government officials were all greedy for money and accepting bribes, Hsueh had replied: "If the East Bureau and Imperial Police were in honest hands, the government officials would not behave like that." Standing nearby was Wang Teh-hua, the eunuch who used to be in charge of the East Bureau but had now been transferred to take charge of the imperial seal, and Wang was frightened. Since that day, both Wang and Tsao had determined to get rid of Hsueh. The imperial relatives decided to make use of these two powerful eunuchs to remove Hsueh, so that the emperor would not have support from another chief minister for his plan. At the same time they were also asking the Chou family of the empress and the Tien family of the favourite concubine to persuade the empress and imperial concubine respectively to help. Since the empress was both dignified and aloof, they could not pass on the message via her eunuchs, but first had to bribe the eunuchs in Chengchien Palace where the favourite concubine lived.

Recently the imperial concubine's father, Tien Hung-yu, had been sending his steward with gifts to the chief eunuch of the Chengchien Palace, asking him to persuade his daughter to plead on behalf of the marquis. Li Kuo-jui's family had also sent several bribes to this eunuch. The imperial concubine knew that the emperor detested any intercession from court ladies for outsiders, yet since her father had asked repeatedly through the chief eunuch, she found it difficult to refuse. She felt herself in a quandary. The night before, her family had again sent her four presents. The first was a roll of paper made on the orders of the last king of Southern Tang. Next was a Sung-dynasty rubbing of Wang Hsi-chih's calligraphy *On the Orchid Pavilion*. Third was a Tuan inkstone carved with two dragons playing with a pearl, which had belonged to the Emperor Hui-tsung of the Sung Dynasty. Last was a string of pearls. These presents pleased her very much. The paper was rare even during the Northern Sung period and famous writers like Ouyang Hsiu and Mei Sheng-yu had written poems in its praise. Now, seven hundred years later, it was almost impossible to obtain, yet her family had found some for her painting. The rubbing of the calligraphy pleased her because, though not so difficult to acquire, she had been practising this kind of calligraphy for two years and liked to collect good rubbings. The Tuan inkstone was purple with a round greenish-yellow "eye" in the middle. Two dragons carved in relief were turning their heads towards this "eye" as if playing with a pearl. On the back was an inscription in the Emperor Hui-tsung's calligraphy, dated, "The second year of the reign of Hsuan-ho in the Sung Dynasty". The beads consisted of a hundred and eight pearls, strung with a golden thread. The centre pearl, large as a small date and with a fine lustre, had on either side of it four gleaming black ones. Recently she had become interested in Buddhism, feeling that life was an illusion and fate arbitrary. In the emperor's absence, she would sometimes practise yoga and recite passages from the *Saddharma Pundarika Sutra*. The pearls pleased her since she could use them in her meditation. What she did not realize was that all four objects had belonged to the marquis' family though presented to her in her father's name. Each gift was separately encased in silk attached to which were pieces

of red paper dusted with gold, bearing the words: "For the appreciation of Your Highness" and "Presented by your respectful subject Tien Hung-yu". She deeply appreciated the presents and touched them fondly, longing once again to see her father. Her mother had died two years before, while she had not seen her father for twelve years. The rules of the Ming imperial house were very strict, with no provisions for the empress or imperial concubines to visit their families. She had heard that after she became the emperor's favourite concubine, her parents had moved to a large mansion in the east city. At their gate were two huge iron lions, so the place became known as Iron Lions Lane. Apart from seeing her mother once, she had never seen any member of her family. When her family sent her presents, they had to be delivered at the Tunghua Gate and not at her palace. Her initial joy on seeing these gifts sent by her father turned to sadness as tears filled her eyes.

She was alone, without maids or eunuchs in attendance, when the chief eunuch of the palace, Wu Hsiang, entered and bowing whispered:

"Your Highness, your father has just sent his steward Chen to report that the marquis is seriously ill in jail and that his life is in danger. He begs you to try and help him."

She did not answer, but thought for a while. Then finding the request too difficult, she just made a gesture dismissing Wu. Unable to decide whether or not to help the marquis, she practised writing twenty characters in the style of Wang Hsi-chih's calligraphy, but she was not in the mood and put down her brush. She had gone outside to the corridor to play with her parrot and teach it to speak when a call was heard:

"His Majesty has come!"

At this all the palace maids and eunuchs in the front courtyard rushed forward to kneel on either side of the passage to welcome the emperor in silence. Having no time to change her clothes, the imperial concubine hurried to the gate to welcome him, and escorted by her he entered looking at all the flowers in the courtyard. Suddenly there was a loud announcement in the corridor: "His Majesty has come!" The emperor looked up and saw the red-beaked green parrot on its gilt stand. Laughing he turned to his concubine:

"Your palace is full of gaiety. Even your flowers and birds are intelligent. I love to come here when I have some leisure."

She smiled and replied: "Your Majesty has been most generous. It is not only your slave who will never forget this, but also the flowers and birds like to show their gratitude."

As she finished speaking, the parrot cried out again: "We thank Your Majesty." Laughing loudly, the emperor momentarily forgot his troubles.

He not only liked his concubine, but also the way she had arranged her palace.

This was unique. She had disliked living in large halls and so had converted them into smaller rooms with zigzagging vermilion corridors and trellis screens. The furniture was elegant, brought from Yangchow, and there were novelties such as a chiming wall-clock made in the West. Feeling the palace lamps were too dim, she removed a third of the golden wire case around them and replaced it with thin silk, which made them much brighter. A clever woman, she tried by every means to retain the emperor's favour, so that whenever he visited her he would find the atmosphere pleasing. She was well aware that if she lost favour, all her happiness and that of her family would evaporate. Peking was sometimes without fruit from the south, because of the wars making transportation difficult. But this day she had on her table a large agate plate covered with oranges and tangerines. In one corner of her room a gold incense-burner, carved in the shape of a lion, was sitting on a black-lacquered stand, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, green jade and red agate. The scent from the lion's mouth filled the room with fragrance, and the emperor felt refreshed.

The emperor always felt happier when he visited her palace, and she would arrange her room to please him. This time there was a miniature garden made by a Soochow artist placed on a desk at a window. The garden, set out on a red lhasing tray less than one foot in length, gave the impression of towering peaks, strange rocks and winding mountain paths. There was an ancient tree, a fountain, a half-concealed monastery and a pool of limpid water and white pebbles. Apart from the miniature garden, there was a Southern

Tang inkstone in the shape of a dragon's tail with an inscription by the Sung writer, Ouyang Hsiu. Beside this was a half-used stick of ink bearing a worn gilt inscription, written in the Cheng-teh period. By the inkstone was a Ju ware bowl of the Northern Sung Dynasty for washing brushes and a red porcelain brush-stand inlaid with jade. The inlaid design depicted the Sung poet Su Shih in a boat by the Red Cliff in the moonlight. Near these was a half-finished painting of a sprig of plum blossom, the paper having been made especially for the palace in the fifth year of the reign of Hsuan-teh. But it was the miniature garden on its ebony stand which particularly fascinated the emperor. Examining it carefully, he remarked with a smile:

"Wouldn't it be more fun if there were some fish in the pool?"

His concubine answered: "But there are some tiny ones which Your Majesty has not yet detected."

"Really?"

Smiling she tapped the tray lightly and a few fish darted out from their hiding-place under the rock behind some weeds. Bending down, the emperor looked at them and said: "Lovely!" Turning from the desk after a while, he gazed at the paintings on the wall, his hands clasped behind his back. His concubine often changed her paintings and on this day there were only two, both fine works by famous artists. One was called *The Cowherd Returning Home*, by Wang Mien; the other was *Hsiang Village* by Tang Yin. The latter was a small scroll six inches wide and six feet long. Painted in a light ink, the images were none the less vivid and lifelike. It showed some willows by the river, with a small bridge and a distant village barely glimpsed through the mist. Another great Ming artist, Shen Chou, had lived in Hsiang Village, and after his death his friend Tang Yin went there to mourn him. He was so overcome with grief at seeing the village without his old friend that he made the painting in the boat to express his feelings. The emperor felt moved by the painting and sat down on a chair, calling to a maid to bring a lute, on which he began to play *Visiting the Hermit*, which he had composed himself. He also asked his concubine to play the melody once more.

Since he seemed to be in a good mood, his concubine quietly told a maid to fetch her three children. Their arrival made the atmosphere

more cheerful. At that time, the emperor had five sons and two daughters. The crown prince and third son were born to the empress, while his second, fourth and fifth son were by his concubine. Her two eldest sons were aged nine and seven, and though they were well-mannered, their palace training had made them rather formal. Entering with their nurse, some maids and eunuchs, they timidly kneeled and kowtowed to their father and then stood at his side, remaining silent. The youngest boy was not yet five years old and so he was more lively and unaware of court etiquette. The emperor was particularly fond of him and would put him on his knees to play with him. Thus the little boy had no fear of his father. Carried in by his nurse after his brothers, when he saw his father he cried out in delight: "Long live . . . the emperor!" When his nurse put him down on the red carpet and told him to kowtow, he stumbled and fell, laughing, since to him it was only a game, not a ceremony. The emperor also laughed and put him on his knees and kissed his cheek.

For a while, the emperor forgot his worries, happy to be with his intelligent and beautiful concubine and youngest son. He had considered asking her to suggest to her father that he should lend the government a few tens of thousands of taels to ease their financial embarrassment, but now he decided to let the matter drop, lest it mar their happiness. His concubine, however, had decided to use this opportunity to plead for the marquis. Telling her maids to take her children away, she invited the emperor to play a few games of chess with her, knowing that after he had won a couple of games he would be in an even better mood and then she could put in her plea. After one game, however, the emperor pushed the board away and sighing said he wanted to return to his palace. His concubine immediately rose and asked in concern:

"You were feeling so happy a few moments ago, Your Majesty. What made you so suddenly sad?"

He sighed and replied: "People in ancient times often compared the political situation to a game of chess. Recently I've had many problems."

She smiled: "If we take that comparison, then in my humble opinion, the bandit Chang Hsien-chung has been routed, while Li

Tzu-cheng is being besieged. I think Your Majesty is winning this game, so why worry so much?"

He sighed once more: "The treasury is empty and I am having great difficulty in raising money. It worries me deeply and that is why playing chess with you cannot cheer me up."

"I heard that Your Majesty has asked the imperial relatives to help. Is that so?"

"Yes, but it is a long story. Li Kuo-jui was asked first, but he refused and so naturally the others won't volunteer."

"Since the Li family has received great generosity from the government in the past, they certainly ought to set a good example. Why not summon him to the palace and ask him in person. Surely he could not refuse Your Majesty then."

"I've already jailed him for stubbornly resisting my order."

She then ventured to say: "I hope Your Majesty will pardon me for my ignorance and stupidity, but perhaps this is not the best course of action. After all, the marquis is quite old and if he dies in jail, it will look bad and people may think Your Majesty is not kind to the old empress dowager."

Remaining silent, the emperor showed neither approval nor disapproval. In fact he felt her words contained some good sense, but as he had always forbidden the ladies to interfere in government affairs or even discuss them, he regretted having mentioned this to her. He rose, wanting to return to his palace, yet reluctant to leave. Pacing about the room, he once more admired her elegant arrangements. By chance he picked up a small mirror from her dressing-table, and found it finely made with a clear reflection. Turning it over, he read on the back an inscription engraved on a design of a single phoenix, which said:

Clear like the autumn water or a full moon,
My companion in my fragrant boudoir.
No shame, the blue phoenix's loneliness;
On opening this box, one seems to greet a friend.

Thinking over these lines, the emperor felt they were not auspicious. He turned his head and inquired: "Where did this mirror come from?"



Seeing his grave expression, his concubine felt afraid. She answered humbly: "It was found recently buried away in the palace storeroom. I thought it was quite ancient and elegantly made and so I asked them to have it polished, just as a trifle. From the design and inscription, I thought it might be late Tang Dynasty."

"The poem is not good. You'd better not use it in future."

She realized that he meant that it was a bad omen for a court lady. She took the ancient mirror from his hands and said meekly:

"It was foolish of me not to think carefully about the meaning of the poem. Your Majesty is very wise to have noticed it so quickly. I'll obey your order and not use it again."

Afraid lest he had hurt her feelings, before leaving he smiled and said: "Don't worry. I'll never make you lament your loneliness. You will be my favourite all your life."

She immediately kowtowed to thank him and replied: "I am very grateful to Your Majesty for your kindness and favour and I shall serve Your Majesty for ever as your slave."

Helping her to rise, he said: "You are not only beautiful and talented, but also very understanding, which is a rare quality. I always feel comforted in your company when hard pressed by affairs of state."

After she had seen him off, she still felt uneasy in case she had pleaded too strongly for the marquis and aroused the emperor's suspicions. Yet since he had loved her for many years, he might listen to her advice and not suspect anything. As in two days' time they would celebrate with joy and festivities the birthday of the empress, the emperor would be in a cheerful mood and might release the marquis from prison, so that they would have no further worries.

After his lunch-time nap, the emperor returned to his desk and affairs of state. Though his scheme was being thwarted, he took comfort in the loyalty and honesty of his chief minister Hsueh. Having sat in silence for a while, he was about to read the reports when his eunuchs Wang and Tsao entered. He looked at them and asked:

"Have you something to report?"

Tsao kowtowed and then standing said humbly: "I have some important news, but I hope Your Majesty will not be too angry."

Surprised, the emperor asked quickly: "What is it?"

Wang dismissed the attending maids and eunuchs with a gesture.

"Well, what is this important news?" the emperor asked Tsao, worried in case it might be some military disaster.

Tsao knelt down to report: "Your Majesty, I have made careful investigations and I am sorry to tell you that your chief minister Hsueh Kuo-kuan has betrayed your trust. I have irrefutable evidence that he has been accepting bribes and acting corruptly."

"So, Hsueh also accepted bribes?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. I have a reliable witness to prove that in the case of Shih Fan alone, Hsueh accepted fifty thousand taels of silver."

"Shih Fan? Who is he?"

"He was the government inspector in the Yangchow and Huaian Prefectures. He embezzled over three hundred thousand taels from penalties and the salt tax. He was promoted to be a vice-minister in charge of temple sacrifices and engaged in all kinds of corrupt activities in his home district. Then his case was reported by Academician Yang Shih-tung and Adviser Chang Kun-fang. . . ."

"But didn't he die in jail?" the emperor interjected.

"Your Majesty is quite correct. Dismissed from his post and jailed, he died before the case had been fully investigated. He took with him over a hundred thousand taels of silver, much of which was spent in bribes. Fifty thousand taels were deposited however in Hsueh's house and he embezzled the lot."

"You have definite proof of this?"

"Yes, from Shih Fan's servants and one of them, Liu Hsin, was the chief witness. He has written a report charging Hsueh with embezzling his master's money." So saying, Tsao took out the document from his pocket and presented it to the emperor adding: "Since this is a charge against your chief minister, Liu Hsin feared that the Ministry of Justice would not accept it and that he might get into trouble instead. So he sent it to the East Bureau and begged me to present it to Your Majesty."

After he had read the report, the emperor's face turned grim. Throwing it roughly on his desk, he stamped his foot and snarled through clenched teeth:

"Day and night I work hard to try and revive the fortunes of the state. I never suspected that my trusted officials, whether high or low, would all engage in corruption. Everyone in this court whatever their position embezzles money and breaks the law. Wang Teh-hua!"

The eunuch hastily knelt down.

The emperor ordered: "Write out this edict immediately. Have Hsueh Kuo-kuan dismissed from office pending further investigations."

"Yes, Your Majesty. It will be done at once."

The eunuch went straight to his office and wrote out the order. When the emperor read it, however, he changed his mind. He had felt like having Hsueh killed as a warning to others, but then he felt he should not act too rashly. First he should make investigations to find out how much Hsueh had taken and not simply accept the servant's accusation. Even if it was true, Shih Fan had been guilty and died in jail, and so to take his money was not as serious as accepting bribes and embezzling public funds. Then, as the affair of the marquis had upset all the government officials, to arrest the chief minister now would make everyone very tense. If, however, Hsueh was spared, then he and the other officials might be more willing to force the imperial relatives to make contributions. So he said to Wang:

"Make a new draft. Order Hsueh Kuo-kuan to answer this charge honestly."

After Wang and Tsao had withdrawn, the emperor started to read the other reports. One was from the marquis and he thought it must be an admission of his mistakes and an agreement to contribute the money. In it, however, the emperor was disappointed to read that the marquis again complained of having no money and of being seriously ill and begged the emperor to allow him to leave prison for medical treatment. Remembering his favourite concubine's hints that morning, the emperor felt this was too much of a coincidence. Mulling it over for a while, he grew enraged and swore to himself:

"So! She dared to communicate with people outside the palace and then had the nerve to plead for Li Kuo-ju!"

He took the report and tore it up, then cursing smashed a precious teacup on the ground, while the maids and eunuchs turned pale with

fright and dared not raise their eyes. In his fury he felt like having his concubine killed, but when he had calmed down a little he realized that this would frighten all his subjects and cause more gossip. She had many good qualities and had borne him three sons, the youngest of whom he loved especially. So he abandoned the idea of sentencing her to death. He remained silent for a while, then told a eunuch to order the East Bureau and Imperial Police to seal off all the marquis' properties, after which they would be confiscated by the state. But he was less certain how to deal with the imperial concubine. The empress' birthday would be in two days' time and though, like the previous year, he would not permit all the mistresses of noble families to pay her homage at court, yet within the palace there would be great festivity. All the palace ladies would go to congratulate her, and as the imperial concubine had the highest status, she should lead the others. Now this new development had spoilt that. The emperor finally chose to send his favorite concubine into seclusion first to see if she was at all contrite, before deciding on her fate. He then sent another eunuch to her palace to inform her, with orders that no news of this must leak out. After the eunuch had left, he muttered to himself in grief:

"I never thought she would speak for him too. So the war over the marquis has entered my own home." He shook his head and wept.

The imperial concubine had just sent a trusted eunuch with a message to her father that she had spoken on behalf of the marquis to the emperor, when a maid rushed in with the news that the emperor's eunuch, Chen, had come with an order for her. Then she heard him calling out: "Let Her Highness come and hear the imperial edict!" Expecting it to be concerned with the empress' birthday celebrations, she quickly put on her phoenix head-dress and, running out, knelt before the steps respectfully to hear it. The eunuch then read out the order:

"His Majesty has decreed that the imperial concubine Tien has taken advantage of the imperial favour she received by daring to communicate with people outside the palace. Since she has committed no serious crimes in the past, she is spared of more serious

punishment, but she is henceforth demoted and must remove to the Chihsiang Palace to repent her mistakes and she is not allowed to leave without His Majesty's order. The fifth son is still too young to leave his mother and so His Majesty kindly permits her to take the boy with her, but the other children will remain in their palace and will not be allowed to see her. . . ! Now thank His Majesty for his generosity!"

"I thank His Majesty for his generosity!" She kowtowed and repeated in a trembling voice.

She was dazed and numbed by this sudden punishment. Ashen-faced she could not rise till two of her maids came to her aid. They removed her phoenix head-dress and helped her to pack. Then leaving her two oldest sons in the palace, she left sobbing with her youngest child. Towards the end of the Ming Dynasty it was the fashion for court ladies to cover their hair with a piece of dark gauze as a protection against the spring winds and dust. As she left her palace, she asked her maid for such a scarf for her head. Her two oldest children tugged at her clothes and cried, but she gestured for two eunuchs to take them away. Ladies in the past who had been favourites of the emperor and then fallen were either banished into seclusion in another palace or killed. As she went out of the gate she knew there would be very little chance of ever returning to the east palace again. Covering her face with her sleeve, she wept bitter tears.

That evening, Wang Cheng-en, the eunuch in charge of the secretariat, came to the emperor's palace to report on something. Since there was no one within earshot, the emperor, knowing that he was always cautious and reliable, asked him in a low voice:

"What's happening among the imperial relatives at the moment? Does anyone show concern for the problems of state?"

The eunuch replied respectfully: "Every day I am here in the palace attending to Your Majesty's needs, so though I occasionally hear news from outside, my information is not necessarily accurate. Besides I do not like to speak incautiously about affairs of state."

"There is no one around to hear you. You can speak frankly to me."

Wang had been very worried about the emperor's increasing isolation and the chief eunuchs making the most out of the situation behind the emperor's back, without any shred of loyalty to him. He had been raised by a former chief eunuch, Wang An, who had since died, and was thus not closely connected to Wang Teh-hua. Since his promotion to the secretariat, he had worked under him and had to take care lest the latter suspect him. Naturally he had never dared mention this to the emperor. Seeing that no one was about, he knelt down and said:

"Since this affair involves the imperial relatives, if I say something wrong or improper, I beseech Your Majesty to forgive me. Few support Your Majesty, and most secretly side with the marquis. . . ."

At this the emperor interrupted: "But I heard that he was very arrogant and had antagonized many of the imperial relatives. Why should they be on his side and be in league with him secretly now?"

"The imperial relatives ought to feel concerned about the welfare of the state, but now that we are in difficulties, few are prepared to contribute any money. They are afraid that the marquis is only a beginning and that once he sets the example then others will have to follow suit. It is in their interests to secretly support him."

"So none wants to give money to the state!" At this the emperor felt angry. He asked again: "What gossip is there among those officials in the government?"

"I believe that those who are quite wealthy fear it may be their turn next, and so they would also like to see the plan fail. But those who are poorer feel that Your Majesty is correct, though they do not want to get involved and will try to remain aloof. None dare to voice their support for Your Majesty's plan in the government."

"But since these men have no money to spare, even if the wealthy officials had to make a donation, they wouldn't. So why are they so timid and unwilling to voice their opinions?"

"There is an old saying: Outsiders should not come between relatives. Although Li Kuo-ju is in prison, none wish to interfere."

Wanting their support, the emperor could not tell Wang Cheng-en this, but he felt their reticence was fear of his changing his mind. Thus he must crush the marquis quickly, or his own prestige would suffer and future plans would not be carried out so easily.

"Who in the palace has received bribes from the Li family?" he suddenly asked Wang.

Startled, Wang dared not answer truthfully as someone might be eavesdropping. Kowtowing he replied:

"No one I have heard of."

"You mean you've heard nothing, not even a rumour?"

"No, truthfully I have heard nothing."

The emperor was silent and then said: "I asked you because I know you will never cheat me, and I'm relieved to know that bribery hasn't been going on in the palace. That's all now."

Wang kowtowed and left the hall. Reaching a gilt bronze elephant, his sleeve was tugged by a eunuch named Wang Chih-hsin who was a trusted follower of Wang Teh-hua. In the lantern light he smiled and whispered:

"Brother, your answer to the emperor was very good and appropriate."

Wang Cheng-en was taken aback and his heart started to beat fast. Saying nothing he bowed and smiled and hastily went down the steps. Because of the troubled situation in the empire, urgent reports might arrive or the emperor might wish to summon someone in the night, so there was always a eunuch in the secretariat on duty in the Yanghsin Hall, like the ministers in the cabinet. Half-way there he met Wang Teh-hua approaching him, escorted by some eunuchs carrying glass lanterns. Wang Cheng-en waited respectfully at the side of the path with his young eunuch and, with his hands clasped, bowed low and inquired:

"Still busy and not resting, sir?"

Wang Teh-hua replied: "The emperor is in a bad temper today and has punished his favourite concubine. I was afraid to go home in case he summoned me. Then the day after tomorrow will be the empress' birthday and there are many preparations to supervise."

"Yes, the situation is difficult and you have many other duties to attend to, sir."

"It's the same for everyone. What did His Majesty ask you just now?"

Not daring to hide the truth, Wang Cheng-en told him what had happened. Wang Teh-hua nodded and said in a low voice:

"His Majesty is in a murderous mood. We must be wary."

"Yes, sir."

Only after the chief eunuch had departed, did Wang Cheng-en proceed to his office. He had been twelve years old when he had entered the palace sixteen years ago. Palace eunuchs were always engaging in petty intrigues and trying to get the better of each other. It was easy to get into trouble. Walking towards the courtyard of the Yanghsin Hall, he privately congratulated himself for having spoken cautiously to the emperor and not revealing that both Wang and Tsao accepted bribes. Going down the steps, he missed one and nearly fell down.

The emperor felt some reassurance from Wang's answer about his eunuchs, but worries still plagued him over raising money for the army, the affair of the marquis, the dismissal of his favourite concubine, the charge against Hsueh, and the question of peace or war with the Manchus. . . . Leaving the hall, he went down the steps and paced about the courtyard by himself. There was nowhere that he wanted to go and he felt very lonely and sad. After a while, he dismissed all the maids and eunuchs save one who accompanied him to the empress' palace, carrying a lantern.

Because of the serious famines and unrest in the country and the grave financial crisis, the emperor had ordered ten days earlier that all the traditional ceremonies such as the noble ladies offering the empress their congratulations on her birthday and paying homage at court, and the sending of tributes and letters of congratulations should all be cancelled. After this edict had been issued, the mother of the empress, Lady Ting, had written two successive requests seeking special permission to come and offer her congratulations at the palace and see her daughter. The emperor had three days previously agreed to this with the stipulation that she should not bring any gifts. Now

that she was going to visit her daughter, he felt that they should not economize too strictly.

The palace of the empress had three gates: one at the east facing a street was called the Yunghsiang Gate; the western one also facing a street was known as the Tsengjui Gate; while the south gate was the main one and was named the Shunchen Gate. Arriving at the east gate, the emperor told the eunuchs not to announce his arrival and entered quietly. He intended surprising the empress and seeing what preparations were being made for the coming celebration. But as he crossed the courtyard and reached the main south gate he hesitated. The year before he had also cancelled the offering of congratulations by noble ladies, though outside the east and west gates and on the streets, three days before the occasion, gaudy arches had been constructed and in the evenings many fine lanterns decorated with jewels had been hung, creating a cheerful warm atmosphere. This year the arches, though colourful, were shabbier and there were fewer lanterns. Feeling suddenly depressed, he turned and went back to his own palace and sat before his desk laden with documents and reports.

A eunuch noticed that the emperor had not stated where he wished to spend the night and so according to custom, he took a silk casket and kneeled before the emperor, opening the lid to reveal a row of ivory tablets, each with the name of a different palace inscribed. The emperor would choose one to indicate where he wished to sleep that night and the eunuch would take the tablet to inform the particular imperial concubine to dress herself ready for the arrival of the emperor. The eunuch knelt for a long time before the emperor even glanced at him. Then he merely shook his head with disgust. Closing the lid, the eunuch rose and left timidly. The atmosphere in the palace seemed oppressive and tense. Another long dreary night had begun.

(To be continued)

Illustrated by Fan Tseng

Mao Tun

An Introduction to “Li Tzu-cheng — Prince Valiant”

Li Tzu-cheng (1606-1645) was the leader of a peasant rebellion towards the end of the Ming Dynasty. In an area of hundreds of miles, his insurgent army had fought with, been surrounded by and suffered great losses at the hands of superior government forces, but after each defeat he had still been able to mobilize new forces. Learning from these experiences and always waging a vigorous campaign, he finally succeeded in overthrowing the reactionary and corrupt Ming Dynasty, which only represented the interests of great landowners, bureaucrats and local despots.

After Emperor Tsung-chen, the last ruler of the Ming Dynasty, hanged himself on Coal Hill, the present-day Peking Chingshan Park, Li Tzu-cheng declared himself emperor, with the title of “Ta-shun”. Armies under the direction of the great landowners and bureaucrats remained, however, the most powerful being that under Wu San-

kuei, the general defending the Shanhaikuan Pass against the Manchus in the northeast. Prior to the overthrow of the Ming Dynasty, some important generals such as Hung Cheng-chou and Tsu Ta-shou, an uncle of Wu San-kuei, had already surrendered to the Manchus. The Manchus were formerly Nuchen tribesmen from the northeast, who at the beginning of the Ming Dynasty were still a small national minority among others and who migrated south to live under Ming protection. By the end of the Ming Dynasty they had become very powerful, establishing their own kingdom of Later Kin which was renamed Ching. During the reign of Emperor Tsung-chen, the Manchus frequently raided and plundered the area within the Shanhaikuan Pass. In 1638, the eleventh year of Emperor Tsung-chen's reign, the Manchus invaded and pillaged the outskirts of Peking and places to the south. The Manchus had demanded Wu San-kuei's surrender but he had hesitated before the fall of the Ming Dynasty. After its fall, as commander of the forces representing the great landowners and bureaucrats, he saw as his chief opponent not the Manchus who were ruled by slave-owning nobles, but the peasant forces under Li Tzu-cheng. Thus his was an army to reckon with. Surrendering to the Manchus, Wu San-kuei then led the vanguard of the invading forces in attacking Peking. Li Tzu-cheng, forced to flee the capital, retreated to Sian in Shensi Province. On the orders of the Manchus, Wu San-kuei pursued the peasant insurgents and Li Tzu-cheng was defeated and killed. Thus this mighty rebellion of the armed peasants ended in tragedy. The Manchus then destroyed all petty kingdoms south of the Yangtse set up by members of the Ming imperial house, thus uniting all China. This established the Ching Dynasty, the last feudal dynasty in Chinese history.

The novel, *Li Tzu-cheng—Prince Valiant*, is based on these historical facts, and even its fictitious episodes are not merely subjective imagination, but are based on probable events of the period. Of the three sections, "Battling South of the Pass", "In the Shanglo Mountains" and "Besieged in His Palace", the first, taken from Volume 1, Part 1, is fiction. The other two, taken from Volumes 1 and 2, Part 2, are a mixture of historical fact and fiction. This requires a more detailed analysis.

According to the author, Yao Hsueh-yin, he had wanted to write a historical novel as early as the beginning of the 1940's towards the end of the War of Resistance Against Japan (1937—1945). He was already a well-known writer of several best-sellers on the theme of the war of resistance. Living under Chiang Kai-shek's reactionary regime, with its rampant corruption and raging inflation, it was almost impossible for a writer to earn his living solely by writing. Despite teaching part-time at a university, he still could not make ends meet and so had to struggle for his existence, leaving no time for historical research or preparing material for this novel. It was only after Liberation, when the government made provisions for professional writers, that he was able to read widely the official histories, local histories, essays, poems and other documents of the period, amassing a vast amount of material. The Liberation also gave him the opportunity to meet with workers and peasants, and study Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought. An understanding of historical and dialectical materialism enabled him to analyse his historical data and comprehend the laws of historical development. He saw that the peasant insurgent movement during the Ming Dynasty was as inevitable as the dynasty's own collapse.

The historical records are numerous and diverse, those past writers being strongly influenced by feudal ideas. Their reports are bound to be distorted even to the extent of reversing the truth. Most were not eye-witness reports written on the spot, but based on hearsay. Thus it was necessary to sift the true from the false in order not to be purely subjective or choose material at random. This was especially necessary in the characterization.

For the revised edition of Part 1, the author wrote a long preface dealing succinctly with these problems. Many historians may not agree completely with his views, but his arguments are quite convincing, because of the depth of his research and his critical analysis from a historical and dialectical materialist standpoint.

Part 1 was first published in 1962. Most of Part 2 was finished before 1965, with certain sections added after 1972. A further year

was required to revise this second part. During the period of the "gang of four's" control over literature and their rigid anti-Marxist policies, the progress of this novel was seriously hampered, and the author found it difficult to finish the work. In October 1975, he wrote a letter to Chairman Mao, explaining his plan for the novel and the difficulties he had confronted. He expressed his fear that as he was growing old he might not be able to finish it, and he hoped that Chairman Mao would help him. Although Chairman Mao was occupied with affairs of state, he quickly ordered the authorities concerned to provide the author with all the facilities he needed. Thus Part 2 was revised and completed. Unfortunately, by the time the first two parts of this novel were published, Chairman Mao was no longer alive to see the book for which he had shown so much concern. This is the first long historical novel since the May Fourth Movement of 1919, and it will be in five parts of approximately three million words.

3

An important section in Part 1 is the episode describing the battles south of the Tungkuang Pass, in which Li Tzu-cheng and his famous officers are first introduced to the readers. A well-known poet at the beginning of the Ching Dynasty, Wu Mei-tsun, wrote an account of this campaign in his work *A Brief Account of the Suppression of Bandits*. Several other writers accepted his version, and it appeared in the official Ming biography of Tsao Pien-chiao, an important Ming general who had fought against the insurgents south of the Tungkuang Pass. Thus it seemed that the campaign was indeed a historical fact. Yet after carefully analysing all the conflicting versions, the author came to the conclusion that it was, on the contrary, pure fiction. He believed that while Li Tzu-cheng and his troops were in fact besieged by government forces, this did not occur in the Tungkuang area or on such a grand scale. On the other hand, he felt that to write about this popular legend as romanticized fiction was not only permissible but also a good idea. There had been a campaign but past historians had wrongly located and enlarged it. Such an episode

was not merely probable but was supported by the historical records. By means of this legend, the author was able early on to focus on Li Tzu-cheng and other insurgent leaders. In describing the fierce battles he showed their unity, courage and strategy, breaking through the enemy encirclements and preserving their main force to rise again. Although the peasant forces were almost crushed by government troops numerically ten times superior, yet there was no unity amongst the latter. The Ming generals were consumed by selfish ambitions and the soldiers were unwilling to die for their officers. Despite the numerical inferiority of the peasant forces, they were in fact the dynamic force that would propel history forward according to the laws of historical development. The emperor, his ministers, generals and the forces that they controlled only appeared very powerful. The interests of the corrupt and moribund landowners and bureaucrats they represented were opposing the progressive trend of history and were thus ultimately doomed to fail.

The campaign south of the Tungkuang Pass introduces this long novel, but the author had the complete story in mind. The one question posed by this section concerns what Li Tzu-cheng would do after his forces had been practically wiped out, and the answer is to be found in the second section, "In the Shanglo Mountains".

From a technical point of view, the writer begins the book by depicting the hero engaged in fierce armed combat, the highest form of class struggle. The scenes are spectacular and effective. Regarding characterization, the author portrays the fine qualities of the hero and his officers not by stating them, but by describing the events and their reactions to their critical situation. He shows how they assessed and learnt from this experience, maturing both in political understanding and military strategy, planning and preparing for further revolt.

The second episode shows Li Tzu-cheng maturing both politically and tactically. The events portraying this development of his character and that of other insurgent leaders are fictitious, but in such a historical situation they are highly possible. The situation for the peasant insurgents in this section was even more critical than before. Based in a very poor mountainous district, Li Tzu-cheng was faced

with various problems, such as feeding his men and relieving the local poor peasants so that they would not be forced to flee. They had to contend with government troops and local landlords' militias, as well as disease. The most difficult problem, however, was created by local bandits who had joined forces with the government troops and who then attempted to infiltrate Li Tzu-cheng's camp for the purpose of sabotage. Li Tzu-cheng had the difficult task of ascertaining who were really renegades and traitors, who were half-hearted in their support and who were temporarily deceived. Knowing whom to destroy, and whom to win over, he could succeed in isolating and exposing the worst elements. But this required time and the situation was desperate, calling for prompt action, as any delay would have made matters worse. Li Tzu-cheng's handling of these difficult matters reveals his unusual wisdom and determination as well as his qualities as a strategist. The readers witness Li Tzu-cheng's maturation in this episode.

4

These two sections describe scenes of war, but are approached differently. The first concentrates on breaking through the encirclement with little reference to strategy; the second concerns the defence of his base position and how to deploy a small force to defeat the enemy. In describing the battle scenes, the author has learnt from a rich Chinese literary tradition, such as *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, but has further developed it. In those days wars were fought mainly with weapons such as swords, daggers, spears, bows and arrows. While the government troops had an early prototype of the gun, the insurgents did not. Thus individual bravery and prowess in wielding a weapon could play a decisive part in winning a victory. In this novel combat between both the generals and the men are depicted as if in close-up, while at other times the whole battle is viewed from a long range. The arrangement of these two sections is well-planned. When the two insurgent groups, led by Li Tzu-cheng and Kao Kuei-ying, were trying to break through the encirclement, the author describes both in a lively manner. It is not easy to depict

the many battle scenes without repetition and in such a way as to capture the attention of the readers, but the author has succeeded in this.

In the second episode, "In the Shanglo Mountains", the warfare is portrayed in another fashion, battling against the government troops as well as local bandits. The author describes for example Liu Tsung-min's tactics in capturing the despotic landlord Sung Wen-fu. In the fifteen chapters, there is a carefully balanced mixture of action and drama, tension and calm. From the clash of swords and hoofs pounding across the earth, the sounds of battle raging are replaced by the notes of a flute and voices singing in the moonlight, a gentle breeze blowing. Scenes of high drama are interspersed with lyrical passages. The style may be simple at times but charming nonetheless.

The author introduces all the main heroic characters such as Li Tzu-cheng, Kao Kuei-ying, various officers and the women soldiers Hui-mei and Hui-ying in the first two sections. Li Tzu-cheng's character is gradually delineated so that finally the readers recognize him as an outstanding giant of a man. The author attempted to make the speech of the characters fit their personalities, which is no small achievement in a novel with hundreds of characters. In the third section, where there are conversations between the emperor and his chief ministers, their language is that of the court which is difficult to convey in translation in a foreign language.

5

In this issue of *Chinese Literature*, we are publishing the first section of "Besieged in His Palace", to be continued in two further issues. It describes the contradictions within the emperor's palace. The central figure is Emperor Tsung-chen, and through detailed descriptions, the author reveals the moribund and hopelessly corrupt nature of the ruling class three hundred years ago. He shows how the decline and fall of the dynasty was inevitable according to the laws of historical development. The emperor could only attempt to postpone the inevitable, but the deteriorating situation could not be saved.

The serious flaws in the emperor's character served to aggravate the complex situation, and his desperate attempts to improve the situation only deepened the contradictions and accelerated the final denouement. In this lies his tragedy.

All these complex struggles within the emperor's court are fact and here historical truth and art coincide completely.

Although the heroes in the novel are Li Tzu-cheng and the insurgent leaders to whose characterization the author has paid much attention, he has also concentrated on the emperor as their chief antagonist and representative of the great ruling Ming landowners and bureaucrats. To describe him superficially as an ordinary, self-indulgent ruler of a declining dynasty would not correspond to historical truth. Moreover, by carefully portraying this negative character the achievements of the heroes are heightened. Emperor Tsung-chen had in fact tried to stave off the collapse of his dynasty.

The selfishness of the emperor is clearly demonstrated in his attempts to borrow money from the imperial relatives and his unwillingness to ask the princes of the imperial house, or the families of his empress and his favourite concubine. Having made the decision to borrow money from the marquis, Li Kuo-jui, who belonged to a different family, the emperor, not wishing to assume responsibility for it, tried to manoeuvre his chief minister, Hsueh Kuo-kuan, into making the suggestion, so that should it turn out to be a fiasco, all the blame could be laid on Hsueh. The emperor's meanness and hypocrisy are evident, for if the plan had worked he would be praised, but if it failed then he would avoid the responsibility. Thus the complex, contradictory nature of the emperor is revealed as well as the corrupt behaviour of the imperial relatives and chief officials, who selfishly indulged in a life of luxury and attempted to discredit each other. Despite the dynasty's dire predicament, not one was willing to ameliorate the situation by offering money from his own pocket. The emperor at first only wanted to borrow a hundred thousand taels of silver from the marquis, who complained that he could not afford such an amount, while spending more in bribing the eunuchs in charge of the secret service and imperial police. In trying to save his prestige, the emperor then escalated the affair to an irrational pitch

by fighting the marquis to the end, only to lose in the end himself. These make fine touches of irony.

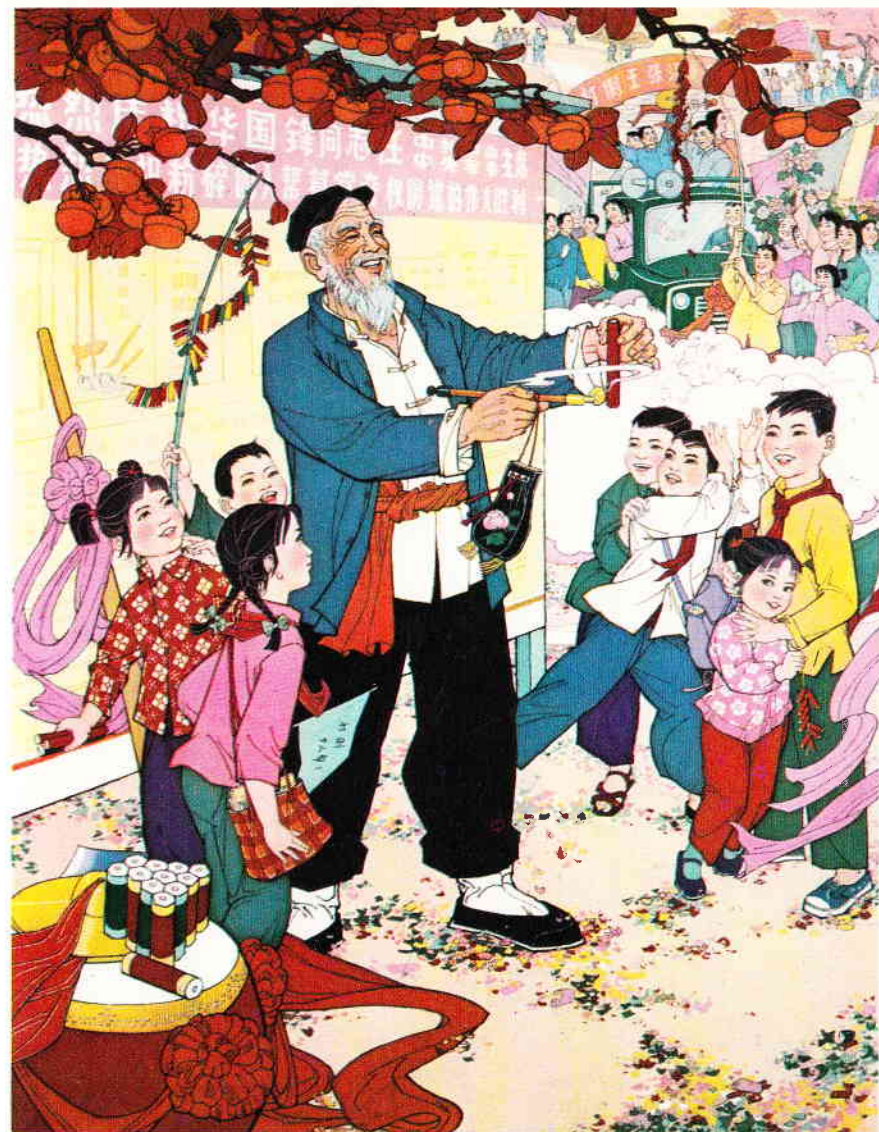
The emperor's anxiety over the campaign to crush the insurgents is convincingly portrayed. When his favourite concubines, Tien and Yuan, played chess with him, they purposely lost their games trying to raise his spirits. The emperor, unaware of this ruse, felt he was supremely intelligent. Because of his exalted position, the emperor thought he was above flattery, while in fact he was always susceptible to it. He thought he was intelligent, while actually he was being duped. Thus he stood isolated, a ridiculous and pathetic figure. Relying on his trusted eunuchs in charge of the intelligence services of the state to spy on his chief ministers, the emperor hinted of this to them so that they would not dare to intrigue and conspire. Yet it was these eunuchs who in the end deceived him, reporting only scraps of information about trivial matters, while keeping him ignorant of the conspiracies of his chief officials and imperial relatives. By depending on the well-organized spy system created by his ancestors to strengthen his declining rule, the emperor achieved the opposite of what he intended. Thus all the events and intrigues clearly demonstrate that the emperor was impotent to prevent the collapse of the Ming Dynasty, and all his actions only aided and hastened its destruction. It was an inevitable trend of history.

The author has written in his preface to the novel: "All the various facets of the emperor's character, his arrogance and conceit, his tendency to think himself intelligent while being duped, his despotic behaviour, his suspicious nature, his pessimism, his hysteria, are woven together to create this complex figure. He was both a product of the political system, the Ming feudal autocracy, and his environment. When in a pressing situation such as the peasant wars, these personality contradictions and traits become sharper and more apparent. All this must be described in a setting typical of the life of an emperor."

The section, "Besieged in His Palace", was written to express this idea of the author and he has achieved his aim.

The author also wished to depict a colourful panorama of Chinese feudal society and the inter-relationship of the different classes.

In the first two parts of his novel he has begun this and will continue in the next three parts. Chinese writers in the past have described the society at different levels, but until now — even after the May 4th Movement — no one has attempted to make an analysis of the feudal society from a viewpoint of historical and dialectical materialism, and present all these contradictions and complexities in a literary form. Yao Hsueh-yin is the first writer to attempt this.



Joy in My Heart

by Chi Hsueh-wen

The Weifang New-Year Woodblock Prints



扮巧祖誓学上女渔间收水湖滩又一播
 。打国为，大儿家，胸色光，一滩过

The Fisherman's Daughter Goes to University

by Pai Yi-ju

量添为驹生母放火生帮四打方传喜事公社，长蔓满葫
 。力社，双马。解产，人倒。四事社，儿架芦



Twin Colts Are Born

by Yang Ming-chih



Industrious People and Strong Hens



by Chang Pao-yuan and Yu Hsin-sheng



Prosperity by Lu Hsueh-chin



Singing While Fishing by Shih Pang-hua



A Courtyard During Spring Festival

The “Gang of Four’s” Attack on Progressive Literature and Art

Editors’ Note: Literary and art circles in China are currently refuting the theory of the “dictatorship of a black line in literature and art”. Many articles have pointed out that the crux of the fallacy is the denial of all achievements on the literary and art front in the seventeen years from the founding of New China in 1949 to 1966, the eve of the Cultural Revolution. Below we present an excerpt from an article recently published in *Renmin Ribao* (*People’s Daily*).

Collusion Between Lin Piao and Chiang Ching

Early in 1966, at a crucial juncture in China’s socialist revolution, a decisive battle was being waged between Chairman Mao’s revolutionary line and Liu Shao-chi’s revisionist line. Towards the end of January that year, Chiang Ching went to Soochow to intrigue with Lin Piao, who entrusted her with the task of calling a forum in Shanghai. At the forum Chiang Ching denounced literary and art circles and complained that since the founding of the People’s Republic in

1949 she had not been given any art troupes or allowed to produce any operas. By implication she attacked Premier Chou En-lai who had called for the revolutionization of literature and art, and for works with a national flavour and mass appeal. She said, "This is a slogan which the bourgeoisie could use too." She alleged that an "anti-Party and anti-socialist black line" had dominated the cultural field since the establishment of New China. "This black line has exercised dictatorship over me for the last seventeen years," she said. "We can't let this go on. It's high time now for us to exercise dictatorship over them!"

That was the origin of the theory of "the dictatorship of a black line in literature and art".

After the forum, Chiang Ching, Chen Po-ta and Chang Chun-chiao put their heads together in Shanghai to devise ways to use this theory to vilify working-class rule. Chen Po-ta proposed that the source of the "black line" should be traced back to the 1930's, and that it should be presented as the outgrowth of the literature and art of that period. He declared that they should also stress Chiang Ching's achievements in revolutionizing Peking opera, claiming that the new operas were the only true proletarian art. This would make it clear what to smash and what to boost. These arguments put forward by Chen Po-ta became the two "theoretical props" of the fallacy.

This formulation of the theory of the "black line" was acclaimed by Lin Piao as answering "many important questions concerning the cultural revolution in the period of socialism". Lin Piao, confident that he had control of the army, needed a confederate in the cultural field to build up his image for him. He would grasp the "gun", Chiang Ching the "pen". And she was only too eager to have his backing. So putting forward this theory was part of their political plot to seize power.

A Gross Distortion of History

The theory of the "dictatorship of a black line in literature and art" completely falsified the class struggles waged on this front in the

seventeen years since the founding of the People's Republic, making a vicious attack on Chairman Mao's revolutionary line and our new social system. Since the establishment of New China, though Liu Shao-chi's revisionist line had interfered with progress and sabotaged construction, it was time and again defeated and Chairman Mao's proletarian revolutionary line made steady headway, guiding our country from victory to victory. Throughout that period, Chairman Mao's revolutionary line occupied a dominant position in the field of literature and art.

In 1956, Chairman Mao personally led the struggles to criticize the film *The Life of Wu Hsun*, the unscientific study made by Hu Shih and his followers of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, and Hu Feng's counter-revolutionary clique. This strengthened the Communist Party's leadership of literature and art and confirmed that they should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers.

During the 1950's and early 1960's when our socialist revolution deepened and developed, there were repeated trials of strength between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and the struggle on the ideological front was especially complex. This period witnessed a great victory as well as serious interference on the literary and art front.

A great victory was won in the struggle against the Rightists in 1957, and Chairman Mao warmly endorsed its success in the field of literature and art. He pointed out that the year 1957 saw a thoroughgoing socialist revolution both on the ideological and political fronts throughout China. This dealt a telling blow at reactionary bourgeois ways of thinking, and enabled writers and artists to work more freely by smashing the fetters imposed on them by the old society, thus clearing the way for proletarian literature and art. This was something new in our history, and much work remained to be done to pave the way forward, as the old basis of reaction could not be swept away completely in a year. However, the road had been opened up and along it countless working-class writers and artists could now advance rapidly.

During that period, Chairman Mao put forward the policy of letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend and the creative method of combining revolutionary realism

with revolutionary romanticism. This marked an important development of Mao Tsetung Thought on literature and art, made an outstanding contribution to Marxist-Leninist theory, and had a far-reaching influence upon proletarian literature and art.

The serious interference was the retrogressive trend caused by Liu Shao-chi's revisionist line in 1961 and 1962. For a time some bad works of literature and art were produced, including literary theory as well as dramas and films. Indeed, certain people in these fields lost their bearings and made mistakes.

However, this adverse trend did not prevail. In 1963 and 1964, Chairman Mao issued two instructions concerning literature and art, and warned, **"Unless they remould themselves in real earnest, at some future date they are bound to become groups like the Hungarian Petofi Club."** While making a serious criticism of modern revisionism, Chairman Mao also showed his concern for those who had gone astray and his hope that they would redeem themselves. He affirmed, **"What has been achieved in the cinema, new poetry, folk-songs, the fine arts and the novel should not be underestimated. . . ."**

During those seventeen years our socialist literature and art flourished under the wise leadership of Chairman Mao and with the careful guidance of Premier Chou. Thus the theory of the "dictatorship of a black line" was in fact an attack on Chairman Mao and on Premier Chou who had faithfully carried out his instructions.

This theory put forward by Chiang Ching and her accomplices flaunted the banner of class struggle, yet they regarded proletarian dictatorship as bourgeois dictatorship and the great victory of socialism as the sway of a sinister revisionist line. This only goes to show that they were a gang opposed to the Party and to socialism, who used ultra-Left slogans to disguise their extreme Rightist manoeuvres.

"Smashing" and "Boosting"

The so-called two theoretical props that supported Chiang Ching's theory were Chen Po-ta's ideas of "smashing" and "boosting". He wanted to smash "the blind faith in the literature and art of the

1930's", and to boost the "revolution in Peking opera led by Chiang Ching".

China's socialist revolutionary literature and art did not drop down from the sky. The first salvos of the October Revolution brought Marxism to China and a completely new cultural force emerged. In spite of the reign of terror imposed by the Kuomintang reactionaries, progressive writers and artists headed by Lu Hsun in the thirties fought back under extremely hard conditions. They defeated the attempts to silence and suppress them, and their revolutionary movement made steady headway. It was in the course of these fierce struggles that Lu Hsun became the great standard-bearer of China's cultural revolution.

In 1941, Chairman Mao pointed out in *On New Democracy* that, after the May 4th Movement of 1919, **"a brand-new cultural force came into being in China"**. He said, **"This new force has made great strides in the domain of the social sciences and of the arts and letters, whether of philosophy, economics, political science, military science, history, literature or art (including the theatre, the cinema, music, sculpture and painting). For the last twenty years, wherever this new cultural force has directed its attack, a great revolution has taken place both in ideological content and in form (for example, in the written language). Its influence has been so great and its impact so powerful that it is invincible wherever it goes. The numbers it has rallied behind it have no parallel in Chinese history."**

The "gang of four" attacked Chairman Mao's estimate by completely negating the literature and art of the thirties. It is true that the Left-wing literary and art movement suffered set-backs owing to Wang Ming's erroneous line and the struggle was both fierce and complex, but this cannot be used to negate the main trend of the revolutionary literary and art movement with Lu Hsun as its standard-bearer.

Chiang Ching, Chen Po-ta, Chang Chun-chiao and their followers proclaimed themselves radicals, but in the early thirties they worked assiduously for the Kuomintang. Their theory of the "dictatorship of a black line in literature and art" made no mention of the attempts

by Chiang Kai-shek's reactionary regime to suppress progressive culture. Instead, it tried to nullify the revolutionary literature and art of the 1930's. This was a continuation of their old counter-revolutionary activities.

China's proletarian literature and art made great headway after the 1930's and especially after the publication of Chairman Mao's *Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art* in 1942. This Marxist-Leninist classic summed up the historical experience of the proletarian literary and art movement, enriched and developed Marxist-Leninist theory on literature and art and pointed out the correct orientation for revolutionary writers and artists. After Liberation, fresh progress was made in literature and art by adhering to the principle of serving the workers, peasants and soldiers. Chairman Mao's *Yenan Talks* provides important guide-lines on how to take over our cultural heritage and how to develop a new socialist culture. When Chiang Ching collaborated with Lin Piao to allege that China's literature and art from the 1930's to 1966 were dominated by a black line, this was a repudiation of the *Yenan Talks*.

At the same time they took the credit for the revolutionary modern Peking operas produced collectively by opera companies which were encouraged by Chairman Mao's concern and supervised by Premier Chou. They bragged that these "splendid" new operas were "superb models" which had "ushered in a new epoch in human history". In a word, they presented Chiang Ching as "the staunch standard-bearer of the revolution in literature and art".

In order to establish this "standard-bearer", they had of course to tamper with history. In January 1944, Chairman Mao pointed out in his *Letters to the Yen-an Peking Opera Theatre After Seeing "Driven to Join the Liangshan Mountain Rebels"*, "**... A new life is opening up for the old opera. . . . The initiative you have taken marks an epoch-making beginning in the revolutionization of the old opera.**" But the "gang of four" maintained that 1964, when Chiang Ching took credit for the reform of Peking opera, marked the true beginning of its revolutionization, opening up a new era for proletarian literature and art.

To boost Chiang Ching as "standard-bearer", they went so far as to declare, "After the establishment of the Paris Commune the proletariat failed to solve the problem of the orientation of literature and art. This problem was only solved in 1964 when we produced the revolutionary model theatrical works." Again, they stated categorically, "The hundred years and more from the *Internationale* to the model theatrical productions were a complete blank." This theory of "blankness" of theirs ignored not only our progressive literature and art from the May 4th Movement to the Yen-an Forum and of the first seventeen years of New China, but also the theories on literature and art and the works of Marx and Engels, the proletarian literature and art led by Lenin after the October Revolution as well as progressive culture throughout the world.

The Bankruptcy of the Counter-revolutionary Theory

More than a decade elapsed between Chiang Ching's initial collusion with Lin Piao and the downfall of her gang. As they escalated their plot to seize power, they applied their reactionary theory of the "dictatorship of a black line" to other fields as well, sabotaging scientific research, education and the economy until their final downfall.

After the "gang of four" had seized control of propaganda and culture, they branded many writers and artists as "black" and persecuted them, suppressing their works. Their fascist dictatorship in the cultural field was aimed at banning the proletarian literature and art produced with the encouragement of Chairman Mao. They assembled groups of hack writers who put forward a whole series of fallacious arguments, advocating the theory of the "domination of one school" to oppose the policy of letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend. As a substitute for the creative method of combining revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism, they advanced the theory of "three prominences". This meant giving prominence to positive rather than negative characters; among positive characters giving prominence to heroes; and among heroes giving prominence to the main hero. To sabotage socialist literature

and art, they opposed the idea that literature and art should convey ideas through concrete images.

In July 1975, Chairman Mao pointed out indignantly that the hundred flowers had disappeared from the cultural scene, which lacked richness and variety. Time and again he emphasized that the Party's policy concerning literature and art must be adjusted. The "gang of four" tried to keep these instructions quiet while they pressed forward with their schemes to usurp Party and state power. They called for an attack on "capitalist-roaders", whom they equated with virtually all old revolutionaries. And in support of this theory they produced many provocative films and dramas, some of the most insidious among them being *Counter-attack*, *Gala Celebrations*, *The Cheerful Hsiaoliang River*, *Charging Forward* and *The Ever-lasting Mission*.

Formulating the theory of the "dictatorship of a black line in literature and art", exercising reactionary control in the cultural field, and producing large numbers of subversive works were the three counter-revolutionary stages of the gang's conspiracy to subvert the dictatorship of the proletariat in the field of literature and art.

The Weifang New-Year Woodblock Prints

Wherever you go in the Chinese countryside, either on the plains or in the mountain areas, at the time of the Spring Festival,* you will see all kinds of New-Year prints everywhere on display, outside and inside every home. During the Spring Festival, villagers in a holiday mood visit their relatives and neighbours and see these prints, commenting on them as if at an art exhibition. The prints remain posted up until replaced by new ones the following year. As well as giving aesthetic pleasure to the peasants, they also teach and educate them.

Weifang, in Shantung Province, is one of the three main centres in China producing large quantities of New-Year woodblock prints, the other two being Yangliuching in Hopei and Taohuawu in Kiangsu. The Weifang New-Year prints originated from the village of Yang-

*The Chinese New Year according to the lunar calendar, when all factories, government organizations and schools have three days' holiday for families to gather together.



Catching Sparrows

chiafu in Wehsien County. They were first brought from Yangliuching near Tientsin in the middle of the seventeenth century. At first the artists in Yangchiafu simply reproduced the Yangliuching prints, but later they developed their own method of making these woodblock prints instead of the Yangliuching technique of half-printing and half-painting. The simple colours they used evolved into a style unique to the village of Yangchiafu, and at its peak this tiny village sold tens of millions of prints each year.

The Weifang New-Year prints serve various purposes. They are pasted on the courtyard gate, in this case two symmetrical ones, or on doors of rooms, on the wall screening the courtyard from outside view, on windows, over stoves, over *kang* beds, in stables or pigsties, and on carts. At the Spring Festival the peasants festoon their villages with them, creating a joyful festive atmosphere.

Reflecting the life, hopes and ideals of the peasants, these New-Year prints express their desire for a rich harvest. In one picture, *A Surplus Every Year*, there are lotus and goldfish, since lotus has a

similar pronunciation to the word meaning "continuous", and fish "surplus". *Happiness All the Year Round*, a picture of flowers throughout the seasons, depicts their wishes for a prosperous life. *A Good Start*, a picture of a cock and the dawn, symbolizes the trader's wish for good business. Traditional New-Year prints, like *Busy Men* and *Busy Women*, reflect the peasants' love of work, with scenes of men farming and women weaving.

The Weifang New-Year prints often adopt the technique of romantic exaggeration. Lotus flowers, for example, are extremely large, or emphasis is placed on the human face with special attention paid to the eyes and eyebrows.

The composition of these traditional pictures is a combination of fullness and space. The subject is offset by a clear background. This characteristic is derived from the woodblock printing process. By using colours such as red, green, yellow, purple and rose, and having warm colours like yellow and red as the main ones, the pictures seem ablaze with joy. This is another important feature of the Weifang New-Year prints.

After Liberation, the Chinese Communist Party and the government paid great attention to this ancient folk art form. Since 1951, artists

Busy Men



have gone to Yangchiafu, Weihsien County, to collect and reform, with the help of the folk artists, the traditional New-Year prints. They have succeeded in creating prints reflecting the new life and new thinking of the people since Liberation, which are well-received by the masses.

The recent Weifang New-Year Picture Exhibition that was shown in the China Art Gallery, Peking, demonstrated these achievements.

Visitors on entering the exhibition hall first saw a model of a courtyard, typical of villages in north China. There were two red lanterns hanging at the gate and colourful New-Year prints were pasted on the black-lacquered gate. On the screen wall behind the gate was also pasted a picture. In the courtyard, plum trees were in blossom. The room was covered with many New-Year prints.

On display in the east and west rooms were 126 prints, which were vivid and colourful, conveying a feeling of joy and happiness.

The prints show the great changes and achievements in the countryside during the past year since the fall of the "gang of four" in October 1976. They depict rich harvests of grain and cotton, prosperity in agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, side occupations and fishing, the increase in agricultural mechanization and irrigation, the improvement of public health and the cultural life of the peasants. They also reflect their confidence and hard work.

Joy in My Heart, by Chi Hsueh-wen, is a lively picture showing the happiness of the peasants throughout the country at the news of the victory over the "gang of four". An old man is lighting firecrackers with his pipe, watched by some happy children. There is also a group beside a loudspeaker van and a wall-poster reflecting the events. From the ripe persimmons on the tree, we can see that the time is October. The effect is natural and lively.

The Fisherman's Daughter Goes to University, a print by Pai Yi-ju, shows a girl being taken to university by her sister on a small boat across the lake. Her smiling face expresses her joy and hopes for the future. The lotus flowers in blossom, the kingfisher in flight, the ducks and the geese, all help to enhance her happiness. There is an inscription of a poem below the picture which reads:

As I row on and on, I drink in
The beauty of the lake and water.
At university I'll work for my country,
Says the fisherman's daughter.

This is another good example of the Weifang tradition.

Making Revolution Is Glorious is a door picture by Lu Hsueh-chin, showing how the Chinese people are learning from Taching in industry and Tachai in agriculture. The artist has made an innovation with his use of bold lines, strong colours and sturdy figures.

The Reservoir Is Good is done in the traditional style and colouring. *Twin Colts Are Born*, by the veteran folk artist Yang Ming-chih, is elegant and simple. Other prints, such as *Giving Dates to Our Dear Ones* or *Chickens*, reflect life in the villages in a new way. They are different from ordinary posters, while employing some of the same techniques.

Owing to the leadership and concern of the Party, the Weifang New-Year prints are now in a new stage of development. This exhibition displayed for the first time a variety of high-quality woodblock prints on many different topics by a large number of artists. They showed the new vigour and bright future of this ancient folk art.

Peking Theatres Honour Premier Chou's 80th Birthday

Both professional and amateur writers and artists gave various performances in honour of the 80th birthday of the late Premier Chou. Most of the plays, concerts, dance dramas, song and poetry recitals were new productions. *The Newsboys*, a six-act children's play produced collectively by the China Drama Troupe, is set against the background of the 1941 southern Anhwei incident, showing how Comrade Chou En-lai fought against the Kuomintang reactionaries. The China Dance-Drama Troupe and the Peking School of Dancing produced jointly a very unusual dance drama, *Green Pine and Red Cliff*. The China Song and Dance Troupe performed two items. One, *The Memorable Water-sprinkling Festival*, is a dance depicting Premier Chou with the Tai national minority people during the festival. The second is a one-act opera, *Premier Chou Came to Our House*, depicting Comrade Chou En-lai in the 1942 Yen-an campaign to increase agricultural production. A peasant family recalls how the premier worked with them, cultivating the wasteland and spinning cotton. Many poets and musicians expressed their deep love for the premier in their works. At an evening recital organized by the monthly magazine, *Poetry*, noted poets and artists recited or sang poems written by Chou En-lai in his youth. These included his poems, *I Turn to Go East*, *Impromptu Lines on a Spring Day* and *Parting in Life*.

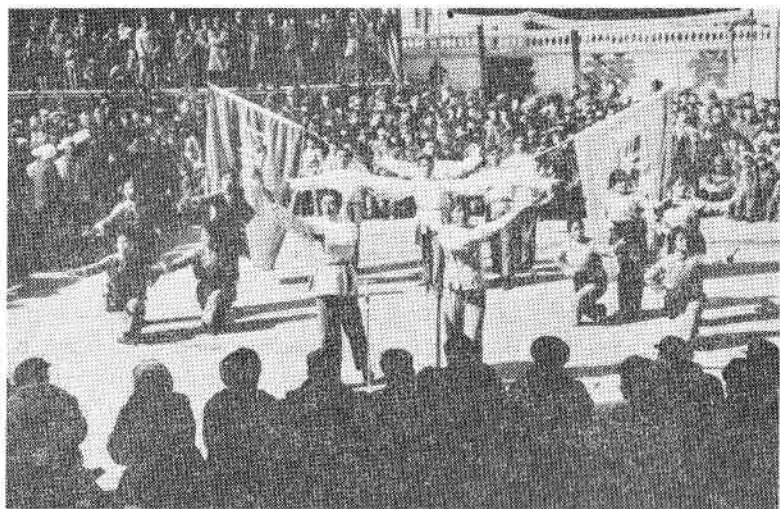
Performances were also sponsored by the Peking Municipal Revolutionary Committee and the art troupes of Peking's People's Liberation Army units, as well as special programmes arranged by Peking Television. All of these were enjoyed by the people.

Chinese Arts and Crafts Exhibition Opens in Peking

A national exhibition of arts and crafts opened recently in Peking and will last for four months. The display of paintings, carvings, embroidery, weaving, ceramics, glassware, metalware, lacquerware, folk arts and crafts, palace lanterns and furniture has a strong national flavour and represents the high technical achievements of China's arts and crafts in recent years. Themes lauding the deeds of old revolutionaries or contemporary scenes of modernization are featured. There are also such traditional themes as *Dragon Boat*, a delicate metalware piece; *The Tale of the White Snake* in ivory; a silk figure, *The Woman General Mu Kuei-ying*; a porcelain figure *Tsai Wen-chi*; and various reproductions in clay of Peking opera masks. The spirit of internationalism was introduced by a reproduction in embroidered velvet of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. The colourful works of the national minorities have a strong folk quality. On display are articles of bamboo, rattan, palm, grass and osier in a variety of designs, and fireworks and fans.

Peasant Theatrical Festival Held in Hsiyang County, Shansi

During the Spring Festival, a peasant theatrical festival was held in Hsiyang County, where Tachai, the model agricultural brigade, is situated. Such festivals are held twice yearly. For three days, over forty amateur peasant troupes presented folk operas, music, dances, songs, *wu shu* and lion dances by day, while holding coloured lantern processions organized by several people's communes by night to celebrate a fine harvest the previous year despite serious natural



setbacks. Visitors from various parts of the country attended the festival, which was particularly gay and colourful.

English Translation of "A Dream of Red Mansions"

The first volume of the celebrated Chinese classical novel, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, written by Tsao Hsueh-chin, has been published by Peking Foreign Languages Press. The novel comprising a hundred and twenty chapters (the last forty having been written by Kao Ngo) is to be published in three volumes of forty chapters each.

A historical and political masterpiece, the novel describes the fortunes of great noble families in the early eighteenth century and the tragic love of the hero, Chia Pao-yu, for the heroine, Lin Tai-yu. A comprehensive and faithful reflection of those times, it exposes the corrupt nature of feudal society and indicates the historical inevitability of its collapse.

The book has enjoyed great popularity in the past two hundred years, both from readers in China or abroad, and has been published in several languages. This English translation is the first in a foreign

language to be published by the Foreign Languages Press since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

The translation is the work of Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, and was read and checked by Wu Shih-chang. The artist, Tai Tun-pang, illustrated it, and the well-known calligrapher, Chi Kung, wrote the title in Chinese characters on the navy-blue cover. The lay-out is typically Chinese.

Finlandia Quartet Performs in Peking

The Finlandia Quartet recently gave several concerts in Peking at which they played the great Finnish composer Jean Sibelius' String Quartet in D Minor, *Voces Intime*, (Op. 56), and two other Finnish works, the String Quartet No. 3 by Joonas Kokkonen and the String Quartet No. 3 by Aulis Sallinen. They also performed Haydn's String Quartet in D Major, the *Lark*, (Op. 64, No. 5). Their playing was characterized by fidelity of interpretation and sensitivity and was warmly appreciated by the Chinese audiences.



Published by Foreign Languages Press
Peking (37), China
Printed in the People's Republic of China



Harvesting (scissor-cut)

by Kuo Cheng-yi



中國文學

英文月刊1978年第6期

本刊代号2-916

FOR SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION
CONTACT

CB **China Books
& Periodicals, Inc.**

2929 · 24TH ST. · SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94110

415-282-2994

San Francisco · New York · Chicago