

# CHINESE LITERATURE



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Front Cover: Red Lotus — *Huang Yung-yu*

## **Village Opera**

In the past twenty years only twice have I been to see Chinese opera. During the first ten years I saw none, lacking both the wish and the opportunity. The two occasions on which I went were in the last ten years, but each time I left without seeing anything in it.

The first time was in 1912 when I was new to Peking. A friend told me Peking had the best opera and that seeing it was an experience not to be missed. I thought it might be interesting to see an opera, especially in Peking, and hurried in high spirits to some theatre, the name of which escapes me. The performance had already started. Even outside I could hear the beat of the drums. As we squeezed in, gaudy colours flashed into view, then I saw many heads in the auditorium; but when I collected myself to look around there were still a few empty seats in the middle. As I squeezed my way in to sit down, someone addressed me. Already there was such a buzzing in my ears that I had to listen hard to catch what he was saying — "Sorry, these seats are taken!"

We withdrew to the back, but then a man with a glossy queue led us to one side and indicated an unoccupied place. This was a bench

only a quarter the width of my thighs, but with legs two-thirds longer than mine. To begin with I hadn't the courage to get up there. Then, being reminded of some instrument of torture, with an involuntary shudder I fled.

I had gone some way when suddenly I heard my friend's voice asking, "Well, what's the matter?" Looking over my shoulder I saw he had followed me out. "Why are you marching along without a word?" he inquired in great surprise.

"I'm sorry," I told him. "There's such a ding-dong skirling in my ears, I didn't hear you."

Whenever I thought back to this it struck me as most strange, and I supposed that the opera had been a very poor one — or else a theatre was no place for me.

I forget in what year I made the second venture, but funds were being raised for flood victims in Hupeh and Tan Hsin-pei\* was still alive. By paying two dollars for a ticket, you contributed money and could go to the Number One Theatre to see an opera with a cast made up for the most part of famous actors, one being Tan Hsin-pei himself. I bought a ticket primarily to satisfy the collector, but then some busybody seized the chance to tell me why Tan Hsin-pei simply had to be seen. At that, I forgot the disastrous ding-dong skirling of a few years before and went to the theatre — probably half because that precious ticket had cost so much that I would feel uncomfortable unless I used it. I learned that Tan Hsin-pei made his appearance late in the evening, and the Number One Theatre was a modern one where you did not have to fight for your seat. That reassured me, and I waited till nine o'clock before setting out. To my surprise, just as before, it was full. There was hardly any standing-room and I had to squeeze into the crowd at the rear to watch an actor singing an old woman's part. He had a paper spill burning at each corner of his mouth and there was a devil-soldier beside him. After racking my brains I guessed that this might be Maudgalyayana's\*\* mother, because the next to come on was a monk. Not

\*A famous Peking opera actor.

\*\*Maudgalyayana was a disciple of Buddha. Legend has it that his mother went to hell for her sins and he rescued her.

recognizing the actor, I asked a fat gentleman squeezed in on my left who he was. "Kung Yun-ful"\* he said, throwing me a withering sidelong glance. My face burned with shame over my ignorant blunder, and I mentally resolved at all costs to ask no more questions. Then I watched a heroine and her maid sing, next an old man and some other characters I could not identify. After that, I watched a whole group fight a free-for-all, and after that two or three people fighting together — from after nine till ten, from ten till eleven, from eleven till eleven-thirty, from eleven-thirty till twelve — but still there was no sign of Tan Hsin-pei.

Never in my life have I waited so patiently for anything. But the wheezes of the fat gentleman next to me, the ding-dong skirling, gonging and drumming on the stage, the whirling of gaudy colours, combined with the lateness of the hour, suddenly made me realize that this was no place for me. Mechanically turning round, I tried with might and main to shove my way out and felt the place behind me fill up at once — no doubt the elastic fat gentleman had expanded his right side into the space I vacated. With my retreat cut off, naturally there was nothing to do but push and push till at last I was out of the door. Apart from the rickshaws waiting for playgoers, there were practically no pedestrians in the street; but there were still a dozen or so people by the gate looking up at the programme, and another group not looking at anything who must, I thought, be waiting to watch the women come out after the show ended. And still no sign of Tan Hsin-pei. . . .

But the night air was so crisp, it really "seeped into my heart". This seemed to be the first time I had known such good air in Peking.

I said goodbye to Chinese opera that night, never thinking about it again, and if by any chance I passed a theatre it meant nothing to me for in spirit we were long since poles apart.

A few days ago, however, I happened to read a Japanese book — unfortunately I have forgotten the title and author, but it was about Chinese opera. One chapter made the point that Chinese opera is so full of gongs and cymbals, shouting and leaping, that it makes the spectators' heads swim and is quite unsuited for a theatre;

\*Well-known Peking opera actor who played old women's roles.



but if performed in the open and watched from a distance, it has its charm. I felt that this put into words what had remained unformulated in my mind, because as a matter of fact I clearly remembered seeing a really good opera in the country and it was under its influence, perhaps, that after coming to Peking I went twice to the theatre. It is a pity that, somehow or other, the name of that book escapes me.

As to when I saw that good opera, it was really "long, long ago", when I could not have been much more than eleven or twelve. It was the custom in Luchen where we lived for married women not yet in charge of the household to go back to their parents' home for the summer. Although my father's mother was then still quite strong, my mother had quite a few domestic duties which made it impossible for her to spend many days at her old home during the summer. All she could spare was a few days after visiting the ancestral graves, and at such times I always went with her to stay in her parents' house. That was in Pingchiao Village not far from the sea, a very remote little village on a river with less than thirty households of peasants and fishermen, and just one tiny grocery. To me, however, it was heaven, for not only was I treated as a guest of honour but here I could skip reading the *Book of Songs*.\*

There were many children for me to play with. For with the arrival of a visitor from such a distance they got leave from their parents to do less work in order to play with me. In a small village, the guest of one family is virtually the guest of the whole community. We were all about the same age, but when it came to determining seniority many were at least my uncles or grand-uncles, since everybody in the village had the same family name and belonged to one clan. But we were all good friends, and if by some chance we fell out and I hit one of my grand-uncles, it never occurred to any child or grown-up in the village to call me "insubordinate". Ninety-nine out of a hundred of them could neither read nor write.

We spent most of our days digging up earthworms, putting them on little hooks made of copper wire, and lying on the river bank to

catch prawns. The silliest of water creatures, prawns willingly use their own pincers to push the point of the hook into their mouths; so in a few hours we could catch a big bowlful. It was the custom to give these prawns to me. Another thing we did was to graze buffaloes together. But, maybe because they are animals of a higher order, oxen and buffaloes are hostile to strangers, and they treated me with such contempt that I never dared get too close. I could only follow at a distance and stand there. At such times my small friends, no longer impressed by my ability to recite classical poetry, would all start hooting with laughter.

What I looked forward to most was going to Chaochuang to see the opera. Chaochuang was a slightly larger village five *li* away. Since Pingchiao was too small to afford to put on operas, every year it chipped in towards a performance at Chaochuang. At the time, it never occurred to me to wonder why they should put on operas every year. Thinking back to it now, I dare say it may have been a ritual drama for the late spring festival.

The year that I was eleven or twelve, this long-awaited day came round again. But as ill luck would have it, there was no boat for hire that morning. Pingchiao Village had only one big ferry-boat, which put out in the morning and came back in the evening, and it was out of the question to use this. All the other boats were unsuitable, being too small. And the neighbouring villages, when people were sent to ask, had no boats either — they had all been hired already. My grandmother, very vexed, blamed the family for not hiring one earlier and started nagging. To console her, mother said that our operas at Luchen were much better than in these little villages, and as we saw several a year there was no need to go today. But I was nearly in tears from chagrin, and mother did her best to impress on me on no account to make a scene, because it would upset my grandmother; nor must I go with other people either, or grandmother might worry.

In a word, it had fallen through. In the afternoon, when all my friends had left and the opera had started, I imagined I could hear the sound of gongs and drums and knew they were in front of the stage buying soyabean milk to drink.

\*The earliest anthology of poetry in China and part of every school curriculum.

I caught no prawns that day, did not eat much either. Mother was very upset but could not think what to do. By supper time grandmother too had finally caught on and she said I was right to be cross, they had been too remiss, and never before had guests been treated so badly. After the meal, youngsters back from the opera gathered round and gaily described it to us. I was the only one silent. They all sighed and said how sorry they were for me. Suddenly one of the brightest, Shuang-hsi, had an inspiration and asked, "A big boat? Hasn't Eighth Grand-uncle's ferry-boat come back?" A dozen other boys cottoned on and at once started agitating to take the boat and go with me. I cheered up. But grandmother was nervous, thinking we were all children and undependable. And mother said it would not be fair to ask grown-ups to stay up all night and go with us, as they all had to work the next day. While our fate hung in the balance, Shuang-hsi went to the root of the problem, declaring loudly, "I guarantee it'll be all right! It's a big boat, Brother Hsun never jumps around, and all of us can swim!"

It was true. Not a boy in the dozen but could swim, and two or three of them were first-rate swimmers in the sea.

Grandmother and mother, convinced, raised no further objections. Both smiled. We immediately rushed out.

My heart after being so heavy was suddenly light, and I felt as though floating on air. Once outside, I saw in the moonlight a ferry-boat with a white awning moored at the bridge. We all jumped aboard, Shuang-hsi seizing the front pole and Ah-fa the back one, while the younger boys sat down with me in the middle and those a little older went to the stern. By the time mother followed us out to warn "Be careful!" we had already cast off. We pushed off from the bridge, floated back a few feet, then moved forward under the bridge. Two oars were set up, each manned by two boys who changed shifts every *li*. Chatter, laughter and shouts mingled with the lapping of water against our bow; to our right and left stretched emerald green fields of beans and wheat, as we flew forward towards Chaochuang.

The scent of beans, wheat and water-weeds wafted towards us through the mist, and the moonlight shone faintly through it. Distant

grey hills, undulating like the backs of some leaping iron beasts, seemed to be racing past the stern of our boat; but I still felt our progress was slow. When the oarsmen had changed shifts four times, we began to make out the faint outline of Chaochuang and to catch the sound of singing and music. There were several lights too, which we guessed must be on the stage unless they were fishermen's lights.

The music was probably fluting. Eddying round and round and up and down, it soothed me and set me dreaming at the same time, till I felt as though I was about to drift far away with it through the night air heavy with the scent of beans, wheat and river-weeds.

As we approached the lights, they proved to be fishermen's lights and I realized it was not Chaochuang that I had been looking at. Directly ahead of us was a pine-wood where I had played the year before and seen a broken stone horse, fallen on its side, as well as a stone sheep couched in the grass. Once past the wood, our boat rounded a bend into a cove, and Chaochuang was really before us.

Our eyes were drawn to the stage standing in a plot of empty ground by the river outside the village, hazy in the distant moonlight, barely distinguishable from its surroundings. It seemed that the fairyland I had seen in pictures had come alive here. The boat was moving faster now, and presently we could make out figures on the stage and a blaze of gaudy colours. The river close to the stage was black with the boat awnings of the spectators.

"There's no room near the stage, let's watch from a distance," suggested Ah-fa.

The boat had slowed down now, and soon we arrived. True enough, it was impossible to get close to the stage. We had to make fast even further away from it than the shrine opposite. But, in any case, we did not want our boat with its white awning to mix with those black ones and, besides, there was no room. . . .

While we hastily moored, there appeared on the stage a man with a long black beard and four pennons fixed to his back. With a spear he fought a whole group of bare-armed men. Shuang-hsi told us this was a famous acrobat who could turn eighty-four somersaults one after the other. He had counted for himself earlier in the day.



We all crowded to the bow to watch the fighting, but the acrobat did not turn any somersaults. Only a few of the bare-armed men turned head over heels a few times, then trooped off. Then a girl came out and sang in a shrill falsetto. "There aren't many watching in the evening," said Shuang-hsi, "and the acrobat's taking it easy. Who wants to show off to an empty house?" That made sense to me, because by then there were not many spectators. The country folk, having work to do the next day, could not stay up all night and had gone home to bed. Standing there still were just a scattering of a few dozen idlers from Chaochuang and the villages around. The families of the local rich remained in the boats with black awnings, but they were not really interested in the opera. Most of them had come to the opera to eat cakes, fruit or melon-seeds. So it could really be reckoned an empty house.

As a matter of fact, I was not too keen on somersaults either. What I wanted most to see was a snake spirit swathed in white, its two hands clasping above it a wand-like snake's head, and next a leaping tiger dressed in yellow. But I waited a long time in vain. As soon as the girl left, out came a very old man acting the part of a young one. Feeling tired, I asked Kuei-sheng to buy me some soyabean milk. He came back presently to say, "There isn't any. The deaf man who sells it has gone. There was some in the daytime, I drank two bowls then. I'll get you a dipperful of water to drink."

Instead of drinking the water, I stuck it out as best I could. I cannot say what I saw, but by degrees something strange seemed to happen to the faces of the players, whose features blurred as if melting into one flattened surface. Most of the younger boys yawned, while the older ones chatted among themselves. It was only when a clown in a red shirt was fastened to a pillar on the stage, and a greybeard started horsewhipping him, that we roused ourselves to watch again and laughed. I really think that was the best scene of the evening.

But then the old woman came out. This was the character I dreaded most, especially when she sat down to sing. Now I saw by everybody's disappointment that they felt just as I did. To start with,

the old woman simply walked to and fro singing, then she sat on a chair in the middle of the stage. I felt most dismayed, and Shuang-hsi and the rest started swearing. I waited patiently till, after a long time, the old woman raised her hand. I thought she was going to stand up. But dashing my hopes she lowered her hand slowly again just as before, and went on singing. Some of the boys in the boat could not help groaning; the rest began to yawn again. Finally Shuang-hsi, when he could stand it no longer, said he was afraid she might go on singing till dawn and we had better leave. We all promptly agreed, becoming as eager as when we had set out. Three or four boys ran to the stern, seized the poles to punt back several yards, then headed the boat around. Cursing the old woman, they set up the oars and started back for the pine-wood.

Judging by the position of the moon we had not been watching very long, and once we left Chaochuang the moonlight seemed unusually bright. When we turned back to look at the lantern-lit stage, it appeared just as it had when we came, hazy as a fairy pavilion, covered in a rosy mist. Once again the flutes sounded melodiously in our ears. I suspected that the old woman must have finished, but could hardly suggest going back again to see.

Soon the pine-wood was behind us. Our boat was moving fairly fast, but there was such thick darkness all around you could tell it was very late. As they discussed the players, laughing and swearing, the rowers pulled harder on the oars. Now the splash of water against our bow was even more distinct. The ferry-boat seemed like a great white fish carrying a freight of children through the foam. Some old fishermen who fished all night stopped their punts to cheer at the sight.

We were still about one *li* from Pingchiao when our boat slowed down, the oarsmen saying that they were tired after rowing so hard, with nothing to eat for hours. It was Kuei-sheng who had a bright idea this time. He said the broad-beans were just ripe, and there was fuel on the boat — we could filch some beans and cook them. Everybody approving, we promptly drew alongside the bank and stopped. The pitch-black fields were filled with plump broad-beans.

"Hey, Ah-fa! They're your family's over here, and Old Liu Yi's over there. Which shall we take?" Shuang-hsi, the first to leap ashore, called from the bank.

As we all jumped ashore too Ah-fa said, "Wait a bit and I'll have a look." He walked up and down feeling the beans, then straightened up to say, "Take ours, they're much bigger." With a shout we scattered through his family's bean field, each picking a big handful of beans and throwing them into the boat. Shuang-hsi thought that if we took any more and Ah-fa's mother found out, she would make a scene, so we all went to Old Liu Yi's field to pick another handful each.

Then a few of the older boys started rowing slowly again, while others lit a fire in the stern and the younger boys and I shelled the beans. Soon they were cooked, and we let the boat drift while we gathered round and ate them with our fingers. When the beans were finished we went on again, washing the pot and throwing the pods into the river, to destroy all traces. What worried Shuang-hsi now was that we had used the salt and firewood on Eighth Grand-uncle's boat, and being a canny old man he was sure to find out and berate us. But after some discussion we decided that we had nothing to fear. If he swore at us, we would ask him to return the tallow branch he had taken the previous year from the river bank, and to his face call him "Old Scabby".

"We're all back! How could anything go wrong? Didn't I guarantee that?" Shuang-hsi's voice suddenly rang out from the bow.

Looking past him, I saw we were already at Pingchiao and someone was standing at the foot of the bridge — it was my mother to whom Shuang-hsi had called. As I walked up to the bow the boat passed under the bridge, then stopped, and we all went ashore. Mother was rather angry. She asked why we had come back so late — it was after midnight. But she was pleased to see us too and smilingly invited everyone to go and have some puffed rice.

They told her we had all had a snack to eat and were sleepy, so we had better get to bed at once, and off we all went to our different homes.

I did not get up till noon the next day, and there was no word of any trouble with Eighth Grand-uncle over the salt or firewood. That afternoon we went to catch prawns as usual.

"Shuang-hsi, you little devils stole my beans yesterday! And instead of picking them properly you trampled down quite a few." I looked up and saw Old Liu Yi on a punt, coming back from selling beans. There was still a heap of left-over beans at the bottom of the punt.

"Yes. We were treating a visitor. We didn't mean to take yours to begin with," said Shuang-hsi. "Look! You've frightened away my prawn!"

When the old man saw me, he stopped punting and chuckled. "Treating a visitor? So you should." Then he asked me, "Was yesterday's opera good, Brother Hsun?"

I nodded. "Yes, it was."

"Did you enjoy the beans?"

I nodded again. "Very much."

To my surprise, that gratified Old Liu Yi enormously. Sticking up one thumb he said complacently, "People from big towns who have studied really know what's good! I select my bean seeds one by one, yet country folk who can't tell good from bad say my beans aren't up to other people's. I'll give some to your mother today for her to try..." With that he punted off.

When mother called me home for supper, on the table there was a large bowl of boiled beans which Old Liu Yi had brought for the two of us. And I heard he had praised me highly to mother, saying, "He's so young, yet he knows what's what. He's sure to come first in the official examinations in future. Your fortune's as good as made, ma'am." But when I ate the beans, they did not taste as good as those of the night before.

It is a fact, right up till now, I have really never eaten such good beans or seen such a good opera as I did that night.

October 1922

*Illustrated by Liu Po-shu  
and Ho Yun-lan*

## On Lu Hsun's "Village Opera"

The deafening din of gongs and drums in old Peking operas performed in theatres and the lilting melodies of distant village operas performed in the open give people two totally different impressions of old Chinese opera. This contrast, so well brought out in Lu Hsun's *Village Opera*, has led certain readers to believe that Lu Hsun wrote this story to criticize the old Peking opera. Actually, this was not the case, for disparaging references to the old opera have only a secondary place in the story, which is largely devoted to recalling how the author went to see a village opera when he was a boy. In conclusion, he wrote with deep feeling, "It is a fact, right up till now, I have really never eaten such good beans or seen such a good opera as I did that night." Does this mean, then, that the main theme was praising village opera? No, that was not the case either.

In old feudal China, people believed in local deities who had to be propitiated on certain festivals. Every year, when the specified season came round, the villagers raised money to put on opera shows for the local gods so that they would give them good harvests. In fact, this was less a means of pleasing the gods than of giving the

peasants themselves a means of enjoyment. The troupes performing in the villages had close contact with the peasants. Their performances were relatively simple, retaining various folk characteristics, although, influenced by feudal ideas, they naturally contained many dregs of feudalism too. That is why Lu Hsun in this story simply described the village children's enthusiasm for the acrobatic feats in the opera, without approving the rest of its content.

What is the main theme of this story, then, if it is neither to debunk the old Peking opera nor to acclaim village opera?

To my mind, the main theme of *Village Opera* is praise of the peasants, especially peasant children. But Lu Hsun handles this with great subtlety. His lively account of how he went to watch a village opera successfully brings out the theme. First his hopes are dashed when there is no boat to take them to the next village to see the opera; then a village boy hits on an idea to make his wish come true; and on their way home they enjoy a midnight feast of boiled beans.

In this story, Lu Hsun depicts such village boys as Shuang-hsi and Ah-fa as thoroughly lovable. For instance, it is Shuang-hsi who hits on the idea of borrowing Eighth Grand-uncle's ferry-boat, and who provides convincing arguments to reassure Lu Hsun's grandmother and mother. When they watch the opera, he gives a very reasonable explanation for the acrobat's unwillingness to turn eighty-four somersaults in the evening. When they steal beans, he it is again who has the good sense to take some beans from both Old Liu Yi's field and Ah-fa's, so as not to annoy Ah-fa's mother. And when Old Liu Yi complains that the children have trampled down some of his beans, Shuang-hsi's explanation that they were "treating a visitor" makes the old man stop scolding them and gratifies him. In the old society, peasants were considered by the ruling class as low-class oafs, yet here Lu Hsun shows this village boy's warm-heartedness, ready wit, tact and resourcefulness.

Then there is Ah-fa who urges his friends to filch his family's beans because they are bigger. This may seem incredible to niggardly people, yet it truthfully depicts the fine selflessness of the toilers. As Chairman Mao has said, even though their hands are soiled and

their feet smeared with cow-dung, they are really cleaner than bourgeois and petty-bourgeois intellectuals. This is because their spirit is clean. And young Ah-fa is a good example of this.

Apart from the boys just mentioned, there is the old peasant Liu Yi. Though introduced so briefly, he makes a very vivid impression on readers. Such characters form an indispensable part of the gallery of Chinese peasants painted by Lu Hsun. The portrayal of characters such as Jun-tu in *My Old Home*,\* Ah Q in *The True Story of Ah Q*\*\* and Hsiang-lin's wife in *New Year's Sacrifice*\*\*\* shows us the bitter life of the peasants in old China. But in the characters presented here Lu Hsun reveals their nobility of spirit.

In the more than two thousand years of our literature, Lu Hsun was the first writer to create so many peasant characters, showing his deep concern for the fate of Chinese peasants. Because his grandmother lived in the countryside, in his young days he had the chance to meet and come to know many peasants. The Pingchiao Village of this story is based on his recollection of Anchiaotou where his grandmother lived. A small river flowed past this village and his grandmother's house looked out over this river, while not far to its right was a bridge called Lian Bridge. These real-life scenes correspond to the places described in *Village Opera*. There, Lu Hsun as a boy made many friends. Among them was a youngster called Lu Liu-yi, not much older than Lu Hsun but senior in status so that Lu Hsun had to call him grand-uncle. This lad often took Lu Hsun to the seaside, less than a mile from the bridge, to watch the men at work in the salt-pans, and this left Lu Hsun with a deep impression of the wretched life of the labouring people. Of course, Lu Liu-yi is not necessarily the prototype of Old Liu Yi in this story, but we can see that Lu Hsun's experiences in the countryside as a boy had a great influence on his later writings.

As the peasants form the vast majority of the Chinese population, it is largely true to say that unless one understands the countryside one cannot understand China, and unless the millions of peasants

\*See *Chinese Literature* No. 1, 1954.

\*\*See *Chinese Literature* Nos. 5-6, 1977.

\*\*\*See *Chinese Literature* No. 11, 1975.

are liberated one cannot speak of the liberation of the Chinese people. Lu Hsun had deep sympathy for the Chinese peasants and longed to see them liberated. However, the democratic revolution of 1911 led by the Chinese bourgeoisie was unable to solve the peasant problem. Thus Lu Hsun in such stories as *Storm in a Teacup*,\* *My Old Home* and *The True Story of Ah Q* indignantly exposed the cruel oppression of the peasants by the feudal ruling class, expressing his criticism of the 1911 Revolution for failing to solve the peasant problem. In this story *Village Opera*, however, his reminiscences about his childhood reveal his love for his young peasant friends and pay high tribute to their fine qualities. In those days it was rare indeed for a writer to be able to see the peasants' sterling qualities and to feel that village children were much superior to those of urban intellectuals who received a feudal and bourgeois education.

This story was written in 1922, soon after the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. At that time Lu Hsun had little understanding of the proletarian Party, but he gave much thought to the future course of the Chinese revolution and was convinced of the paramount importance of liberating the peasants. Thus he was taking the same line as the Chinese Communist Party during that period. This is why a story like *Village Opera* still has a real significance today. And we can understand it better if we link it with other stories Lu Hsun wrote about peasants.

\*See *Chinese Literature* No. 2, 1975.

## Stories

Kuo Cheng-ching

### A Misunderstanding

The county supply and marketing store received a letter which read:

Dear Comrade in Charge,

My wife bought some wine on June 5th from your branch store at Liuchi. Although she paid for a catty of wine, she only got eight ounces. This wasn't the first time she hadn't got her money's worth of wine. I hope it won't happen again,

Ting Mang-chung

Commune member of Tingchuang

The store at Liuchi was a one-man store — Wang Chiu-fen was manager-cum-accountant-cum-salesman. When the county store discussed the letter, people reached varying conclusions. Some believed that Wang had been cheating, or at least that he was a sloppy salesman. Others thought quite differently.

Each had their reasons. Those who believed that he had cheated argued first that when Wang worked for a shopkeeper before Liberation he often had to go out with his employer to do business. He was always saying that shopkeepers needed the gift of the gab plus the ability to cheat. Doubtless he had picked up his bad habits then.

Second, Wang had once had an assistant, who was transferred. When Wang was given a replacement, he said, "Save the state the expense of an extra person. I can manage the store alone." While everyone else was applying for more people, he did the opposite. This was considered a good attitude then. Now it was possible that he might have had some ulterior motive.

Third, he was said to often buy and sell for people. Was he making a profit from this?

The counter arguments were that Wang had come from a poor family and had worked as a hired-hand for a landlord. After two years of maltreatment he had left and as he had no land of his own, he had borrowed some money from his relatives, offered this to a shopkeeper in the city and become his apprentice. Then, after Liberation, he had made a lot of progress and had been cited many times as an advanced worker in recent years.

Finally, many villagers thought highly of him. He was considered a diligent worker who was very concerned about his customers. His work as assessed from the store's monthly reports was outstanding too. So how could a man like him be a crook?

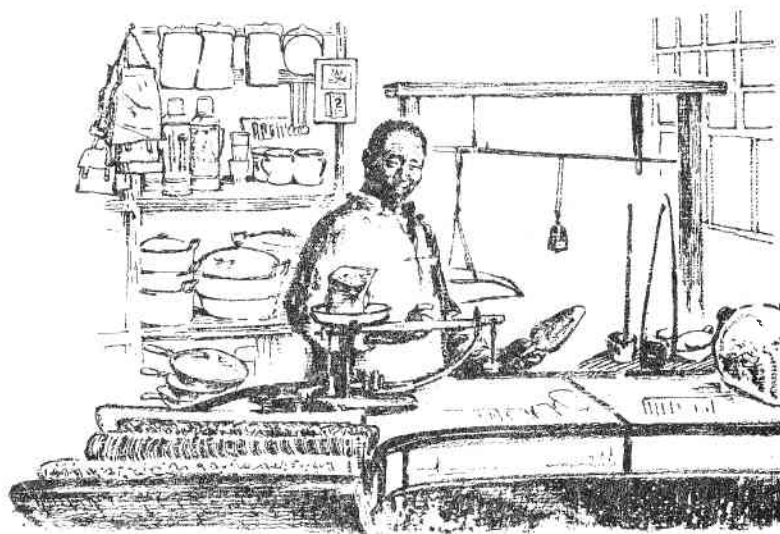
What opposing views! And who was right? So it was decided to send someone to investigate. And that someone just happened to be me. I was chosen because I'd only recently been appointed to the county store and, as I'd not yet met Old Wang, I would be completely unbiased. Whether or not I was really qualified for the job, the task fell on my shoulders and so I set out very early in the morning to avoid the scorching heat of the day.

The distant landscape was hazy, but the golden wheat beside me glimmered like water in the morning rays. Manure mounds lined the edges of the fields for use in the summer sowing.

It was broad daylight when I reached my destination Liuchi. The branch shop was open and crowded with customers. Old Wang, a swarthy, stout man in his fifties, with high cheekbones, was all smiles as he politely attended to his customers.

"Please can I have some twill cloth, Old Wang?"

"Yes, here you are." He took out a bolt of black twill. "You



came at the right time. This stuff is the best quality. Just arrived this morning. . . ."

"How did you know I wanted black?"

"Well, comrade, with only you and your old wife in the family, you wouldn't want coloured cloth, would you?" Unrolling it he inquired, "How much do you want?"

"Seven and a half feet." With one hand holding one end of the cloth and the other a ruler, the shopkeeper rapidly measured the cloth and tore off the required length. He moved like lightning and wasted no time before he took the basket from another customer and asked, "How much do you want, brother?"

"Two catties, please."

"Right. Get your money ready, please." He scooped out two bowls of salt and put it on the scale. It was exactly two catties, no more, no less. Then he poured the salt into the basket. It was all done so quickly and efficiently. He took the money, counted the notes deftly with his fingers and said, "Just right."

"But suppose I don't want salt."



"None of your jokes, please. Everybody is in a hurry to get to the fields," he scolded as he took an empty bottle from another customer.

"Pigs will fly the day you don't want salt," somebody teased while the man went away laughing to himself.

I watched in admiration. How well he knew his customers and how efficiently he worked, saving their precious time! And nobody questioned the weight or quantity of anything he gave them.

Soon all had left satisfied. Wiping his forehead with a towel Old Wang greeted me, "Sorry to have kept you waiting. Please come inside." I followed him into a room where he offered me a seat, poured me a cup of water and inquired, "Have you come on business?"

"Mmm. . . ." I tried to be casual.

"Where are you staying?"

"I've only just arrived so I haven't had time to fix that yet."

"Then you must come and stay with me, like Commune Secretary Chi and Department Head Liu of the county Party committee." He gave me a key. "Here's one for you. More convenient this way. But only on one condition. You must look after the store for me when I go out. I won't give it to you otherwise." Then he laughed.

His naive honesty baffled me. Could he be so irresponsible with state property? I accepted the key, nevertheless, since I would get to know him better by staying there.

"How do you know I can be trusted?" I teased.

"Well, if I can't trust the vice-chairman of the county store who can I trust?"

I was astounded. "But we've never met before. How do you know me?"

"Never met before! What a memory! Two weeks ago you saw me carrying a load of manure and asked me if I was paid by the load or by the day. I told you it was neither but in return for some help. Then you asked what I meant and I explained that the production team brought my stock on their cart when they fetched their chemical fertilizer from the city. So I took some manure to the fields for them in return. Just then Director Chao from the bureau of commerce came over and greeted you. You shook hands and talked. After-

wards I asked her who you were and she said you were the new vice-chairman of the county store. She thought we knew each other. So that was our first meeting."

"You've got a memory like an elephant!" I laughed.

"Workers need clever hands while a shopkeeper needs a good memory," he declared. "How can I serve the people otherwise?" he chortled.

He had filled two crates with goods while talking to me. Then stuffing two buns into his pocket he said, "Make yourself something to eat. There is some rice and flour over there." He pointed out where they were and then started to leave with his crates on a shoulder pole.

"But where are you going?" I asked.

"To sell these in the villages."

"Why not have your breakfast first?"

"If I don't go during the mealtime, everybody will have left for the fields."

As a few customers came after he had left, I attended to them as Old Wang had requested.

He returned after breakfast. All his goods had been sold but his crates were filled with bits and parts of old farm tools.

Pretending not to have noticed them, I wondered whether or not he was making some profit on the sly trading with them.

He glanced at the goods on the stand and then sat down at his desk. Putting on his spectacles, he said to me as he took up a pen, "Come here and let's do our accounts first so that we won't forget. What did you sell?"

"What do you think?" I asked.

"Giving me a test, eh?" he laughed. Walking up to the display stand he picked up a bolt of cloth and felt the weight of it. "You've sold more than ten feet of this." Picking up another bolt he said, "And seven or eight feet of this." Then he lifted a jar of wine. "Five or six catties less here."

I was stupefied. Out of curiosity I demanded, "Calculate it exactly. How many catties were sold?"

"Trying to catch me out?" He laughed and lifted the jar carefully this time. "Five and a half catties."

"Wrong. Four and a half," I lied deliberately.

He took up the jar again with his other hand. "You must have read the scale wrong. It was five and a half catties."

I had to hand it to him.

"A shopkeeper should be able to weigh with his eyes and hands. Otherwise, he won't be any good."

As he wanted me to tell him what I had sold, I gave him a piece of paper and said, "I jotted it all down here. You can copy it."

He started to frown as he read it. "Who bought the wine?"

"Don't know."

"And the cloth?"

"I don't know," I said puzzled. "Do I have to put down who bought what?"

"Of course!"

"What for?"

"For three reasons. A. You'll know who bought what and what he might buy next. B. You'll know the amount of things each family consumes, so that you'll know what to order. And C..."

Footsteps were heard outside and a voice cried, "Old Wang!"

As a young man dashed in, Old Wang scolded with a smile, "What's the rush, Hasty? Why can't you wait until you've come in? Do you have to shout as if the house was on fire?"

Hasty rubbed his neck and smiled in embarrassment. "My team leader told me to fetch the ploughshare."

"I haven't got one," replied the shopkeeper. "When I asked you to buy a seeder attachment for me, it goes in one ear and out of the other. Now you want a ploughshare. That's just about the easiest thing in the world to get hold of!"

"Now, now, Old Wang. I've been to every family for you. None of them have one to spare."

Another young man barged in. "Hey! Where're the rake teeth we wanted?"

"Rake teeth?" asked Wang.

春風楊柳  
于 1957  
年 10 月  
于 10 月



Just then a voice shouted from the outer room, "Old Wang, is this seeder attachment for us?" The two young men inside the room dashed out and squatted beside the crates Wang had left there. Each jumped for joy when they found what they wanted.

"How much do we owe you?" they asked.

"I got the ploughshare from Wangchuang Production Team. It cost 1.83 yuan. The rake teeth belonged to Liuchuang Production Team. They were 12 cents each. . . ."

After they had left I pointed at the junk in the crates and commented, "These things sell very quickly."

"Yes. Things nobody wants can bring in a little money, while the production teams get what they need for a song. This way everyone profits."

Before he went out again with his crates of goods, he gave me his account book and asked me this time to jot down the items I sold as he had done. I couldn't help smiling as I flicked through it. Unlike any modern account books, or old-fashioned ones recording each item chronologically, rather it was more like a diary. For instance, the first page read:

"On April 1st, Doggy's mother bought ten feet of cotton print and paid 3.5 yuan. She has always been thrifty. The cloth is a gift for her son's fiancée."

On the next page, I read:

"On April 2nd, the leader of Pangchuang Production Team bought two mirrors for 7.8 yuan. These were not for production. I tried to talk him out of buying them, but he was adamant. Must talk to him again when I next see him."

Someone came in at this moment. Still looking at the book I asked, "What do you want?"

"Hallo, vice-chairman. . . ."

The voice was familiar. I looked up to see the chairman of the credit society.

"I heard that you were here, so I thought I'd grab this chance to have a word with you."

Later I asked him, "Are you a cousin of Ting Mang-chung? Can you tell me something about him?"



"Certainly. He spends all he earns. Money just burns a hole in his pocket. His wife and he are always bickering over this. Then his wife had a brain wave. She bought a little less of everything she needed and put the savings in the credit society. She saved more than thirty yuan in that way without his knowing." He chuckled. "Look at me. Talking shop all the time!"

That evening I met with the brigade cadres to discuss how our supply and marketing store could help to boost agricultural production. Afterwards I called on a few families and did not return until midnight. But in the brightly-lit store Old Wang was busily tying banknotes into stacks and wrapping up sweets.

"It's so late now, do you have to do this? Let's go to bed," I urged.

"Tomorrow is market day and if I don't do this now my customers will have to stand in a long queue in the sun." Since it was a good idea I volunteered to help him.

"Certainly not," he protested. "Everything should look just right. I'm used to doing this. Besides you must be tired. You go to bed."

When I woke up some time later, the light was still on. I sat up and saw Old Wang scoop up a bowl of salt, try its weight first and then pour the salt on to the scale. He kept repeating it.

"What on earth are you doing?" I inquired.

"Practising," he confided.

"But you're like a scale yourself. How can you be even better?"

"Practice makes perfect. I can't be sure if I don't practise it every day."

I never knew when he finally went to bed. When I opened my eyes again the sky was pale and Old Wang was already up and sweeping the doorway. Then, I heard a woman's voice asking, "Do you have any black thread?"

"Yes."

"Any halter rope?" a man asked.

"Yes."

Then the shopkeeper asked in surprise, "Why have you come to buy wine yourself, Ting Mang-chung? Why didn't you send your wife?"

"I've not come about that."

"You bring a bottle and you don't want wine! Who are you kidding?"

"But it's true. I've come to get some vinegar for my neighbour."

"Anything for yourself?"

"Nope! But I've also come to apologize to you." Ting didn't keep things to himself. In a loud voice, he began, "I'm awfully sorry, Old Wang. Listen everyone, every time my wife came to buy wine, she bought only eight ounces, while telling me it was a catty and she put the money she saved into the credit society. I was completely in the dark until I bought a catty of wine myself. Thinking that you'd cheated her, I wrote a letter to the county store reporting this. When my wife learned about it, she told me the truth and said I'd misjudged you. You could have been criticized for this and it's all my fault. So I want to apologize to you and then go to the county store and criticize myself in front of the chairman."

"No need to go anywhere. The vice-chairman is in my bedroom."

"Really!" The next moment Ting Mang-chung came bursting in on me. "Vice-chairman," he cried. "I want to criticize myself."

"It's all right, I heard everything. You must manage your financial affairs more carefully in future. That's much better than making a self-criticism. And ask your wife to tell you when she saves some money so as to avoid any future misunderstandings."

"You bet I will!" Turning to Old Wang he said, "Will you help me, Old Wang?"

"O.k. It's a deal."

And so a busy market day began amid everyone's happy laughter.

*Illustrated by Liu Hsi-li*

## Battling South of the Pass

### Chapter 10

Sun Chuan-ting, Commissioner of Shensi, had prepared three lines of defence south of the Tungkuan Pass to halt Li Tzu-cheng. Now the first line had been smashed by the insurgents, but not before it had decimated their strength. This was what Sun, an experienced commander, had been counting on. He had foreseen that Li Tzu-cheng would fight desperately to break through his encirclement; and the first line, having no strategic positions, would be unable to wipe out his army. According to the laws of war, the fighting spirit aroused by the first roll of drums is depleted by the second and exhausted by the third. He believed that after the fierce fighting that morning, followed by a continuous march, Li Tzu-cheng's troops must be exhausted. So he deployed more troops on the second line and took the command in person. As for his third line, that was merely a small force to mop up rebels fleeing from the battlefield.

Sun was a scholar who had passed the palace examination. But

## Main Characters in "Battling South of the Pass"

Li Tzu-cheng	<i>head of the peasant insurgent army after the death of Kao Ying-hsiang, who styled himself Prince Valiant. Li Tzu-cheng assumed the same title</i>
Liu Tsung-min	<i>commander-in-chief of the prince's forces</i>
Kao Yi-kung	<i>Li Tzu-cheng's wife's brother, an officer of the insurgent army</i>
Kao Kuei-ying	<i>Li Tzu-cheng's wife and Kao Ying-hsiang's niece</i>
Ho Chin-lung	<i>an officer in the insurgent army whose cousin Ho Jen-lung was a government general</i>
Shang Chiung	<i>the insurgents' physician</i>
Liu Fang-liang, Yuan Tsung-ti, Hao Yao-chi, Li Kuo, Tien Chien-hsiu: insurgent officers	
Sun Chuan-ting	<i>military commissioner of Shensi</i>
Hung Cheng-chou	<i>commander-in-chief of the border regions between Shensi and five adjacent provinces</i>
Kao Chieh	<i>an officer in the insurgent army who had an affair with Li Tzu-cheng's concubine, then went over to the government forces</i>
Kao Chien	<i>Li Tzu-cheng's cousin, originally an officer in the insurgent army, who later surrendered to the government</i>
Tsao Pien-chiao, Ho Jen-lung, Tsu Ta-pi, Sun Hsien-tsu and Tso Kuang-hsien: government commanders	



having been born outside the Yenmen Pass in a district with a martial tradition, he had grown up adept in military arts and with an acute interest in strategy; moreover, having commanded troops for some years now, he did not behave like one of the literati. Now this forty-six-year-old commissioner, fully accoutred astride his horse, was watching the scene below from the top of a hill. The confident and arrogant expression on his grim, square face impressed all those around him. When he saw Li Tzu-cheng's vanguard and main army corps approaching in good order after their exhausting march and the morning's fierce battle, he could not help reflecting:

"This bandit chief is in a class of his own!"

When the prince's vanguard reached the ambush, Sun looked on with tense elation, the flicker of a smile on his tightly clamped lips. With bated breath he watched the insurgents' approach, then said in a low voice:

"My sword!"

An officer immediately presented it with both hands. Holding his long sword, Sun turned to address his generals:

"After years of preparation success is at hand. You must capture the rebel Li Tzu-cheng alive, so that we can show our gratitude to the emperor. Not a single bandit must escape!"

The next second a gun went off, and troops leapt out from ambush on different sides. With a roar, Sun Chuan-ting galloped down the hill, brandishing his sword. At the same time, according to plan, his general Ma Ko led picked troops straight towards the prince's headquarters, in order to cut the insurgent army in two. At once they became embroiled in the biggest battle of the last two years, with the insurgent forces greatly outnumbered.

As soon as Tsao Pien-chiao heard the din of fighting in the north, he urged his men forward swiftly, with Tso Kuang-hsien's troops on the right, Ho Jen-lung's on the left, horsemen in front and foot-soldiers behind. The tumult of drums and battle-cries shook the earth. Banners large and small were fluttering all over the plain and hills in the pallid twilight. In no time, Tsao's force overtook the prince's rearguard commanded by Li Kuo and Tien Chien-hsiu, and they joined battle too.

Li Tzu-cheng sent Ho Chin-lung with a hundred horsemen to seize the fortress on a small hill to the left and establish headquarters there. He then led Kao Yi-kung, Li Shuang-hsi, Chang Nai and the whole of the central army corps into battle. Charging full tilt towards Ma Ko, he scattered his infantry, then forced his cavalry to retreat as well, foiling the enemy's plan to cut his column into two halves and surround them separately. Ma Ko cut down one of his officers who was retreating, but could not stem the rout. He himself had to turn and flee. After pursuing them for a short distance, the prince turned to help the vanguard.

In the mêlée, Liu Tsung-min saw Sun Chuan-ting's big banner. Relinquishing the other opponents in front, he charged in that direction; but while still more than a bowshot away from Sun he and his few hundred horsemen were surrounded. Sun knew Liu's fame as an insurgent general second only to the prince, and gave orders for his capture, so that he could be taken in triumph to the court. The government troops, on their mettle, at once charged forward shouting:

"Capture Liu Tsung-min! Take him alive!"

This goaded Liu Tsung-min to greater fury. He fought like an angry lion, slashing out with both his swords. As an enemy officer charged him he let out a roar which made the man's horse rear, and before the officer could defend himself he was cut down and bit the dust. Liu's hands and sleeves were spattered with blood, his horse's hooves were red with the blood of the slain; but Sun's host was so disciplined that when Liu charged eastwards the troops on the east fell back without breaking ranks so that he could not break through, while at the same time the troops on the west pressed forward. And when he turned to strike west, the troops on the east thrust back. Liu received several light wounds. He had little more than two hundred men left, some of them wounded too.

Now grey evening mist laden with yellow dust thrown up by the horses' hooves enveloped the plateau and undulating hills. Liu Tsung-min, confident that after dark they would find a way to break through the encirclement, rallied his troops and fought on. For a while the battle was so tense that no war cries could be heard, nothing



but the clash of weapons, the groans of the wounded, the thunder of horses' hooves and running footsteps.

Then Liu heard a familiar voice calling on him to surrender. Looking up, he saw through the gathering dusk the renegade Kao Chien riding up a hillock some hundred feet in front. With an angry roar, his beard bristling, his glaring eyes nearly starting from his head, Liu spurred his piebald horse forward. The government troops scattered in alarm before him, and instead of giving battle Kao Chien fled. Liu galloped up the hillock but failed to find him, and the government troops surging forward like a tide surrounded him again. However, they did not venture to press their advantage. And as Liu wished his men to have a respite while awaiting a chance to break through, this front suddenly grew quiet.

Liu's lieutenants Ma Shih-yao and Li Yu kept close beside him, their three horses standing abreast. These two brave youths were lightly wounded too, but roused by the fighting they chafed at this respite. Seeing that the government troops had lost their impetus, Ma Shih-yao glanced at Liu.

"Why not charge them?" he muttered.

Liu made no answer as if he had not heard. Li Yu glanced at him too, then exchanged a look with Ma.

"Let's charge. I'll take the lead!" he urged softly.

Still Liu said nothing as if he had not heard them. He had a clearer idea of the situation. Though they were surrounded by troops almost seven times their number, it seemed the enemy could do little against them. Judging by the shouting in the distance, Prince Valiant and Liu Fang-liang were still fighting hard, and if he with his two hundred-odd men could pin down over a thousand of Sun's picked troops here, it would help the prince. To his mind it should not be hard to break through the encirclement after dark, unless Sun brought in fresh reinforcements. And even if the worst came to the worst — if Sun brought in reinforcements and stopped him and his comrades from breaking out — it would not matter greatly. The main thing was to ensure that the prince broke through with flying colours. This consideration strengthened his resolve to pin down Sun's troops.

Fierce conflicts were raging now in several places and the din was deafening. Liu looked around in vain for Sun's banner. He wondered, "Has he gone to attack the prince too?" Abruptly changing his plan, he glanced at his officers and waved his sword.

"Follow me!"

Sun Chuan-ting had counted on wiping out Liu's forces, and had therefore taken the command himself and offered rewards for Liu's capture; but his sustained attacks had failed in their purpose. When he saw that Li Tzu-cheng had routed Ma Ko and others of his generals and was charging this way and that without serious opposition, he left part of his force to continue to harass Liu Tsung-min while he himself led picked troops, together with two thousand reinforcements sent by Hung Cheng-chou, to encircle Prince Valiant.

In this new battle the insurgents fought very bravely, but as they were outnumbered and the terrain was unfavourable to them, and as moreover both men and horses were famished and exhausted and they had suffered heavy losses, they were quickly cut up into small groups, each able only to defend itself.

At first Li Tzu-cheng had had the initiative and could sally out to find opponents. Gradually, however, he lost this initiative and could only charge to the rescue of groups of his men who had been encircled by the enemy, in an attempt to cover their withdrawal to the small hill to the east. But this extremely perilous situation did not make him lose heart. When Sun Chuan-ting, brandishing his sword, charged towards him at the head of more than three thousand picked troops, the prince had less than five hundred horsemen left. He was helping some of his forces to withdraw, while others were still pinned down by government troops and putting up a fierce resistance. Sun's arrival with fresh troops worried the prince's officers and men. Many of them feared that if some calamity overtook Prince Valiant, the whole army would be lost. Li Tzu-cheng understood their apprehension. He saw how anxiously his two officers and Chang Nai were watching him, as if to ask, "Withdraw? Or take them on?"

He could also see at a glance that the troops under Sun were well trained. They were advancing steadily over a stretch of fairly open

ground, in a semi-circular formation, two or three hundred cavalymen on the two wings, with the foot-soldiers in the middle. Sun and several dozen officers and guards, mounted on armoured Mongolian steeds, were riding at the head of the infantry. Their banners flapped in the wind; the roll of their battle-drums shook the earth; their lances and swords glittered coldly in the sunset. Li Tzu-cheng gave swift instructions to two of his guards, who rode off, evading the enemy, in different directions.

"What shall we do, Your Highness?" asked Chang Nai tensely.

The prince remained silent, waiting for the enemy's approach. Between him and Sun's troops lay a sunken road. Roads of this type, rutted year after year by ox-carts and washed out by the rain so that they resembled dried-up ditches, were common on the loess plains in the north. They were usually seven or eight feet wide, sometimes more than ten feet. Li Tzu-cheng knew that this big sunken road could be turned to his advantage, but it was too close for his troops to advance and attack. He ordered his men to fit arrows to their bows and to withdraw slowly in two columns a hundred yards, then make a stand by a hillock.

When Sun approached the road and saw the insurgents waiting with drawn bows, he promptly called a halt. He believed that once his troops had crossed this road they would be more than a match for the prince's poorly equipped force of less than five hundred. However, a beast at bay will put up a desperate fight, and Li Tzu-cheng was an intrepid warrior. In the hope of defeating him without a fight, to avoid incurring more losses before his return to Peking, Sun turned to Kao Chien beside him.

"You are Li Tzu-cheng's cousin and used to be on good terms with him. Now his life is in our hands. Go and tell him that if he surrenders at once, I shall ask the court to spare his life. Go on!"

Kao Chien knew that Li Tzu-cheng would never surrender, but not daring to say so he obeyed this order and galloped to the edge of the sunken road. Well aware that Prince Valiant was a skilled archer, he was pale with fear, his heart pounding. However, he had to put on a show of calmness to impress Sun. And to make

sure that Li Tzu-cheng knew that his mission was friendly, he had taken off his helmet and waved to him.

"Cousin Tzu-cheng! Cousin Tzu-cheng!" he called. As the drums on both sides were mute now, all could hear the trepidation in his voice.

"Isn't it that bastard Kao Chien?" whispered a man beside the prince. "Can I loose off an arrow at him?"

"Wait till we hear what he has to say," answered Prince Valiant.

The old soldier Wang Chang-shun grumbled, "He's the ghost of a drowned man who wants to lure other people into the water. Let the swine do his talking in hell. We don't want to listen."

But no one dared shoot without the prince's order.

"Cousin, please come over!" Kao Chien called more loudly. "I've something to say to you."

Li Tzu-cheng lightly pressed his stirrups and Black Dragon cantered fifteen yards or so forward. The prince had told no one else to follow him. Behind him, with bows in their hands, were only Chang Nai and Li Chiang, the captain of his guards.

"What have you to say to me?" asked Li Tzu-cheng.

"We are cousins, kinsmen by marriage, and we both served under Kao Ying-hsiang, the first Prince Valiant. For years we shared weal and woe, with no hard feelings. So now that your army is beaten and facing annihilation, I've come specially to give you some advice. You'd better listen, cousin!"

"Do you want me to surrender?"

"Yes. I honestly have your interests at heart. Just hear me out. . . ."

"I understand. You don't have to go on. If you want me to surrender, go and fetch your Commissioner Sun to propose it himself."

"Fine. I'll ask His Excellency to come."

When Kao Chien went back and reported this, Sun thought that Li Tzu-cheng meant to surrender. He rode up to the road with a troop of officers and bodyguards. Laying his sword horizontally over his saddle, he glanced superciliously at the prince.

"Li Tzu-cheng, do you surrender?" he asked loudly.

"Commissioner Sun, years of fighting have covered our land with the white bones of the slain, and my heart bleeds for our people. Recently the Tartars have thrust south of the Great Wall, surrounded our capital and penetrated deep into our territory. This makes my hair bristle with fury! I long to lead my troops there to fight those Manchus and strike a blow for our country. I hear that the emperor has ordered you and Governor Hung to take your armies there. If you will accept my offer, commissioner, I will gladly march east with your forces. But only on four conditions..."

"What conditions?"

"First: The government armies must let us through to Lingpao or Wenhsiarg, so that we can reorganize our troops and rally more followers, in preparation for the eastern expedition. Second: We must be supplied with fodder and rations, money and weapons, and treated on the same footing as the government troops. Third: Our troops will go with you, but you must not reorganize them, much less try to wipe them out. Fourth..."

In a towering rage Sun Chuan-ting cried, "Stop this farting! The court has its own plan for subduing the Tartars. We don't need any bandits butting in! Since Heaven is merciful to all living creatures, I am giving you a chance to repent. If you persist in your wrong ways, you'll die here and now! Hurry up and lay down your arms! What are you waiting for?"

Li Tzu-cheng laughed scornfully and without another word turned and rode away. Sun, fearing that he would escape, hastily called to his officers:

"Ten thousand taels of silver for whoever captures or kills this rebel chief. And three grades promotion too. After him!"

At once, drums rolled and shouting broke out as Sun's cavalry and infantry sped forward to cross the sunken road. Its depth varied from two feet to six and parts of the sides sloped gently, others were steep. When half of the troops had got across, they jostled and shoved each other in wild confusion; only those still on the bank remained in orderly ranks. Sun, who had already crossed, did not stop to reorganize his troops, so eager was he to capture Prince Valiant. This was the chance the prince had been waiting for. He waved his sword.



At once the insurgents' drums thundered and arrows were let fly at the enemy.

"Charge!"

Nearly five hundred horsemen followed Li Tzu-cheng into the fray. The thunder of hooves and the flashing of swords struck terror into the government troops. Sun nearly panicked, especially when the prince led the charge to encircle him with his few trusted officers and bodyguards. He felt the impulse to kill himself rather than fall into the insurgents' hands.

However, his men put up a desperate fight and reinforcements soon reached them, enabling Sun to make a stand beside the road and beat back the prince's attack. Since Li Tzu-cheng's force was too small to fight a pitched battle, he turned to attack the troops still in confusion. This dealt a heavy blow at the enemy, but also gave Sun the chance to organize a counter-attack. In less time than it takes for a meal, Ma Ko arrived too with his men. Then by sheer weight of numbers Sun recovered the initiative and encircled the prince's troops.

The fighting had never been so fierce. Though Prince Valiant was outnumbered he did his best to defeat Sun in this battle, so that he could break through the encirclement that night. Making use of his cavalry's mobility, he now concentrated his forces, now split them up, attacking Sun's infantry, charging his main column, and once even capturing Sun Chuan-ting's big banner, although it was soon wrested back.

In the chaos Prince Valiant's own banner was seized by an officer under Ma Ko. The insurgents fought hard to win it back, and great was the carnage on both sides as they contended round it, but they failed to recover it. The loss of the prince's banner shook the confidence of the insurgents but elated the government troops, who thought that victory was within their grasp.

"Lay down your arms!" they yelled. "Quick!"

At this critical juncture Li Tzu-cheng, Chang Nai and some dozen men charged like lightning, scattering all those in their path, and the prince's banner returned to the insurgents. At sight of it raised high again, they burst out cheering and shouted battle cries which

unnerved their opponents. Swiftly the prince and his small band charged Ma Ko, who turned and fled.

"Take this!" swore Chang Nai.

His sword flashed and Ma Ko's standard-bearer was cut down from his horse. However, before Chang Nai could reach out for the banner, some hard-thrusting government troops had carried it off.

Owing to the great disparity in strength, the prince's position was growing more difficult. He began to fear that his two messengers had failed to find Liu Tsung-min and Yuan Tsung-ti. Just then, in the northwest behind the government forces contending with him, he saw the enemy thrown into confusion and fleeing in all directions. The prince led his force that way. Almost immediately Liu Tsung-min at the head of his men raced towards him. Liu's two swords flashed in the gathering dusk, putting government troops to flight.

After joining forces, Prince Valiant and Liu decided to fight their way to the small hill to the south. Then they saw a gap in the southeast government ranks and Yuan Tsung-ti appeared, whirling his mace. The enemy had to give way to him and his three hundred horsemen. As soon as Yuan drew near, the prince asked:

"What of headquarters?"

"It was surrounded just now by the enemy. After a skirmish, Kao Yi-kung got our people out and took them up the small hill. We've lost quite a few cadets and bodyguards, dammit!"

"And the rearguard?"

"They fought a bloody battle too, with heavy losses on both sides. Now Tsao Pien-chiao's stopped attacking."

"Any casualties among our officers?"

"I'm not clear. All I heard was that Hao Yao-chi had been wounded."

"Badly?" asked the prince in dismay.

"That I can't say."

Seeing that Sun Chuan-ting and Ma Ko were bringing up troops to encircle them again, Li Tzu-cheng at once regrouped his cavalry and withdrew, fighting, to the southeast. After pursuing them some way, Sun had a gong sounded to call off the pursuit, as it was now

growing dark and his infantry were worn out. When the prince saw this, he withdrew more slowly with his men towards the small hill.

After these two big battles, one in the morning, the other in the evening, there were little more than two thousand insurgents left, and of these one third were wounded, some seriously, while quite a few had several wounds. They withdrew to the foot of the hill and the fortress on it. There was no sign of life near this stronghold, the only building there being a small temple to the mountain god, nor was there a single well. Many years or perhaps a century before, there had been a village there, but after long years of war the villagers had either died or fled, and their cottages had fallen into ruin. Even the well was blocked up. Clearly Sun had thought the place untenable, so instead of garrisoning it he had left it to the insurgents to occupy. The lack of water was what distressed them most. The wounded, in particular, were desperate for water to moisten their parched throats.

Li Tzu-cheng was worried but did not know how to find water. He himself was so thirsty that his throat seemed on fire, and he was tired out. However, instead of sitting down to rest he made the round of the troops to encourage and comfort them. When his men saw him and reflected that Prince Valiant was just as thirsty as they were but exerting himself harder than anyone else, they looked up at him with gratitude and stopped grumbling, taking fresh heart. When the badly wounded saw him or heard his voice, they too suppressed their groans. Some insurgents were exchanging news about how their officers and close friends had fared. When they heard that the prince had received not so much as a scratch, their spirits rose — there was still hope for their army.

"Of course Prince Valiant's unscathed," some commented. "He's a great man, born under a lucky star!"

However, not long after the prince had passed they began to worry again, and curses and groans could be heard.

By the light of the moon Li Tzu-cheng saw a tall figure with a sword strapped to his back, a medicine pouch fastened to his belt, limping along through the rubble. Leaning on a spear, he was picking his

way towards a man who was groaning with pain. Li Tzu-cheng called to him to stop and asked in a low voice:

"Old Shang, is there nothing you can do for all these wounded?"

"What can I do when all the medicine's gone?"

The prince's lips contracted in dismay and he gazed at the doctor in silence. The physician shook his head and avoided his eyes. He had never seen such pain in those eyes before. In the past few months of incessant marching and fighting, most of their store of drugs had been used up, and they had few chances to replenish it. Sometimes they had no sooner sent a man to buy medicine than they had to resume their march, and he could not catch up with them. Sometimes the men sent were captured by government troops or local militia, with the result that they lost both men and money. It distressed the physician, too, to have no drugs for these wounded. He moved a step closer and sighed.

"We have only a few good drugs left, which have to be kept for an emergency. Of course I give a little to some of our generals and the most badly wounded."

The prince nodded grimly.

"How is that wound on your leg?" he asked. "Can you still ride?"

"It's nothing. I've had plenty of scratches like this these last few years. They can't stop me riding and fighting."

The prince said with a sigh, "You must have some rest too."

"There are too many wounded men, Your Highness, and too few physicians. We left one at Tuchiachai, and another has just been disabled. With only one apprentice left, how can we cope? Besides, some cases are so serious, I have to attend to them myself. If only that good apprentice whom I trained..."

At mention of his most promising apprentice who had fallen a fortnight ago, his heart ached and he broke off to fight back his tears. Just then a young officer came hurrying over. Not stopping to greet the prince he accosted the physician.

"Doctor, please come at once! A young captain of ours has just been carried back from the battlefield. He's dying."

"Badly wounded?" Shang Chiung asked.

"Stabbed in the belly. His guts are spilling out."

"So, another of those cases. Come on. If there's still life in him we can save him."

The prince refrained from asking the wounded man's name, for fear of delaying them. He was following them with his eyes when another young captain came up, holding something in both hands.

"Prince Valiant," he said, "have some water."

"Water? . . . Where did you get it?" The prince's eyes shone with joy at sight of the pig's bladder in the other's hands.

"There's a gully about two *li* from here. Three of us went there to fetch water. Just as we got there we were spotted by government scouts. Still we managed to lap up some water and bring this bladderful back for you." The young captain laughed happily, raising his trophy higher.

"Go ahead, prince, and drink!"

Li Tzu-cheng was parched. When he took the bladder, its coolness seemed to penetrate his heart. At once he felt refreshed. Although the bladder was brimming, the water seemed too little to quench his thirst. He commended the young officer:

"Well done."

He unfastened the hempen cord round the neck of the bladder and greedily drank a mouthful, first rinsing his parched mouth before he swallowed. A sensation of coolness permeated his body. Since this bladder had been used as a flagon for liquor, it still retained a taste of alcohol. Li Tzu-cheng raised it to his lips again, intending to drain the contents, when he heard the groans of the wounded all around him as well as the sighs of the thirsty. He hesitated, then took only a tiny sip to moisten his lips, after which he refastened the bladder and handed it back.

"Take it, quick. Let our brothers who are tormented by thirst all have a sip."

"But you, prince. . . ."

"Go on. I've a bit of a belly-ache, I can't drink too much."

Before the young officer could protest Prince Valiant waved him away.

This day of tumultuous fighting had taken toll of Kao Kuei-ying — she looked worn to a shadow. During the *mêlée* when headquarters was besieged by the enemy, she had shown remarkable courage and cool-headedness. The bodyguards of different families whom she had organized that morning to protect headquarters had played a big part in the fighting. After Kao Chang-sheng who headed them was killed in battle, she immediately told the physician Shang Chiung to take his place. Then there were the cadets led by Lo Hu, and the wounded soldiers, non-combatants and young women, all of whom followed her orders and helped to guard the various families and headquarters' supplies. In moments of grave danger, she urged them calmly not to panic, assuring them that soon reinforcements would come to beat back the enemy. Her words and her resolution gave them fresh strength. When her bodyguards volunteered to help her and her daughter to break through, she firmly refused.

"What nonsense!" she said sternly. "How can we abandon headquarters? Either we rally our forces to beat back the government troops, or we die here together."

So in spite of heavy losses they managed to hold out till rescuers came and drove the enemy back. Had she wavered when her bodyguards proposed leaving, headquarters would have collapsed.

After headquarters moved to the small hill, Kuei-ying had virtually no rest. She went immediately with two women guards to help the physicians give first aid to the wounded, eating nothing except a piece of half-roasted horseflesh which Hui-mei handed her. Then, hearing that there was a tumbledown temple in the forest on the hill, she left her two guards to go on bandaging the wounded while she herself went with a heavy heart to offer incense and pray to the mountain god. On her return from the temple, she went to see the cadets.

In the bitter fighting at dusk, the cadets had suffered so many losses that there were only a few dozen left. Now some boys were sitting round three camp-fires in one corner of the fortress, roasting horseflesh. The wounded or worn-out were lying on the straw and leaves with which the ground was strewn, some of them sound asleep. When the rest saw Kuei-ying approaching they started to get up, but she raised her hand to stop them. So many cadets had been killed

that she was bitterly distressed, but she swallowed back her tears. After chatting for a while, she noticed that smart young Wang Ssu's eyes were red. She went over to him and patted him on the head.

"Have you been crying, Wang Ssu? Why?"

The boy had been unable to hold back his tears because some of his best friends had fallen in battle. Embarrassed by her question he covered his eyes.

"I wasn't crying. Smoke got in my eyes," he muttered.

Afraid he might break down again, Lo Hu put in:

"Madam, do you know? If Wang Ssu hadn't been so quick, Lai-heng would have been done for."

Kuei-ying nodded. "That's right. Wang Ssu saved his life. He's really a brave lad."

Her heart was still in a turmoil when she recalled the brave fight the cadets had put up to protect headquarters at dusk. When the fighting started, the older boys like Lo Hu had battled unflinchingly, and even young Lai-heng had shown great pluck. One could see that he would grow up to be a brave fighter. During that crisis, refusing to be controlled by either her or his mother, he joined the other cadets to combat the government troops. The cruel skirmish took place only a few dozen feet from her, so that she could see it clearly. When Lai-heng for the first time swung his sword at a foot-soldier's head and the man toppled down before his horse, he yelled excitedly to the other boys:

"I've downed one! I've downed one!"

He became bolder and bolder, charging repeatedly into the enemy's midst and felling several men before turning back. The last time he charged, an arrow came whistling over and pierced his shoulder so that he fell from his horse. A government cavalryman bent down to spear him, and Kuei-ying's heart missed a beat — surely Lai-heng was done for! But just then Wang Ssu galloped up and cut down the enemy from behind while another cadet helped Lai-heng up from the ground. Unfortunately this second rescuer had been surrounded and died a hero's death.

"How bad is Lai-heng's wound?" Wang Ssu asked her.

"It's not serious. In another ten days or so he'll be able to join in your games again and your battles."

Then Kuei-ying left the cadet corps in search of the prince. Having found him outside the forest she asked in a low voice:

"What is your plan now?"

"I'm just about to discuss it with Liu Tsung-min."

"You mustn't delay. If we fail to break through tonight, it'll be bad!"

"I plan to break through after midnight."

"Good. The men and horses are tired out. Let's start off after midnight." After a short pause she added, "Which direction will you take?"

Prince Valiant always respected her opinion. He asked, "What do you think?"

"I think we might turn back and fight our way out in the south."

The prince nodded. He glanced at his wife's face, so haggard and so weary in the moonlight.

"You ought to have some rest too," he urged softly.

She shook her head with a deep sigh. "No medicine, no water, and all those wounded men..." Swallowing back a sob she refrained from saying that they were groaning with pain. Instead she asked, "How can I leave them?"

The prince said nothing. After exchanging glances they started off in different directions. But suddenly he turned his head to ask:

"Is that old hunchback still with headquarters?"

"He had another light wound. We never thought he could fight, yet he felled several soldiers with that oak staff of his... Do you want him as guide when we break through the cordon?"

"We need a few people who know the lie of the land."

"Well, there's no time to be lost."

The prince assented, then went back to headquarters in the forest.

## Chapter 11

After a hurried supper Sun Chuan-ting, tired as he was, rode out to inspect the battlefield. He also spent some time near the foot of the

hill where Li Tzu-cheng was surrounded. He was confident that tonight he would either capture or kill Li Tzu-cheng, for he reckoned that after the two big battles today the prince could not have more than two thousand men left — not nearly enough for a break-through. To concentrate his whole force to wipe out the remnant insurgents, he gave orders to disband his third line of defence and to bring up two thousand picked troops as reinforcements. After his messenger had galloped off, he headed back well pleased towards his headquarters.

In the two years and more since his appointment as commissioner of Shensi, Sun had won many victories against the insurgents and was regarded by the court as one of the ablest of the provincial officials. Not only was he a good strategist, he also showed skill in other military affairs such as reorganizing local forces and the supply of troops. Thus he had been commended by the emperor. More than two centuries previously, a system of allocating armed forces to farmlands had been introduced in the Sian district; but later many of these farms were taken over by local despots who appropriated the grain; so when the government needed money and soldiers none were forthcoming. Sun Chuan-ting made a series of sweeping reforms which within just a few months yielded good results. He rounded up more than nine thousand able-bodied men for armed service, and raised more than one hundred and forty thousand taels of silver as well as over one thousand tons of grain. The local gentry who had appropriated the produce of these farms dared not oppose his reforms openly, but they incited local riff-raff to protest vociferously. By arresting a number of these hooligans, having eighteen of them executed on the spot and eleven bastinadoed, Sun had suppressed this resistance.

The success of his reforms and his many victories in war had made Sun so arrogant that he thought himself the best of the government generals. Hung Cheng-chou, commander of the northwest border regions and his superior officer, also happened to have been his examiner, yet Sun had very little respect for him. Now that he had reduced Li Tzu-cheng's troops to some two thousand men and encircled them here, he felt that his ambition to capture the prince was

about to be realized. He made up his mind to compose a poem, while on horseback, to celebrate his achievement. But barely had he thought of one line when his aide-de-camp Liu Jen-ta galloped up to report that Governor Hung was coming to their headquarters to discuss urgent business with him. Sun decided that the Manchus must be pressing their attack on Peking and the government had summoned him and Hung to return post-haste. The prospect of fighting the Manchus made him lose all interest in poetry.

When Sun returned to his headquarters, many of his secretaries and officers were waiting outside. He nodded curtly, ignoring most of them, and swaggered into the tent. As he took his seat they followed him in and started flattering him, praising him for his brilliant strategy which had trapped Li Tzu-cheng, extolling him as invincible in battle, the scourge of the insurgents. These encomiums enabled Sun to forget for a while his fear of fighting the Manchus. He asked a few of the higher-ranking men:

"In your view, can the bandit Li Tzu-cheng escape from my hand tonight?"

"Of course not, certainly not!" several answered in unison.

One secretary produced a square sheet of paper and presented it with both hands, bowing.

"This is a poem I've just written," he said with a smile. "Please point out its shortcomings, sir."

Sun took the paper and read the title *Written During Battle, with the Same Rhymes as Before, in Honour of Commissioner Sun*. Then he slowly chanted the poem:

Miraculous the commissioner's strategy;  
Rebels past counting in three years he has suppressed.  
Tonight all the bandit chieftains will be killed;  
No more will our sovereign be anxious about the west.

This secretary had already written four poems with these rhymes in praise of Sun that day and had won Sun's praise. After reading it, Sun became even more elated. Tapping the table with his fingers he lauded each line. Other secretaries joined in, wagging their heads



as they commented on the aptness of the sentiments in the last line. Sun chanted the poem once more, then said:

"A fine poem! I must drink a cup to it."

His followers, knowing him well, immediately brought out a pot of good Hsinfeng wine and a goblet. Placing these before him, they filled the goblet to the brim. Without asking them to join him, even ignoring the man who had written the poem, Sun raised the goblet and drained it.

"Bring me the report," he said quietly.

At once another secretary brought him the report they had drafted. This said that by the grace of the emperor and thanks to the valour of officers and men and the good commandship of Governor Hung, they had succeeded in wiping out a whole series of "bandit" forces, and Li Tzu-cheng finding it impossible to escape had fallen into their trap. It went on to speak in glowing terms of their victories that day, and exaggerated the insurgents' casualty figures as "no less than several tens of thousands". A few lines at the end had been left blank so that the next morning they could list the major rebel officers captured and killed, as well as those who had surrendered. It ended, "We shall after investigation report the names of the officers and men who distinguished themselves in this campaign."

Sun was fairly satisfied with this draft, but he took the writing brush to strike out the sentence "we captured countless arms". In its place he wrote, "Bandits' corpses covered the plain and their abandoned weapons piled up like a mountain. This is indeed the greatest victory of the last ten years." Then, tossing his writing brush on the table, in a gruff voice he ordered:

"Bring me the bulletins."

When Sun started reading the bulletins, those secretaries who had toadied him withdrew one by one on tiptoe. The few who remained stood in silence, closely watching the commissioner's expression. Sun was indifferent whether they stayed or left. His secretaries invariably selected the good news to put on top of the file, because if he read the bad news first he might be too provoked to read the rest, or might fly into a temper.

The first bulletin Sun read was about Chang Hsien-chung, who had remained quietly in Kucheng and whose surrender therefore seemed genuine. He nodded slightly, threw the bulletin down and drank a goblet of wine, then picked up the second bulletin. One secretary quickly stooped and respectfully retrieved the one on the ground while a guard refilled his goblet. Sun, feeling in a good humour, got up and put his right foot on the strut of the table. Another young guard promptly held the candlestick closer.

This second bulletin dealt with Lo Ju-tsai, who after his defeat outside the Tungkuan Pass by Commissioner Sun had fled with nine columns of insurgents to Fanghsien and Chunchow and surrendered to the government, volunteering to garrison that district without asking the state for grain or emoluments. After reading this, the flicker of a smile appeared on Sun's lips. He tossed the bulletin down with his left hand, and with his right picked up his goblet to drink.

As he stooped to reach for the third bulletin, either through his own negligence or because the young guard holding the candlestick was nodding with fatigue, the candle set light to the hair over his temple. Sun clapped his hands to his hair and put out the flame. The young guard had turned pale with terror. Putting down the candlestick he fell on his knees, trembling. Sun glanced at him, whereupon two more guards came over, hauled the young fellow to his feet and pushed him out. The secretaries there exchanged apprehensive glances and held their breath. Presently, when Sun had resumed his seat and finished reading the third bulletin, his aide-de-camp Liu Jen-ta entered. Liu bowed and asked how they should deal with the young guard. Sun did not look up. Without any hesitation he softly rapped out two words:

"Execute him!"

Liu Jen-ta knelt down. "Please be merciful, sir," he said. "He fought all day with no rest, that's why he slipped up. Please spare his life!"

Sun looked up and glared at Liu. "Hold your tongue! Execute him, quickly."

"Yes, sir!" Not daring to plead again, Liu got up and slowly withdrew, casting an appealing look at the secretaries.

The secretaries exchanged glances, then eyed the man whose poem had been commended by the commissioner, hoping he would intercede. He went up to Sun and made a deep bow, then said:

"Please don't be angry, sir. Though that guard deserves death, we hope you will consider the fact that he did not do this deliberately but because he was tired out. We beg you to be merciful and spare his life. Today we have won an unprecedented great victory; all the bandits are about to be wiped out, and the whole country is rejoicing. Please do not mar this occasion by killing a man for so slight an offence. The ancients said, 'A great fire will melt metal.' Of the five elements, fire is the one that conquers metal. And metal stands for war as well as for the west. Tonight the flame that burnt your hair was an omen that in this campaign we shall win a great victory and the war will end. From now on the court will have no more cause for worry in the west. This coincides with that line in my poem, 'No more will our sovereign be anxious about the west.' This is an extremely auspicious omen, sir. Why should you feel so angry?"

These words delighted Sun. He stroked his beard, lost in thought. And the other secretaries, seeing that his mood had changed, added their requests for mercy. Sun turned to a guard beside him and said:

"Give him two hundred strokes." He added, "Hard ones!"

This order given in a low voice by Sun was passed on loudly by an officer, then relayed by voices outside, striking dread into all who heard it.

Sun continued to read the bulletins, coming now to one about peasant insurgents who had stayed in the Tapieh Mountains but not ventured out to pillage the countryside. Without waiting to finish it, he tossed it to the ground, ignoring the sound of lashes and shrieks outside. He started on the fifth bulletin, a detailed report of famines in various parts of Honan where "bandits" were appearing everywhere. Having finished and thrown it down he read the sixth, an account of the prevalence of "bandits" in the Huai and Ssu River valleys. With a look of disgust he threw it to the ground. The seventh bulletin reported the Manchus' advance to the vicinity of the capital, and Kao Chi-chien's defeat at Lukouchiao. Sun shook

his head and tossed it to the ground. Now Liu Jen-ta re-entered and reported with a bow:

"Sir, the man has been beaten."

Without looking up Sun grunted, and Liu withdrew on tiptoe. The eighth bulletin reported the Manchus' further thrust to Yichow and Chuohsien. Sun threw it down and, leaving the last two unread, exclaimed with a sigh:

"The Tartars are so close to the capital!"

The secretary who had picked up the bulletins from the ground stacked them on the table and said, "No need to worry, sir. After we wipe out the bandit Li Tzu-cheng tonight you can go with Governor Hung to fight the Manchus. As soon as your army arrives, the capital will be freed from danger."

Sun said nothing. In silence he drank half a goblet then slapped the goblet down, thrusting out his chin. The guard, understanding the gesture, cleared away the winepot and goblet. Sun knew that his officers were mortally afraid of fighting the Manchus. As for him, though he had plenty of experience in "mopping up bandits", he had no confidence at all that he could defeat such formidable opponents as the Manchus. But not liking to say this in public he remained silent.

Outside the tent now someone shouted, "His Excellency the governor has come!" Then Sun's aide-de-camp hurried in to report:

"Sir, the governor is outside."

Before Sun could go out to welcome him, Hung Cheng-chou had already come in. Sun and the secretaries bowed at the entrance to greet him.

"We respectfully welcome Your Excellency!" said Sun.

Hung Cheng-chou casually raised clasped hands by way of greeting.

"No need for formality on the battlefield," he said. "You all acquitted yourselves manfully today."

"All the credit belongs to Your Excellency," they answered.

After Hung and Sun had taken seats the others withdrew, except for a few trusted secretaries who took part in most councils of war. Sun bowed and asked:

"After the rigours of the campaign, instead of resting at head-

quarters, Your Excellency has honoured us with a visit. What instructions have you for us?"

"These days we have received a series of Imperial edicts," said Hung, speaking mandarin with a Fukien accent. "Our orders are to wipe out Li Tzu-cheng quickly, then go with all speed to relieve the capital. We both know what a fiery temper the emperor has. This evening I received another urgent summons from the Ministry of War. If by any chance we let these rebels escape, the emperor will be incensed and our exertions during the last few years will come to nothing."

"Rest assured, Your Excellency. I estimate that after today's fierce battles Li Tzu-cheng has little more than two thousand men left, including wounded as well as women and children. So there will be only a thousand or so who can fight, and they are all exhausted. They are completely surrounded by our troops; their supplies are finished and they have no water; they can only feed themselves by killing their horses. Like fish in the cauldron they have no chance to escape now. Surrender or die — they have no other way out!"

Hung stroked his beard and smiled.

"I fear you are oversimplifying the situation, brother."

Sun was taken aback. "Oversimplifying it? . . . Please elucidate, Your Excellency."

"Even a beast at bay will fight, not to say men like Li Tzu-cheng and Liu Tsung-min. In my view, they will certainly try to break through at midnight. If we fail to stop them, our past merits will count for nothing, and we shall have endless trouble."

"Don't worry, Your Excellency. I have drafted a letter ordering them to surrender, and was meaning to consult you before sending it to the bandits' camp. If they submit, we shall vanquish those villains with no further bloodshed. If they refuse, at the crack of dawn we shall attack from all sides. We are bound to wipe them out with one blow. Not a bandit will escape!"

Hung shook his head. "Li Tzu-cheng is not the man to surrender."

"In the past he was stubborn and would not submit. But the situation has changed now. He must surrender."

"Not necessarily."

"Those other rebels Chang Hsien-chung and Lo Ju-tsai had more men than Li, and they rose in revolt earlier. Now because both surrendered the court has spared their lives. These are precedents. Li Tzu-cheng has no reinforcements to come to his rescue. He's all alone confronting the picked troops of several provinces. He's finished, caught in our trap and with no way of escape. That being so, I reckon he must lay down arms. During the battle today he already showed signs of willingness to capitulate."

"Indeed?" Still sceptical, Hung looked searchingly at Sun.

"He said he would be willing to surrender if he could lead his men against the Tartars. I refused, for fear it might be another trick, like that time when he escaped from our forces at Chehhsianghsia. I fancy he knows by now that we are not dupes like Chen Chi-yu. If we send an envoy calling on him to surrender and promise to spare his life, he's certain to bind himself and come over to us."

Hung smiled again. "If you're so sure of this, brother, go ahead and try. If they are willing to submit, we can avoid further losses."

Sun glanced at his trusted secretaries and said, "Bring the letter."

One man promptly presented the letter they had drafted, and Sun handed it to Hung. The latter, after reading it, stroked his beard with a faint smile.

"I think it would be better, brother," he said, "to write this in your own name."

"Your Excellency has the exalted position of Imperial Guardian, and you have been in command of all our armed forces for many years. Your fame, known far and wide, strikes awe into the rebels; so a letter written in your name will be more effective."

"But I haven't brought my seal with me," Hung objected.

"I shall send the letter at once to your headquarters to have it stamped."

Seeing that further objections would be useless, Hung nodded and said, "All right, send it to my headquarters. But mind you choose a good man to deliver it."

"I intend to send Kao Chien, a bandit chief who surrendered, with my aide-de-camp Liu Jen-ta. Does Your Excellency approve?"



Hung understood his intention perfectly well, but he deliberately feigned surprise. For in view of Sun's arrogance he often made a show of obtuseness himself. If Sun had consulted him modestly, he would have given him frank advice on the basis of his own experience, analysing the question thoroughly before making any proposal. But now Sun's overweening pride made Hung pose as dim-witted.

"Why send Kao Chien?" he asked. "If Li Tzu-cheng won't surrender, we'll lose Kao too."

"Kao Chien has done nothing useful since coming over. Sending him on this mission will give him a chance to win merit. Such people are unreliable, not to be trusted, so even if he fails to come back it won't be much loss."

Hung said nothing, just tweaked his beard and smiled. Sun called to the men outside:

"Send in Aide-de-Camp Liu Jen-ta and Kao Chien!"

When this order had been passed on, the two men entered the tent, Kao Chien behind Liu. They saluted the governor and the commissioner, then stood at attention waiting for their orders. Sun handed the letter to Liu.

"You and Kao Chien are to take this letter to the governor's headquarters to have it stamped; then go to the bandits' camp and deliver the letter. Explain our just stand and the dire consequences to them if they refuse. Call on them to surrender at once. Make haste, there must be no delay!"

Liu Jen-ta assented and was about to leave when Kao Chien stepped forward and fell on his knees.

"Be merciful, commissioner!" he cried in dismay. "I can't go on this mission, I really can't."

"Why not? Here's your chance to win merit."

"Li Tzu-cheng has always abominated those who surrender to the government. If you send me on this mission I'm bound to fail. Not only that — if I fall into their hands they'll kill me."

"Nonsense! With his life in our hands, how dare he kill you? If I weren't certain of this I wouldn't send you. Why be so timid?"

"It's not that I'm a coward, but I know Li Tzu-cheng so well. . . ."

Sun frowned and bellowed, "My orders must be obeyed. Are you defying orders?"

Kao Chien kowtowed and reiterated, "I dare not!" He reflected that if he refused to go, Sun would have him dragged out and decapitated. If he brazened it out and went, there was just a chance that he might return alive.

"Going there, my chances are very poor," he pleaded. "If Li Tzu-cheng kills me, sir, I beg you to take pity on my wife and children and make provision for them, so that they will not suffer from hunger and want. Then in the nether regions I shall be grateful, sir, for your great kindness."

"Just go with an easy mind."

Kao Chien kowtowed resoundingly once more, then followed Liu Jen-ta out.

"All those bandits who surrender are useless cowards afraid of death!" swore Sun contemptuously.

The crafty smile left Hung's face as he said, "In my humble opinion, this order to surrender may not prove effective. We must make military preparations."

"Please issue your instructions, Your Excellency."

"What do you think? If they try to force a break-through, which direction will they take?"

"Southwest or southeast, that's certain."

"What makes you think so?"

"After this battle they know that your army is stationed in the north. They won't court disaster there. Tsao Pien-chiao's crack troops are in the south in a strategic position, so they won't dare try the south either. On the west side is Mount Huashan, on the northeast the Tungkuan Pass, and the east is held by such a strong force that not even birds can fly past. Ho Jen-lung's force to the southwest is weaker, and Tso Kuang-hsien to the southeast has sustained heavy losses today. So I am sure these are the directions they will choose if they want to break through."

Hung nodded with an approving smile. "You are an experienced campaigner, brother. I'm sure your estimate is correct. With you here, I have no need to worry. How will you dispose your troops?"

"I await Your Excellency's orders."

"For you to give the orders is the same."

"As the emperor's commander-in-chief you have taken the field yourself, Your Excellency, so how can I issue orders?"

"Since you are so modest, brother, I won't insist. It's a pity we have no time to summon the generals and brief them. We shall have to send messengers to pass on our orders. . . ."

As Hung was thinking this over, one of Sun's confidential secretaries stepped forward with a bow.

"I have just heard that the generals and deputy-generals have come to ask the commissioner for instructions," he said. "Because they saw that the governor was in conference with him they dared not enter. They are still waiting outside."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Hung. "Ask Generals Ma Ko, Tso Kuang-hsien and Ho Jen-lung to come in."

As soon as the order was passed on, the three generals strode swiftly in and, having saluted their superiors, stood at attention to await their orders. Hung first commended them briefly, then explained that if Li Tzu-cheng did not surrender that night he would certainly try to break through in the southwest or southeast directions. He ordered Ho Jen-lung to lead his troops quickly and secretly to the southeast sector to help Tso Kuang-hsien block the enemy's way, and Ma Ko to deploy his troops in the southwest sector, also with absolute secrecy. As he considered that Li Tzu-cheng was most likely to strike southwest, he stressed the need to concentrate on this sector and told Sun Chuan-ting to station his best troops in strategic positions there. Finally, rising to his feet, he said:

"Gentlemen, you have all been well treated by the state. We hope you will fight well to wipe out the bandits and requite our sovereign. If you can capture Li Tzu-cheng, Liu Tsung-min and other bandit chieftains and deliver them to the court, His Majesty will be relieved of deep anxiety and the morale of our army and people will soar. The state will then not begrudge you fiefs as rewards. If you dare to shirk fighting and let one bandit escape, I have the sword bestowed by the emperor, and you can expect no pardon!"

The three generals answered in unison, "We shall obey your orders!"

As they were withdrawing Hung suddenly called them back. Eyeing them, he was pleased to see their confidence, but he warned them once again:

"Don't let today's great victory and the bandits' weakness make you proud and careless. Li Tzu-cheng is exceptionally brave and resourceful, and his troops will fight to the death for him unlike those other bandits. I hope you will take good care!"

"We will!" they chorused.

"Another thing. I hear that Li Tzu-cheng's wife Kao Kuei-ying though not a skilled fighter is brave and resourceful too, bold and resolute, and the rebels are devoted to her. If you encounter her, you must capture her alive as well to present to the court."

"We shall carry out orders!"

After the generals had left, Sun said deferentially, "I shall lead my troops now to the southwest sector. Please rest here, Your Excellency, to wait for news of Li Tzu-cheng's surrender."

"Very well, brother. I am indebted to you. I shall wait here for a while. If he refuses to lay down his arms, I shall come to your position to take command."

"You mustn't put yourself out, Your Excellency. I shall see to it that not one rebel escapes."

"I wish you speedy success." Having seen Sun out of the tent, Hung patted him on the shoulder and said gravely, "Brother, the emperor has issued three edicts in succession and given me the imperial sword as a token of authority. This shows how worried His Majesty is. If tonight we fail to wipe out all the bandits and to kill or capture Li Tzu-cheng and the rest, this will not only affect our great plan for relieving the capital, but we shall incur a royal reprimand. Li Tzu-cheng is both intrepid and cunning. We must not be careless."

"I know, Your Excellency."

Hung did not re-enter the tent immediately. He stood there in the cold wind, watching the troop movements under the pallid moon. . . .

## Chapter 12

As all Prince Valiant's tents had been lost, headquarters was now in the wood on top of the hill. Fallen leaves strewed the ground, and there were rocks on which people could sit. The high cliff behind sheltered them from the north wind. The moon rising over the treetops chequered the ground with shadows. Liu Tsung-min and some other high officers had arrived and were roasting horseflesh round a fire; for since making camp here the quartermaster had sent men to the battlefield to bring back wounded horses, which were divided among different contingents. Headquarters had kept one too. Eating horseflesh would save their rations, and in the absence of water it was easier to swallow than dry rations. Before the prince's arrival they had already started to discuss how to break through the enemy encirclement tonight. Liu Fang-liang and Li Kuo both wanted to fight in the vanguard. They were disputing when Li Tzu-cheng arrived.

As the prince sat down by the fire for a council of war, the officer Ma Shih-yao who had been on sentry duty at the foot of the hill came into the wood to report:

"Prince Valiant, Hung Cheng-chou has sent an aide-de-camp and Kao Chien, together with ten guards, to deliver a letter. I told them to wait at the foot of the hill. Shall I bring them up here?"

"Kao Chien is with them?" asked Li Tzu-cheng in surprise.

Before Ma Shih-yao could answer, Hao Yao-chi leapt up from the ground, forgetting his wounds, and swore loudly:

"That swine! How dare he come! Let me go and kill him!"

Yuan Tsung-ti also fumed, "Just killing him isn't good enough. Let's disembowel him to see whether his heart is black."

Li Tzu-cheng raised one hand to stop them.

"Sit down, all of you," he said. "Don't get so worked up. Wait till I give the signal. . . . Shih-yao, where is the letter?"

"That officer of theirs has it. He says he wants to deliver it in person and hear your reply."

"All right, bring him here with Kao Chien. Just the two of them, no guards."

After Ma Shih-yao had left, Hao Yao-chi sat down again on a rock and asked, "Brother Li, will you let Kao Chien get away alive?"

The prince did not answer this. Glancing round at them all he said, "They have brought a letter from Hung Cheng-chou urging us to surrender. What answer shall we give them?"

"What answer?" Liu Tsung-min snorted. "Kill the lot. Let Old Hung see we're tough — nothing will make us surrender!"

Tien Chien-hsiu shook his head. "No need to kill envoys," he said. "Just send them back to tell Hung Cheng-chou that we won't capitulate."

"Brother Tien, has Kao Chien bribed you to spare his dog's life?" Hao Yao-chi asked sarcastically.

Tien smiled but did not answer.

Yuan Tsung-ti suggested, "Look, why not pretend to surrender?"

"Pretend to surrender?" Li Kuo shook his head.

"If we can fool them long enough to give them the slip, it's worth trying," Yuan explained. "But I doubt whether Hung Cheng-chou and Sun Chuan-ting would be taken in."

"Those two aren't like Chen Chi-yu," agreed Li Kuo. "We can't fool them. Death with honour is better than a life of shame. If we can break through, fine. If we fail, let's fight to the bitter end. Though we die, our fame will live and generations to come will speak of us with respect. We shall also be setting others a good example; so even if we die our names will be immortal. To live in shame like Kao Chien is worse than death."

Yuan Tsung-ti thumped his chest and cried, "Good! Well said. Since the day I joined the revolt I haven't expected to die in bed. Stout fellows in life should have a hero's death. To surrender is worse than crawling on the ground."

"Besides, some of us will get through," put in Li Kuo. "As long as we keep Prince Valiant's banner flying, our army can be rebuilt."

"That's right," approved Liu Tsung-min loudly. "Here's my proposal. Kill their envoys, then straight away attack the government troops and fight our way out!"

"There's no need to kill envoys," said Li Kuo, "Uncle Tien's

idea was right. Let them go back to give Hung Cheng-chou our answer."

It was now reported that the enemy envoy had started up the hill. At a sign from Liu Tsung-min, all the officers stood up and ranged themselves in two lines, only Liu and Prince Valiant remaining seated. The guards also stood to attention on both sides, their lines stretching outside the wood. Ma Shih-yao now came back to report that he had brought the enemy envoy and Kao Chien. Li Tzu-cheng dusted some ashes from his sleeves and said quietly:

"Bring them here."

The enemy aide-de-camp Liu Jen-ta had assumed that Li Tzu-cheng's forces, after being decimated, must be a disorderly rabble. He was amazed to see such imposing, disciplined ranks. His heart beat faster. It flashed through his mind that his chance of survival was small, and he regretted not having taken his leave of his relatives and friends before setting out. Then he thought, "It makes no difference. The commissioner will look after my family." Despite his trepidation he determined not to lose face before these "bandits" and walked forward boldly, assuming a haughty air. Kao Chien who had followed him most unwillingly, though he tried to dismiss the thought of death from his mind, could not hide his fear — the closer he came to headquarters, the greater his dread. His face had turned ashen and his legs were trembling like those of a felon being marched to the execution ground. So with conflicting emotions the two men followed Ma Shih-yao past rows of guards with gleaming weapons who glared at them angrily, until they reached Prince Valiant.

Li Tzu-cheng and Liu Tsung-min, seated motionless on a rock, regarded these envoys coldly. The blazing fire cast a ruddy glow over their battle-worn faces, adding to their impressiveness. Kao Chien, to placate his old comrades, had called out greetings while still some distance away and bowed repeatedly, a forced smile on his pallid face. But no one paid any attention. Only the prince snorted twice to acknowledge his obsequious greetings. And when Kao Chien saw that there was no response, he lapsed into silence. Liu Jen-ta, with a show of bravado, stopped in front of the fire with the arrogant air of a victor and asked Li Tzu-cheng:

"Are you Prince Valiant?"

"I am. What mission has Governor Hung sent you here on?"

"His Excellency knows that you have lost most of your men and are closely surrounded, unable to escape. Being merciful, he orders you to surrender forthwith before you are all slaughtered. If you persist in your errors and dare to resist, he will give the order to launch an offensive and we shall leave not a single person alive, not even your womenfolk, old people and children. It will be too late then to repent. As the proverb says: A wise man submits to fate. Rather than court death, surrender here and now!" This said, he held out the letter. "This is our ultimatum. Read it for yourself. Decide at once whether to surrender or not, so that I can return to report to His Excellency."

Hao Yao-chi drew his sword and stepped forward.

"You dog!" he bellowed. "How dare you? I'll cut off your dog's head!"

In alarm Liu Jen-ta dropped the letter a foot or so from the fire, instinctively drawing his sword to defend himself. But when he saw several insurgent officers converging on him with weapons at the ready, he hastily sheathed it again. And not stopping to think whether it was appropriate or not, he blurted out two lines often found in popular romances:

"Since of old, two states at war will not kill each others' envoys. Why should you threaten me?"

Kao Chien hastily stepped forward to bow, begging them to calm down and not resort to arms. But Yuan Tsung-ti's scornful laugh sent shivers down his spine. Li Tzu-cheng, his face expressionless, signed to his officers to return to their places. Then Liu Tsung-min addressed the envoy.

"Today we captured two of your officers. They said that Hung Cheng-chou and Sun Chuan-ting have offered a rich reward to anyone who captures Prince Valiant or me. Is that true?"

"The reward for the capture of Li Tzu-cheng is ten thousand taels of silver, for your capture five thousand taels, in addition to three grades promotion. If the captor already has the rank of a deputy-general, the governor will petition the emperor to ennoble him."





"Is it true that a big reward has also been offered for the capture of Madam Kao? Ennoblement too?"

"A big reward, yes. But not ennoblement. He will become a hereditary general."

"In your government forces, the lowest ranking officer is a lieutenant. Do you know what our lowest ranking officer is?"

"I've heard it is a sergeant."

"Right. In Prince Valiant's army the lowest officer is a sergeant. I shall spare your life so that you can take back this message: Anyone who kills Hung Cheng-chou and comes over to us with his head will be made a sergeant. We shan't go back on our word."

Liu Jen-ta started, unable to believe his ears. Before he could collect his wits, Liu Tsung-min continued sternly:

"Pick up that stinking ultimatum from Hung Cheng-chou and present it to Prince Valiant with both hands."

Liu Jen-ta submissively did so. The next moment he regretted it and was ashamed of his weakness, but the thing was already done.

Li Tzu-cheng read the ultimatum, then snorted contemptuously and tossed it on the fire to watch it burn. Liu Jen-ta was flabbergasted. Involuntarily stepping back, he gazed first at the burning letter, then at the prince's stern face and contemptuous smile. He plucked up courage to ask:

"You mean you won't surrender?"

The prince slowly rose and planted one foot on the rock.

"A temporary setback means nothing in war," he said. "I have fought your Governor Hung for several years and thought he would have sized up his opponent. Apparently he has not. Go back and tell him that three years ago, in the eighth year of Tsung-chen, I campaigned with our former Prince Valiant Kao and Chang Hsien-chung all the way to the east, and it was I who proposed sacking Fengyang and destroying the imperial sepulchres there. Had I intended to surrender some day, I would not have destroyed the tombs of the emperor's ancestors. How ridiculous to expect me to surrender!"

"But Chang Hsien-chung and Lo Ju-tsai had more men than you, yet both of them surrendered. Why shouldn't you admit defeat?"

Li Tzu-cheng took one step forward, roaring with laughter.

"Do you think they have genuinely surrendered to you? That they will give you no more cause for worry? Whether they truly submit or not, you know as well as they do. Still, I prefer a fight to the death to a life of ignominy. I shall never do as they did, bowing to the court and shamming surrender so as to preserve my strength and rest my troops."

The prince's indomitable spirit and his unequivocal reply left Liu Jen-ta speechless. However, loath to go back like this, he quietly prodded Kao Chien to urge him to speak. Kao Chien stepped forward timidly, the picture of distress.

"Good cousin, don't act so rashly. Far better surrender," he said. "You are already hemmed in by government troops..."

Before he could finish, Prince Valiant thundered, "Keep quiet!" Kao Chien gave a start and faltered:

"All right, I'll keep quiet."

The prince demanded sternly, "Have you no sense of shame that you show your face here? Are you worthy to call me cousin, you beast in human form?"

"Don't hold it against me, Tzu-cheng. I was forced to surrender."

"Forced? How? Just by one defeat?"

The prince's fearsome expression brought home to Kao Chien the peril he was in. But he attempted to justify himself in the hope that he would be pardoned, saying that he had surrendered only because his two sons had been captured. At this, Li Tzu-cheng could not contain his anger. He gave Kao Chien a box on the ear which sent him staggering backwards.

"Some men kill their own wives and children in order to join the revolt. Yet you have the nerve to try to excuse your surrender!" With one kick he sent Kao Chien sprawling, then swore through clenched teeth, "Damn you!"

Kao Chien grovelled pitifully on the ground and panted:

"Tzu-cheng, you have such a hot temper..."

"Tie him up!" ordered the prince.

Guards immediately came over and trussed Kao Chien up. Liu Jen-ta, seeing now that Prince Valiant meant to kill him, protested:

"How can you harm an envoy from Governor Hung?"

The prince answered coldly, "This is our family affair. Keep out of it."

Hao Yao-chi put in, "Let's do for him too. Let him keep Kao Chien company in hell."

Liu Jen-ta dared say no more. Though thoroughly apprehensive, he put on a show of indifference. Indeed, a faint smile appeared on his face as he thought, "We'll settle scores with you later tonight!"

Kao Chien pleaded, "Tzu-cheng, cousin, Prince Valiant! Let me off for my uncle's sake, for the sake of the first Prince Valiant!"

"It's because you betrayed him that you must die tonight."

Kao Chien gazed at Tien Chien-hsiu. "Won't you put in a word for me?"

Tien answered, "You brought this on yourself. I can't help you."

Kao Chien's glance fell on Kao Yi-kung then. "Yi-kung," he cried, "we are cousins. Won't you speak up for me?"

Kao Yi-kung laughed coldly and turned his face away. Kao Chien was looking round in desperation for Kao Kuei-ying when he heard the prince's order:

"Down on your knees!"

His legs buckled under him and he fell on his knees, his head bowed.

Li Tzu-cheng said, "Tell me this. Who sent the man pretending to be a messenger from Lo Ju-tsai?"

"Commissioner Sun made me send him. I did wrong."

"Less than a year after our old Prince Valiant's death, you betrayed us and surrendered with all your men. Then you helped Sun Chuan-ting to trap us. You have betrayed even your own cousins. Tell me, do you deserve death or not?"

"I deserve death. But as we are relatives I beg you to grant me a quick death, then you'll have my gratitude in the underworld."

Li Tzu-cheng ordered the guards, "Take him out and off with his head!"

Liu Tsung-min had been hoping to have Kao Chien tortured to death, but after the prince's order he held his tongue. Hao Yao-chi, however, cried loudly:

"Prince Valiant, let me supervise the execution!"

Li Tzu-cheng understood and nodded, signing to him to make haste. Kao Chien was in a state of great trepidation. When they dragged him off he glared at Hao and asked:

"So you want to get even because of your private grudge?"

"I am doing this for all of us," Hao answered. "Not because of a private grudge. Come on!"

Kao Chien suddenly turned savage. As he was pushed away he loosed off abuse, not stopping even when the guards pummelled him, kicked him and struck him with the back of their swords.

After a while Hao Yao-chi and the guards came back and threw Kao's gory head down before Liu Jen-ta, grazing the tip of his boots. Liu hastily stepped back, wondering how Prince Valiant would deal with him. Would they cut off his ears or nose before releasing him? His heart was pounding. However, the prince kicked the head aside and simply glanced at him icily, then ordered:

"Ma Shih-yao, take him down the hill."

After the envoy had left, it took the insurgents some time to calm down. Both Yuan Tsung-ti and Liu Tsung-min exclaimed, "Too bad that swine died such an easy death."

Hao Yao-chi snorted. "As supervisor, how could I let him off lightly? I disembowelled the dog with my own hands."

Li Tzu-cheng made his officers sit down again to discuss their plan for a break-through. As usual, he listened first to the others' proposals. Most of them suggested driving through the southwest sector and taking to the Shanglo Mountains. After Hung Cheng-chou and Sun Chuan-ting's troops had gone north, they could come down from the mountains and march to Honan. If instead of going north to fight the Manchus the government troops continued to pursue them, they could go to the Hanchung region. They proposed this because they knew the Shanglo Mountains, and because with Ho Jen-lung's troops in the southwest that should be the easiest place to break through. Li Kuo and Tien Chien-hsiu, however, were in favour of fighting their way out from the southeast, then going first south, then southwest. They felt that after the battle

earlier that day they had already smashed Tso Kuang-hsien's picked troops, while Ho Jen-lung's forces were still intact. Neither group insisted on their views, however, leaving it to the prince to decide; for as things stood, no plan was completely safe.

Li Tzu-cheng believed their best course was to strike south and take refuge in the Shanglo Mountains. He also knew that no one would suggest breaking through to the northeast and advancing on Wenhsiang in Honan. He secretly blamed himself for underestimating the enemy's cunning and the strength of the government forces at the pass, and for boldly heading north — a blunder which had ended in this defeat. Though nobody held this against him, he felt deep remorse.

When they had all expressed their views and the prince remained silent with lowered head, Liu Tsung-min said:

"It's getting late, Prince Valiant. We must decide now — which direction to take."

Li Tzu-cheng raised his head and looked at them with a smile.

"Your proposals are sound," he said. "Those are the only two ways out: either through Ho Jen-lung's position or through Tso Kuang-hsien's. But Hung and Sun are no fools. What we can see, they can see too. I am sure they will count on us breaking through southwest or southeast. They'll have concentrated their troops there to stop us."

He paused and seemed lost in thought. The others agreed with his estimate and their hearts sank. The prince was thinking that they would do best to break through in two directions, so that the enemy could not concentrate their forces; but they had few good troops left, and if divided up they would be still weaker. As he was pondering, Ho Chin-lung hurried over to say:

"Prince, I've been watching the enemy. They are deploying troops hurriedly to the southwest and southeast sectors. It looks like some ruse."

Li Tzu-cheng nodded. "All right. Go and have a rest now."

Liu Tsung-min smiled faintly. "So you guessed right. Still, we'll have to charge southwest. Better start while they are still

moving troops, before they've consolidated their positions. Prince, please give the order at once."

"That's right. We must fight our way out before they're ready. We'll take the southwest route..."

"Wait a minute!" called someone near by.

They looked up and saw Kao Kuei-ying running over from the wood. Coming up to the prince she said:

"This isn't like earlier break-throughs. If we mass our best troops together with the old and infirm and all charge in one direction, but fail to get through, won't we all be wiped out? Please reconsider the matter."

Liu Tsung-min protested, "Although it's best to divide our forces and take different routes, and that was what we usually did in the past, we have too small a force left — little more than a thousand able-bodied men. If we split up into two, we'll be even weaker. Tell us quickly what your plan is."

Kuei-ying said with conviction, "Few as we are, we must still divide into two forces."

"How?" asked Liu Tsung-min.

"The first contingent will consist mainly of headquarters headed by Kao Yi-kung plus the rearguard under Liu Fang-liang — five to six hundred good troops in all. Together with the cadets and bodyguards that will be some thousand fighters. They will take care of the dependants and wounded, and force their way through the southeast sector. The government troops, thinking that Prince Valiant heads them, will all rush in pursuit. Then the second contingent will charge the southwest sector. It will consist of the vanguard, the left and right wings, and the prince's personal troops — about a thousand picked men. The ancients said that ten thousand men cannot stop one willing to sell his life dearly. Not to say these will all be good troops, without impediments; so they are bound to succeed in breaking through."

"Which force will you join, aunt?" asked Li Kuo.

"I've always led headquarters. Naturally I'll go with them."

Li Kuo shook his head. "No, that won't do. It doesn't matter

much if other wives fail to get through, but you have a big reward on your head. What if you fall into the enemy's hands?"

Liu Tsung-min reiterated, "We mustn't divide our forces."

Kuei-ying countered stubbornly, "Indeed, we must! No one's safe in war, especially at a time like this. The most important thing now is for you to get Prince Valiant safely out. As long as he lives, this great banner of ours will keep flying; and even if all our men are lost there's still hope of raising an army again. By dividing into two forces we can fool the enemy, and you'll be unencumbered. That's the only way to ensure that you break through. To trick the enemy, I'll take the prince's banner to lure the government troops in my direction. . . ."

"No!" put in Li Kuo. "If you do that, you'll never get through, aunt."

"As long as my men and I are united and battle bravely, we'll fight our way out," said Kuei-ying. "Even if we fail, that won't be so serious. As long as the prince lives, he'll carry on our great cause. Of all the insurgent armies under our first Prince Valiant, ours is the only one left. So right now it doesn't matter if ten lives like mine are lost, provided it enables the prince to break through successfully."

They eyed each other and no one wanted to speak. The officers knew that what she had said was correct, but they worried because Kuei-ying and headquarters might well fail to get through. Hao Yao-chi leapt up and cried:

"The first group has to protect the old and infirm as well as draw the enemy after it. We mustn't let her head it. Don't we have other officers who can do it?" Without giving the rest a chance to speak, he thumped his chest and volunteered, "Let me shoulder this task! Let Kao Yi-kung and Liu Fang-liang guard our lady and the prince. Just give me a few officers and the prince's banner, and I'll protect the old and wounded and force a way first through the southeast sector. I guarantee I'll succeed. Even if I fail, I'll pin down the enemy so that those bastards can't chase after you. And I'll kill off so many of them that their blood will flow like a river!"

Kao Yi-kung leapt up too. "No, you protect the prince. I'll shoulder this task!" he cried.

Li Kuo also volunteered, "No, let me! Let me do it."

When Liu Fang-liang and Yuan Tsung-ti asked for this assignment too, Liu Tsung-min was afraid this dispute would hold them up. He urged Li Tzu-cheng:

"Prince, make the decision now."

Instead, Li Tzu-cheng turned to Tien Chien-hsiu to ask, "Brother, what do you say?"

"I'll have to think it over," answered Tien.

Kuei-ying put in resolutely, "We can't afford more delay, so stop arguing. As long as Prince Valiant and you officers break through, you can rally more troops to avenge our dead and save the people. Hao Yao-chi should stay with the prince. If I have Kao Yi-kung and Liu Fang-liang with me, we'll fight our way through too, you needn't worry. If we wait till the enemy have completed their preparations, it'll be more difficult."

Meanwhile Li Tzu-cheng had made up his mind: his wife's plan was the safer. So now he rose and said decisively:

"I've thought it over. We'll divide our forces. Now listen to my orders."

The officers stood to hear them. The prince decreed that the first force should be commanded by Kao Kuei-ying with Liu Fang-liang in the vanguard, Kao Yi-kung leading the main army corps and the remaining cadets to protect headquarters, and Yuan Tsung-ti with two hundred picked troops from the vanguard to bring up the rear. After they had broken through encirclement in the southeast sector, they were to go to the Shanglo Mountains to join the second force. This would be commanded by the prince and Liu Tsung-min, with Li Kuo and Hao Yao-chi leading the vanguard, and Tien Chien-hsiu leading the rearguard. They were to fight their way out from the southwest sector and go to the Shanglo Mountains. All those wounded men who could ride were to go with them. Those unable to ride would have to be left behind.

"There's no help for it," he said gravely in a low voice. "If we

put them on horseback, it would kill them. Better leave them to save them more pain."

Hearing this, several officers lowered their heads. Kuei-ying's eyes brimmed with tears as Li Tzu-cheng continued:

"As for my banner, we need not raise it during the break-through. I shall have it furled and take it with me. There must be no more argument about this. If during our break-through tonight our troops are scattered, we must each find some hiding-place, then devise ways to re-establish contact. The government troops in Shensi have been ordered to Peking to fight the Manchus, so in a few days the situation will change. Though Chang Hsien-chung and Lo Ju-tsai are said to have surrendered, I don't believe their surrender is genuine and neither does the court. I am sure that sooner or later Chang Hsien-chung will rise in revolt again; the sooner the better, of course. That's why I told the enemy envoy just now that his surrender was a sham, to get the government to force his hand. If we can win through tonight, even if Chang makes no move we'll make a fresh start; if he rises, diverting some of the government forces, we can take advantage of that to strike even harder. So as long as we keep the banner of our former prince flying, we shall triumph."

Hao Yao-chi saw light. With a laugh he observed, "No wonder you spoke as you did to the envoy just now. I thought you were so mad at Chang Hsien-chung, you were trying to queer his pitch. So it was a trick!"

Li Tzu-cheng smiled, then signed to the guards to withdraw. With a grave look he cautioned his officers:

"The outcome of every battle is uncertain; we must be prepared for the worst. Should I be killed during the break-through, make Liu Tsung-min your prince. Should he be killed too, choose another Prince Valiant. Come what may, we must keep our banner flying and not stop fighting till we have overthrown the Ming Dynasty. It is already the second watch. Go and get ready quickly and wait for my order to set out."

"One minute!" said Kuei-ying. "Please give our force your banner to fool the enemy."

"No," he answered. "Tonight when we leave our drums will be mute, and there is no need to raise Prince Valiant's banner." He turned to Liu Fang-liang. "You and Kao Yi-kung are to protect headquarters. This is a difficult task; you must be on your guard."

"Rest assured. As long as I live, headquarters will be safe."

After the other officers had left, Tien Chien-hsiu turned back and said softly, "Prince, this isn't like past break-throughs. I think your wife had better come with us. Kao Yi-kung can take charge of headquarters."

Li Tzu-cheng replied in a low voice, "No, let her command headquarters as she always has done. She can't shirk her duty now or leave all the officers' wives who are with headquarters. Besides, she has been with me fighting north and south since the start of the revolt. She may not be a skilled fighter, yet for a woman she is both brave and resourceful. In time of danger, if she is with headquarters, she can devise ways out and make decisions. Heaven helps those who help themselves — let her go."

"Don't worry about us, Brother Tien," Kuei-ying added. "As long as you get Prince Valiant out safely and our banner is kept flying, there's hope for the future. As for me, I should get through all right with Kao Yi-kung and the others."

Tien Chien-hsiu gazed at them speechlessly, then after some hesitation turned and left. Apart from a few bodyguards, there were only Shuang-hsi and Chang Nai by them now. The prince sighed and said to his wife:

"Taking headquarters with you is going to be difficult. Kao Yi-kung and Liu Fang-liang are young hotheads but poor tacticians, and Old Yuan is even more impetuous. So whether your force breaks through or not depends on your courage and generalship. We've never been parted before, but after you set out tonight you won't have me to fall back on. Up against danger, mind that you keep cool; because if you do, your officers and men won't panic either. And that's the only way to devise some means to get yourselves out of danger."

Grief-stricken as she was, Kuei-ying did her best to keep calm. She said hurriedly, "Don't you worry about me. In danger, of

course I'll find some way to cope. Luckily Yi-kung and all the rest obey me. As long as we're of one mind we shall win through safely. There's so much I want to say to you, but all I'll beg you is this: Take good care of yourself! As long as you are alive. . . ."

She was too overcome with emotion to go on. Prince Valiant also had much in his heart to say, but did not know how to advise her. And just then their only daughter Lan-chih, who had woken up by a nearby fire, was brought over by a guard. Her parents' expressions and the look on Shuang-hsi's face gave her a sudden premonition. She nestled close to Kuei-ying and hiding her face in her mother's lap started sobbing. After a moment Kuei-ying turned to her husband, but before she could speak they heard wailing in the wood.

"Save us, madam! Save us!"

Three or four dishevelled women came running over. In alarm Kuei-ying drew her sword.

"What's happened?" she asked.

The foremost woman panted, "Quick, save us, madam! Our men want to kill their own wives and children!"

Before Kuei-ying could answer, Hao Yao-chi's wife ran up from another direction, tugging her two children with her and carrying a bundle of clothes. When still some distance away she changed her mind. After a short hesitation, she turned round and knelt on the ground.

"All right, Yao-chi, kill me!" she sobbed. "Kill us all. Then there'll be nothing to hold you back, and you can give your whole mind to guarding our prince. In future, when you help him win the empire, please remember your wife who had a hard time of it all these years following you. On Chingming Festival burn some paper coins for me in the wilderness. Now kill us, quick!"

Now that her mind was made up, this woman was no longer afraid. She knelt down with bent neck for her husband to kill her. And her two children, seeing this, stopped crying too and instead of running away knelt down beside their mother. Hao Yao-chi striding up to them raised his sword.

"Stop!" shouted Kuei-ying. "You are not to kill your wife!"

He hesitated but did not lower the sword. Kuei-ying stepped forward and demanded sternly:

"Are you out of your mind? How can you kill your own wife and children?"

Then Hao Yao-chi wavered and lowered the sword.

"Killed, they won't be a burden," he blurted out. "Nor will they fall into enemy hands to be put to shame."

"Since they are in my care, you needn't worry. The wives of our insurgents have followed their husbands all these years, putting up with hardships of every kind and braving death. They've seen plenty of battles too. They've born and raised children for you, nursed you when you were wounded, and even taken up arms to fight in an emergency. Why kill them, and your children too, now that we've sworn to break through? If I fail to lead them out of encirclement, we can kill ourselves in the saddle. We certainly won't fall into enemy hands. There's no need for you to come and kill your dear ones before we even start!"

Hao Yao-chi had nothing to say. He turned away with lowered head, as did two other men who had been pursuing their wives. Hao Yao-chi had not gone far when his wife sprang up and, overtaking him, draped over his shoulders a cape she had just finished making. Without turning his head he went on down the hill. Kuei-ying told the women:

"Headquarters are mustering on the southeast side at the foot of the hill. Hurry up and lead your horses there."

After they had left she sighed and said to her husband, "I wonder how many dependants were killed just now."

"Probably not many. While you were talking with Hao, I sent to order all our men not to harm their families."

In all these years of war Kuei-ying had never known such a thing before. Clearly, the men could not have hardened their hearts like this had they not felt that the situation was desperate and determined to die fighting. She could not hold back her tears. The prince was deeply stirred too, but he had no time to dwell on such things.

"I hope you will break through safely with headquarters and rejoin

me in the Shanglo Mountains," he told his wife. "If by any chance you can't get through, it's up to you to decide what should be done."

She raised her head and said firmly, "If we're trapped and can't fight our way out, I'll fall on my sword and see to it that our daughter kills herself too. I'll certainly not disgrace myself, much less let them take me to Peking as a captive!"

The prince turned to the two young officers. "Shuang-hsi, you stay with headquarters to protect your mother. And Chang Nai too."

Kuei-ying at once countered, "No. We don't need more people. Let them go with you."

"You'll find them useful in an emergency."

"No, no. I don't need them."

Shuang-hsi looked at his foster-parents and asked, "Mother, which of you shall we go with?"

"With your father," she ordered. "Prince, take them along. We'll be setting out very soon, and you have to see how the preparations are going. Don't waste any more time over this."

"Well, as you wish." Prince Valiant, his heart aching, turned and went off.

Shuang-hsi and Chang Nai looked at Kuei-ying, reluctant to leave her. As they turned to follow the prince she called them back. With tears in her eyes she gazed at Shuang-hsi and said chokingly:

"You were an orphan, Shuang-hsi, all your family killed by government soldiers or dead of starvation. When you were nine the prince adopted you, and now at seventeen you've become an outstanding young officer. Though you are an adopted son, he treats you as his own. This break-through tonight will be difficult. You must stay by your father's horse and guard him well."

Swallowing back his own tears Shuang-hsi replied, "You don't have to tell me, mother. I shall stay close by father's side."

Then she turned to Chang Nai. "Though you're not our adopted son, Chang Nai, for years we've brought you up just like Shuang-hsi, so that most people consider you as another adopted son. Your elder brother Chang Ting followed Prince Valiant as well, until three years ago when he was killed by the enemy. That left you an

orphan too with no family, and the prince showed you even more affection. Now that your brother Shuang-hsi has been shot in the left arm, he can only be counted as half a fighter. When danger threatens, Prince Valiant invariably fights in the forefront. I'm particularly worried about him tonight. You must stay at his side and guard him well."

Chang Nai had long since made up his mind to risk his life ten times over rather than let the prince come to any harm. He was too stirred by Kuei-ying's injunction to utter a word, simply nodding and bending his head to hide his tears. Kuei-ying looked at Shuang-hsi again and examined his wounded arm, then patted Chang Nai on the shoulder, her eyes bright with tears in the moonlight. After a pause she said:

"Go quickly then, you two. Wait for me in the Shanglo Mountains!"

The two young officers could not meet her eyes but turned and left swiftly, too moved to speak. Kuei-ying watched till they had disappeared in the wood, then turned to her two women guards.

"Tonight, breaking out, we shall have a bloody battle. If we fail to win through, we'll die fighting rather than fall into enemy hands to be put to shame. Are you prepared?"

They answered together, "We are!"

Now Kao Yi-kung hurried over to report that the first force was ready, ranged at the foot of the hill. Kuei-ying wiped her eyes with her sleeve and asked him calmly:

"Have you reported to the prince?"

"Yes. He says we can start."

"Then to horse at once!" she ordered, leading her daughter and guards to the horses tethered by the wood.

Kuei-ying's force cantered for about a mile southeast of the hill then, raising a shout, charged Tso Kuang-hsien's position. However, because the enemy were prepared, though the insurgents' attack was fierce the government troops were not thrown into disorder. Kuei-ying's force met with strong resistance and suffered heavy casualties. Both Kao Yi-kung and Yuan Tsung-ti were wounded in the mêlée. Tso Kuang-hsien, learning that Kao Kuei-ying had

taken the field against him, assumed that the prince was with her. He reported this at once to Commissioner Sun, at the same time ordering his men to capture Li Tzu-cheng and his wife alive, to take them in triumph to the capital. The torches of the enemy host overspread the hills and plains. Everywhere rose shouts:

"Capture Li Tzu-cheng! Capture Kao Kuei-ying!"

The insurgents battled forward, leaving behind them many dead and wounded. They had just cut their way through Tso Kuang-hsien's position when they were intercepted by Ho Jen-lung's forces. The remnant insurgents, men and women, old and young, promptly charged the new enemy. The stern orders of Governor Hung and Commissioner Sun had made Ho Jen-lung eager to distinguish himself, the more so as the emperor had issued edicts and sent his imperial sword of authority together with a trusted eunuch as inspector; but his men had not been paid for months and Prince Valiant's trick had lowered their morale, making them unwilling to fight. The lower-ranking officers and men had many complaints, and after receiving money and gifts from insurgents from their locality they saw no reason to risk their lives. As for the emperor's sword, it held no terrors for them as it was used only to execute commanders and not the rank and file. When Ho Jen-lung saw how half-hearted his men were, he swore, "Hell, you'll make me lose my head!" But whether he cursed or threatened them with death, his men would not fight hard. When the insurgents charged, after some skirmishing they let them through. After shouting himself hoarse, Ho Jen-lung summoned Kao Chieh.

"Kao Chieh," he ordered him sternly, "here's a good chance for you to show your gratitude to the court. Go and capture Li Tzu-cheng and his wife."

Owing to the army's lack of grain and fodder, a couple of days before this Kao Chieh had been ordered to take his two or three hundred men out to requisition supplies. He had therefore taken no part in the fighting. As soon as Ho Jen-lung realized his troops' reluctance to clash with the insurgents, for which he was likely to be penalized, he sent immediately to fetch Kao Chieh back, hoping that this renegade would battle hard and help to win him credit.

Kao Chieh had been Li Tzu-cheng's neighbour and joined the revolt from the start. A good fighter, he had won Prince Valiant's approval. The prince had a concubine in those days, an attractive woman with some education who, showing ability, was put in charge of the distribution of rations, weapons and other army supplies. Kao Kuei-ying also treated her very well, hoping she could be of service to her husband, and gave her a free hand. Though Li Tzu-cheng had a wife and concubine, he was no voluptuary but concentrated on fighting and training troops and seldom spent the night with his concubine. Kao Chieh, who often went to her for money, grain and weapons, gradually became infatuated with her. For fear that if the prince discovered they were lovers he would kill them, in the eighth month of the eighth year of Tsung-chen they had fled, taking with them several hundred men, and surrendered to Ho Jen-lung. And knowing that he could never rejoin the insurgents, Kao had worked whole-heartedly for the government, leading troops to launch sudden attacks on certain rebel forces and inflicting heavy losses on them. When Ho Jen-lung saw that he was to be trusted and had many times distinguished himself, he made him his adjutant. However, Kao Chieh would never attack Li Tzu-cheng's troops from which his own followers came, for in such a confrontation his men might refuse to put up a hard fight. He explained this to Ho Jen-lung after his surrender, and Ho had complied with his wishes. Each time they fought Prince Valiant, he assigned different tasks to Kao Chieh. But now that they were fighting under the watchful eyes of the governor and the commissioner, Ho Jen-lung dared not disobey orders or make any further concessions to Kao Chieh.

Kao Chieh did not know where Prince Valiant was, but recognized the troops of headquarters led by Kuei-ying. He deployed his cavalry in a straight line, with himself in front, to stop the insurgents' advance and called on them to surrender. At this point, up came troops led by Tso Kuang-hsien and Ho Jen-lung as well.

Kuei-ying saw the danger they were in but was unwilling to fight a pitched battle. She summoned her three chief officers and some lieutenants, then asked Liu Fang-liang:

"You're not wounded, are you?"



"No, madam."

"Good. Go and intercept Tso Kuang-hsien and Ho Jen-lung while I trick Kao Chieh into letting us through."

After Liu Fang-liang had gone, Kuei-ying ordered headquarters and the cadets to take cover on a nearby hill till she rejoined them. She then picked several lieutenants including Ho Chin-lung who had not been wounded and less than a hundred men to stay with her, telling Kao Yi-kung and Yuan Tsung-ti to accompany headquarters. But not agreeing to this they remained with her too.

Kuei-ying said to one of her guards, "Chang Tsai, you're a good archer. Hide behind the others and fit an arrow to your bow. When I talk with Kao Chieh, take aim. If he agrees to let us pass, well and good. Otherwise, at a sign from me, shoot him." She turned then to a woman guard. "Hui-ying, you take cover too and aim at his horse. As long as one of you hits the mark that will dismay the enemy."

"Right!" both guards answered.

Next her glance fell on Ho Chin-lung. Though clamouring government troops were fast approaching, she called calmly:

"Chin-lung!"

"Here!" he answered.

"As soon as they've loosed their arrows, be ready to charge. While Kao Chieh is still disconcerted, off with his head!"

"Right!"

After issuing these orders, Kuei-ying rode forward to within twenty paces of Kao Chieh, whose face she could see clearly in the moonlight. Though Kao Yi-kung and the others feared the enemy might let loose a hail of arrows, she knew they would hold their fire because they wanted her to surrender or be captured. Now she moved a few paces closer to Kao Chieh, to give her guards a clearer view of their target and make it easier for Ho Chin-lung to reach him. Kao Chieh had more courage than intelligence. When he saw that she had so few men left and was coming to parley, he jumped to the conclusion that she was going to give herself up, knowing that there was no way out.



Image of Buddha in Cave 5

## THE YUNKANG CAVES



Head of a Bodhisattva in Cave 3

◀ Worshipping angel in Cave 6



Worshipping Bodhisattvas in Cave 6



Saint Vimalakirti in Cave 6



Image of Buddha in Cave 20





Head of Buddha in Cave 5

A disciple of Buddha in Cave 18





Buddhist legend in Cave 6

◀ Kumarakāśī in Cave 8





East section of the back chamber in Cave 6

"Sister-in-law!" he shouted. "Your army's done for. Hurry up and surrender!"

Suppressing her anger she asked, "Are you Kao Chieh? I never thought to meet you here. Hasn't the court offered a big reward for my head? What are you waiting for? Go ahead and capture me."

"Don't talk like that, sister-in-law. Though you always treated me well, now that I've come over to the government side I can't let you go because of our past friendship. Dismount, please, and give yourself up. Don't make me use force."

"Since you still have the nerve to call me sister-in-law, let me ask you something. After that I'll decide whether to fight or surrender. Tell me: How did we treat you in the past?"

"What question is that to ask on the battlefield?"

"For seven or eight years, Tzu-cheng looked on you as a brother, and the rest of us thought you one of his most trusted generals. But you abducted his concubine and took some of our men to surrender to the government. You've turned against us and slaughtered your own brothers. And here you are calling on me to surrender, hoping to take me to Peking so that I can be tortured to death! You've betrayed not only Tzu-cheng, but all your former comrades, all the officers and men of our army. You're worse than a beast, with no sense of justice or of gratitude. No sense of shame either, speaking like this to me!"

Kao Chieh flushed.

"Don't talk nonsense, Kao Kuei-ying," he blustered. "If you refuse to surrender I'll show you no mercy."

She called out then to his men, "Brothers, Prince Valiant never did you any wrong. Stand back, those of you with some conscience, so that I can fight it out alone with Kao Chieh!"

While she was still speaking, two arrows whizzed from behind her. Hui-ying's, loosed a second too soon, pierced the right eye of Kao Chieh's horse, penetrating its brain. Chang Tsai had aimed at the enemy's throat to dispatch him with one shot, but when the wounded horse reared, his arrow struck Kao Chieh's breast-plate then glanced off. The horse stumbled and fell, throwing its rider

to the ground. The insurgents who had been waiting impatiently charged forward behind Ho Chin-lung. Some of Kao Chieh's men had turned away after hearing Kuei-ying's reproaches, but his close followers made a desperate stand and helped him up. He mounted another horse, preparing to fight, when a second arrow struck him on the helmet. As he reeled, Ho Chin-lung closed with him and grazed his left cheek with his sword. Luckily for Kao Chieh, his followers came to the rescue again, surrounding Ho. But fearing his men might turn against him he fled.

While Tso Kuang-hsien was fighting Liu Fang-liang, Ho Jen-lung led his troops to surround Yuan Tsung-ti and Kao Yi-kung. Lo Hu, leader of the cadets, afraid Kao Kuei-ying might be captured, left half the boys at headquarters and led the rest to fight their way through government troops and find her. Kao Chieh's followers, though loyal to him, knew that many of their relatives and friends had sons who were cadets, and not wanting to fight these youngsters they withdrew.

Ho Jen-lung's men having no stomach for a hard fight drew back as soon as they saw Kao Chieh withdrawing. Ho Chin-lung seized this chance to break through the encirclement shouting:

"Fellow-countrymen, kinsmen, friends! We bear each other no grudges. Why battle to the death here?"

Then many officers and soldiers of the Ho clan withdrew too. Though Ho Jen-lung, cursing, ordered them to make a stand, he had to fall back some distance. When he next looked for Kao Kuei-ying she had disappeared.

Kao Yi-kung had resisted the onslaught until he saw that the troops of Ho Jen-lung and Kao Chieh had withdrawn. He turned back to look for Kuei-ying, but could find neither her nor Yuan Tsung-ti and Ho Chin-lung. Meeting Lo Hu, he asked the whereabouts of headquarters and learned that Lo Hu did not know, as he had taken half the cadets to rescue Kuei-ying. They hurried up the hill where headquarters had been, but it had gone. The moonlight showed only Tso Kuang-hsien's cavalry and infantry deployed all over the plain. They searched here and there but still with no success. Then they saw a group surrounded by Tso Kuang-hsien's troops, putting

up a desperate fight. Thinking that here were Kao Kuei-ying and headquarters, they contrived to extricate them — only to find it was Liu Fang-liang and his men. Together they charged through serrated government ranks in search of Kuei-ying, but nowhere could they find her. Later, having lost more men, they were dispersed by Tso Kuang-hsien's cavalry.

Liu Fang-liang by now had just over a hundred men left. Taking advantage of the complex terrain and the cover of forests, they shook off their pursuers and spurred towards the foot of a hill from whence had come the tumult of fighting. When they reached it, however, there was no trace of Kuei-ying. Dead bodies of men and horses lay on the river bank and in the shallows, among them enemies as well as insurgents, including women and children. Obviously headquarters had clashed with the enemy here. But where was Kao Kuei-ying?

Liu Fang-liang and some guards dismounted to search for some wounded men who could tell them where she had gone. The common fear, which none expressed, was that they might find her body among the other corpses. The dim moonlight made it impossible to see every corpse clearly, as there were so many of them, some covered with blood. And time was short, for their pursuers might soon overtake them.

Suddenly they saw the old hunchback lying in a pool of blood. Beside him was his grey mule, dead and transfixed with arrows. The old man was dying too, covered with wounds. He had lost his oak staff and in his left hand clutched a sharp woodcutter's axe, in his right a sickle. In front of him lay two soldiers, one with his head split open. When Liu Fang-liang recognized him, he crouched down and half raising him from the ground asked repeatedly:

"Where is Madam Kao Kuei-ying?"

The hunchback groaned and finally muttered, "All dead."

His head fell back then and he breathed his last. Laying his body down, Liu straightened up to gaze at the moon and stars and the river flowing past. He was still alive while Kuei-ying and the others in headquarters had either been killed or captured. How could he face the prince again? In despair he drew his sword to



kill himself. Luckily a lieutenant beside him was quick enough to seize his arm. Liu kicked the young officer away, but two other guards pinioned him. The rest knelt to beg him not to commit suicide, but to lead them to the Shanglo Mountains to join the prince.

At this juncture, a lieutenant panted up to report that there were hoofprints and bloodstains on the sand stretching eastwards. Perhaps Kao Kuei-ying had escaped that way with a remnant force. Liu Fang-liang went to investigate. It was true. He felt a stirring of hope. Raising his sword he cried, "To horse! We'll continue our search."

They mounted and galloped east like the wind, leaving behind them a trail of dust in the moonlight.

Soon after the first force left, the second led by Prince Valiant headed quietly southwest. When they neared the government position, with a great shout they charged forward. The enemy were ready for them, however. Sun Chuan-ting and Ma Ko themselves commanded troops blocking the way. First they fired cannons and loosed off arrows. Many insurgents fell. Fortunately, being mounted, the rest were able to gallop swift as lightning into the government positions, and in the close combat which ensued the artillery and archers were rendered useless. The insurgents pressed them so hard that though Sun urged his troops to put up a strong defence they had to give way before them.

After galloping for five or six *li*, having broken through encirclement, they stopped by a small stream to drink and water their horses. Li Tzu-cheng counted his men. Little more than three hundred were left. And Hao Yao-chi's troops had not come up. They must have been cut off.

About four or five *li* to the south they could hear fighting. Li Kuo said anxiously to the prince:

"Uncle, Hao Yao-chi must have lost his way and gone by mistake to Tsao Pien-chiao's position. What shall we do? Shall I go to the rescue?"

"Leave him. We've no troops to spare, and you might not find him."

Pursuing government troops were now approaching. Swiftly remounting, the prince's men waited silently for his orders. For even now this small contingent with so many wounded remained well disciplined and orderly, showing no sign of panic. Li Tzu-cheng astride Black Dragon watched with his bow in his hands. When the enemy came within bowshot he cried:

"Come on!"

He quickly loosed two arrows, and two enemy horsemen fell. The rest lost heart and dared advance no further. The insurgents then rode south through a gorge, Li Tzu-cheng himself bringing up the rear with Chang Nai and Shuang-hsi, followed by some bodyguards.

The pursuing forces, Ma Ko's cavalry, dared not venture too close yet were unwilling to let the insurgents escape. They trailed a few hundred yards behind, in the hope that when dawn broke some local militia would block the way and they could join forces to attack the insurgents. Li Tzu-cheng saw through their scheme. He told Li Kuo to take two hundred horsemen with the young officers Chang Nai, Jen Chi-jung and Jen Chi-kuang to lay an ambush in the woods on both sides of the track.

Ma Ko kept up the pursuit with some dozen officers and over a thousand horsemen, eager to win merit by capturing the prince. Suddenly he heard battle cries from behind, and two forces fell on his column from the woods on both sides. Before Ma Ko could collect his wits, Prince Valiant whirled round with Liu Tsung-min and Tien Chien-hsiu to charge him. His men thinking these were rebel reinforcements fled in confusion. And Ma Ko, much against his will, had to gallop off with them, for though he cut down some deserters with his sword it was impossible to stop the rout. So he too fled with his officers and guards. The insurgents killed some of the fleeing troops, then instead of pursuing them they went on their way.

As Ma Ko's forces were fleeing in confusion, Sun Chuan-ting came up with his troops. He had first heard from Tso Kuang-hsien that Li Tzu-cheng and his wife were trying to break through southeast with some picked troops, the old and wounded and family dependants.

But before he could start in that direction himself, word came from Ma Ko that the "bandits" heading southwest seemed to be the prince's best troops, and as Liu Tsung-min was with them the prince might be too. Sun then hastily turned southwest. When his men saw the confusion of Ma Ko's forces, they thought that the rebels must be chasing them and they too fell back, only halting when Sun cursed them.

Sun sent for Ma Ko and asked for his report, but he could not say whether Li Tzu-cheng was in this contingent or not. And just then two reports came from the battlefield. One said that Li Tzu-cheng had been seen falling wounded from his horse and that they were searching for him in the woods; the other stated that one of the dead rebels resembled Li Tzu-cheng, and beside him lay a black charger. Sun asked the messenger sternly:

"This dead bandit, had he a red ox-hide quiver with gilded designs?"

"Yes, sir, he had such a quiver."

"And his sword, was it that famous one?"

"His right arm was nearly lopped off. He must have dropped his sword somewhere."

"Well, he can't have lost the scabbard."

"I . . . I didn't see clearly what was inscribed on it."

"Who sent you with this report?"

"General Sun."

"Dolt! . . . Go and make a more careful search!"

After the messenger had gone Sun reflected for a minute, then ordered the pursuit to be called off and the troops withdrawn. For Ma Ko's men were too demoralized by their defeat to fight effectively, and his own troops were intimidated too as a result. Moreover, the mountain track was dangerous: if they fell into an ambush and lost more men, it would affect their future campaign and earn him a reprimand from the emperor. Besides, since the insurgents had taken two different routes, the prince might not be in this contingent. Even if he was, he could hardly escape, as all passes in front were guarded by local militia. Furthermore, the two reports just received encouraged Sun to believe that the prince was dead or one of the many wounded. He instructed his aide-de-camp Liu Jen-ta:

"Announce at once to the troops that the bandit chieftains, Li Tzu-cheng among them, are either dead or wounded. They must make a careful, thorough search among the corpses in the thickets and grass."

Sun proceeded to inspect the battlefield. Everywhere there lay dead and wounded, but he could not make out in the moonlight which side they had been on. He went to the fortress on the hill where the insurgents had camped. All the badly wounded left there had been decapitated. He paid no attention to this gruesome sight, knowing that some government troops had done this to claim credit, for he himself too would present false reports to the court and to the imperial eunuch Liu sent from the capital. So simply nodding without a word he rode swiftly back to his camp. By this time it was nearly dawn, and Governor Hung had come to his tent.

Hung Cheng-chou had watched the battle from a height. When he heard that the insurgents' best troops had broken through to the southwest, he decided that the prince must have taken this route and started leading his own troops to pursue him. He had not gone far when word came that Sun and Ma Ko had withdrawn. Accordingly he had come to Sun's camp to await his return. Sun's report of what had happened filled him with secret misgivings. It seemed likely that Li Tzu-cheng had escaped with Liu Tsung-min and the others in that direction. However, since Li Tzu-cheng's men had been practically wiped out in this campaign, which was after all the greatest victory in these ten years of fighting against the rebels, the emperor was unlikely to reprimand them. Even if he did, the responsibility was the commissioner's. Therefore showing no sign of dissatisfaction, he commended Sun for his exploits. At this moment they were joined by Ting Chi-jui, the garrison commander of Tungkuan Pass. Hung Cheng-chou turned to tell him:

"Sir, this is the greatest victory we have won in these ten years of suppressing rebels. However, we don't know whether Li Tzu-cheng and Liu Tsung-min are dead or have fled. The commissioner and I have to go north immediately to relieve the capital. We shall depend on you to safeguard this area in future and to find out the whereabouts of these bandit chiefs."

This implied that Hung intended to recommend Ting to succeed Sun as Commissioner of Shensi.

"I shall carry out Your Excellency's instructions," Ting answered with a bow.

He promptly sent to inform all the local gentry that they must lead their militia to stop the rebels from escaping, and comb the hills so that not one man could escape.

Though Li Tzu-cheng had successfully ambushed the enemy, inflicting so many casualties on them that they gave up their pursuit, the insurgents too had lost several dozen men. As they pressed on, some of the wounded whose strength had ebbed away through losing too much blood slumped down from their saddles, dead.

At dawn, continuing along the mountain track, they found the way blocked by logs. As they reined in, they heard sudden gonging, and several hundred militiamen sprang out from the undergrowth to charge them with long wooden staffs. The insurgents, caught by surprise, suffered heavy losses and had to retreat. After less than a mile, their way was blocked again by several hundred more militiamen, while their pursuers were gaining on them too.

During the battle the previous evening, Liu Tsung-min had been lightly wounded. While breaking through at night he had received two more wounds, one in his breast, and this had sapped his strength. His horse was wounded too. But now that he saw a red-robed officer on a sorrel horse directing the militia's attack, Liu summoned up all his energy to charge him with a roar. The man turned and galloped away. As Liu Tsung-min gave chase, his horse fell into a pitfall. The enemy officer whirled back to attack him with his big sword, while some dozen militiamen rushed up and thrust at him with spears and staffs. Liu Tsung-min bellowed and brandished his two swords in the pit, so that his adversaries could not come near him. Many years later, indeed, the local people still sang the praises of Liu Tsung-min's valour that day, for he fought like a demon. And a legend grew up that he was the reincarnation of a bodhisattva in a nearby monastery. Still, however bravely he fought, he could not extricate himself from the pit till Li Kuo arrived in the nick of time to drive

off his opponents. As Liu Tsung-min leapt out of the pit, he saw the officer in red group his men for another attack. Although his wounds were bleeding again Liu rushed him, bellowing, and felled him with one sweep of his sword, then leapt on to the sorrel horse. Since he and Li Kuo had no more men with them, they galloped off then to rejoin the prince.

Most of Prince Valiant's officers and men had fallen now in battle. The scattered survivors were fighting in small groups or single-handed. Only Shuang-hsi, Chang Nai, Jen Chi-jung, Jen Chi-kuang and a few guards remained with the prince. When Li Tzu-cheng saw Liu Tsung-min and Li Kuo coming his way, he raised his sword and shouted, "Follow me!" With the prince clearing the way and Li Kuo bringing up the rear, they hacked their way out of encirclement and headed south over rough country. A few hundred yards further on they met up with Tien Chien-hsiu, Ku Ko-cheng and three other men coming a different way. They joined forces and pressed on for less than a mile, when two riders emerged from the forest and hailed them. They were Yuan Tsung-ti and his lieutenant Li Mi-chang, both covered with blood. At the sight of Yuan Tsung-ti, the prince inwardly shuddered, thinking, "Headquarters is finished!"

When the two men came closer, Prince Valiant asked about their wounds and ordered his party to continue the march. Another few hundred yards brought them to a stream, where he called a halt to water the horses and rest. Taking out some efficacious medicinal powder given him by the physician before they set out, he told the wounded to sprinkle it on their wounds, then made them take some pills. No one had ventured to ask about Kao Kuei-ying and headquarters, for they knew the news must be bad, and these two men were seriously wounded. But in their hearts they were all eager to know. On the road both Li Kuo and Shuang-hsi had been on the point of asking, but the prince had stopped them with a warning glance. Now that their wounds had been dressed and the pills had eased their pain, Li Tzu-cheng asked Yuan:

"What of headquarters? And Liu Fang-liang and Kao Yi-kung?"

Twenty-nine-year-old Yuan Tsung-ti, that doughty warrior, burst into tears like a child. He believed that headquarters had been wiped

out and blamed himself because he had failed to safeguard it. The loss of his own wife caused him less anguish than the disappearance of Kuei-ying and her daughter Lan-chih. The fate of the wives of Liu Tsung-min, Li Kuo and other insurgent commanders was also unknown.

Shuang-hsi and Chang Nai, filled with forebodings at sight of his tears, wiped their own eyes but held back their sobs.

Yuan said chokingly, "Prince Valiant! Headquarters was scattered, wiped out. How can I face you, how can I face all my brothers!"

Li Tzu-cheng answered consolingly, "We can't win every battle. Don't take it so hard. And you're wounded yourself. It's not as if you didn't do your utmost."

Tien Chien-hsiu joined in, "No need to be down-hearted. Headquarters has only been scattered for a while; we'll be hearing more in a few days. The important thing now is to escort Prince Valiant to a safe place. We mustn't lose heart because we've lost touch with headquarters."

When Liu Tsung-min and Li Kuo had encouraged Yuan Tsung-ti too, Li Tzu-cheng asked him for an account of their break-through and dispersal. He then made them remount and move on.

In the boundless wintry sky, a lonely flock of wild geese was flying south in an inverted "V" formation. Under this blue sky they advanced on the rugged track through the mountains. Officers and men, they numbered only fifteen. Famished, worn out, in pain from their wounds and heavy-hearted, they pressed on doggedly through the wilds. Their clothes drenched with sweat before were icy cold, yet some of them still dozed off in the saddle. The terrain was rugged, often with no track. They estimated it was after noon as they took their bearings from the sun. Li Tzu-cheng, bringing up the rear, reflected that this was his worst defeat in ten years and wondered, "Is this the end?" Then he told himself, "No! As long as I am not killed and don't surrender, it can't be the end. We shall rise again!" Then he thought of the men who had followed him all these years, the cadets whom he regarded as his own children, his wife and daughter and others with headquarters whose

whereabouts were unknown, and his heart ached with grief. He had a mental picture of those who were lost, especially of his wife's face as she bade him farewell the night before by the fire.

As they went on, the sky became overcast with low-hanging clouds, threatening snow. How far they had travelled they did not know, but it was now growing dark and both men and horses were tired. Prince Valiant thought they must have reached Lonan County and were perhaps not far from Tuchiachai, their destination. He therefore called a halt in a sheltered forest clearing. Those wounded, already at the end of their tether, fell asleep as soon as they were helped to dismount and propped up against a tree or laid on the grass. Li Tzu-cheng and some unwounded or lightly wounded men cut withered grass to feed the horses, and chopped down dry branches to make a fire. Before lighting it, they looked round to make sure that there were no villages or passers-by in the vicinity, to guard against being taken by surprise.

They did not unsaddle the horses, simply loosened their girths so that they could eat their fill. Nor did the men take off their armour. They looped the reins over their arms, ready for an emergency. Li Tzu-cheng told the others to have a good sleep while he and two unwounded guards kept watch in turn. He sat up till the second watch, when he roused his guard Li Chiang then lay down himself. Li Chiang was so worn out, however, that before his time was up he nodded off and fell sound asleep leaning against a tree.

The hills were silent, all was dark. The birds in the forest were mute. The only sounds were the rustling of leaves and dry grass in the cold wind, the munching of fodder by horses, and the light snores of the sleepers. But after midnight, when all was dark and still, several hundred militiamen stealthily approached to capture or kill these rebels.

For Li Tzu-cheng and Liu Tsung-min had been out in their reckoning. They had lost their way in these hills, changing direction so often, and had travelled several dozen *li* to the northwest, entering a district guarded by militia. Soon after they halted here, two scouts had spotted them and come closer, under cover, to reconnoitre, then raced back to their fortress to report their discovery. As the for-

tress was more than ten *li* away, by the time their officer heard the news and collected several hundred armed men to converge on this spot by three routes, it was already well after midnight. They mustered in a forest not far away, then moved quietly in a semi-circle towards the insurgents who were lying sound asleep.

The fire was practically out. It was piercingly cold with a wind rising in the hills, yet none of the exhausted insurgents woke. Occasionally one would turn in his sleep and mutter something or groan, then all would be still again except for the sound of horses champing their fodder.

The militiamen, groping forward through the forest, were only a few hundred yards away. If the sleeping men did not wake up in time, very soon the enemy would fall on them and bind them.

Black Dragon had nearly finished the pile of dry grass before him. Already his loosened girth was taut. His strength had returned. Still he went on munching and craned his neck to reach for some grass before the gelding beside him. The gelding turned and kicked out. Black Dragon was about to kick back when he caught a sound. He raised his head to look round, both ears twitching suspiciously. It flashed on him that there was danger. He pulled hard at the reins, but the prince did not wake. Now Black Dragon could see shadowy figures approaching. He neighed wildly and pranced, kicking out, his hooves striking sparks from the rock.

With a start, Li Tzu-cheng woke up and sprang to his feet. He could see nothing in the dark. But just then some birds flew up in alarm near by in the forest. The truth dawned on him. Drawing his sword he shouted:

"To horse!"

This reverberating shout roused all his men. It startled the approaching enemy too, making some of them tremble and shrink back in fear. In a flash the insurgents tightened their girths, helped the wounded into their saddles, mounted and drew their swords. Prince Valiant spurred his horse.

"Follow me!" he cried.

He galloped down the slope in the direction taken by the birds. The militiamen raised a shout and rushed after him, but as they were

all on foot they could not catch him. And the few dozen militiamen barring the way could not withstand the insurgents' fierce charge. They scattered in alarm, but not before a dozen or so were cut down.

Once clear of this danger, the small insurgent band rode on without stopping. When dawn broke, they met a peasant and learned that they had gone the wrong way the previous afternoon, but were now on the right track in Lonan County. Li Tzu-cheng ordered his men to take a short rest and have some dry rations before continuing. Looking at the fifteen men who remained to him, he asked himself again:

"Is this the end?"

*Illustrated by Chao Hung-pen*

Chu Yuan

The Lady of the Hsiang

To the northern bank descends the Lady Goddess;  
Sombre and wistful the expression in her eyes.  
Sighing softly the autumn breeze;  
Leaves fall on the ripples of Tungting Lake.  
Amidst the white sedge, I anxiously keep watch  
For my love who will come when the sun sets.  
Why are the birds flocking in the reeds?  
Why are the nets hanging in the trees?  
Angelicas by the Yuan and orchids by the Li.  
I long for my love but dare not speak my thoughts.  
My heart is trembling as I gaze afar  
Over the waters which are flowing fast.  
Why are the deer browsing in the courtyard?

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About the poet see article on page 112.

Why are the dragons cleaving to the bank?  
At dawn I ride my horses by the river;  
At dusk I cross the current to the western bank.  
I shall hear my loved one when he summons me;  
Urging my horses I shall speed to his side.  
In the river I shall build him a home;  
It will have a roof made of lotus leaves,  
Iris walls and purple shells for a room.  
A hall of fragrant peppers,  
Cassia beams and rafters of magnolia,  
Jasmine lintels, an arbour of peonies,  
And fig-leaves woven into curtains,  
Melilotus overhead for a shelter.  
White jade stones securing mats,  
A screen scented with rock-orchids,  
A room of lotus decked with vetch,  
And fresh azalea sprigs entwined.  
A courtyard filled with wondrous flowers,  
Whose fragrance rare assails the gates.  
The mountain spirits will greet my love,  
Clustering round like clouds.  
I dip my sleeve into the waters;  
Wash my lapel by the shore of Li.  
I pick sweet polia on an islet,  
For my loved one far away.  
So rare the precious time we share;  
Yet all I can do is wander and wait.

## Mourning the Lost Capital

High heaven has proved fickle in its bounties;  
Why should it frighten our people thus?  
Men are scattered and friends separated.  
Early in the spring, eastwards we started.  
Setting out from my home for places far away;  
The Yangtse and Hsia were my paths into exile.  
With sorrow in my heart, I went through the city gate;  
Early on the first day, I commenced my travels.  
As I left the city and then my village gate,  
An endless despairing seized hold of my mind.  
While the boat's oars swished in time,  
I mourned for the prince I'd never see again.  
A deep sigh escaped me gazing at the forests;  
My tears in profusion coursed down like sleet.  
Passing the Hsia's head, we then drifted westwards,  
I searched for the Dragon Gate but all in vain.

Yearning racked my heart and grief my mind;  
Going so far away, the path uncertain.  
Tossed by wind and waves, aimlessly drifting;  
Embarked on an endless journey without hope of return.  
Riding the rough waves, these thoughts filled my mind;  
When, oh when, will this drifting ever cease?  
My heart enmeshed could not be disentangled;  
My thoughts trapped in a maze with no escape.  
By the current, my boat was borne downstream;  
South to the Tungting Lake, north to the river.  
My old home abandoned, wherein I had lived,  
As I travelled eastwards randomly adrift.  
Yet within my soul I burned to return;  
Not a moment passed, but I longed to go back.  
On leaving Hsia Pu, my thoughts raced westwards,  
Mourning that my city daily grew more distant.  
From a hilly island I searched the horizon,  
Hoping to relieve the ache within my heart.  
But the island's soil so fertile saddened me,  
A reminder of the lands beside the Great River.  
Where my destination, as I traverse the water?  
How proceed south across this vast waste?  
Unaware in my exile the palace had been razed;  
Unthinkable the East Gate had crumbled into ruins.  
How many are the days since my heart felt joy;  
As grief followed sorrow and sorrow followed grief.  
Long and hard is the way to the city;  
The Yangtse and Hsia are difficult to cross.  
To have left it seems at times inconceivable;

Yet for nine years I have not been there.  
 The sadness that blights me is too deep for words;  
 Chained to that place, life has a bitter taste.  
 Your favour was won by outward flattery;  
 Too weak to resist, without independent will.  
 When I, most loyal, tried to approach you,  
 Envy triumphed and obstructed me.  
 Yao and Shun so renowned for noble deeds,  
 That their glory was even reflected in the skies;  
 Yet many vicious tongues, jealous of their fame,  
 Spread ugly slanders and said they were not good.  
 Now you abhor the patient quest for beauty,  
 Preferring instead a scoundrel's trumpeting.  
 The mobs swarm round, each day closer in your favour;  
 While beauty spurned withdraws far away.

#### Envoi

So long have my eyes stared into the distance;  
 Yearning once to return, but never knowing when.  
 The birds can fly home to their old nests;  
 The dying fox can turn to face his earth.  
 That I was blameless, yet cast aside and exiled;  
 Each day and night this still scars my soul.

## Notes on Art

Chi Feng-ho

### Introducing "Sketches of the Long March"

*Sketches of the Long March*, a collection of twenty-four drawings, was reprinted last year. The artist, Huang Chen, participated in the heroic 25,000-li Long March of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, making these sketches during the course of the march. This eye-witness account is an invaluable record of those times.

The Long March was unique in the annals of Chinese history. For twelve months from 1934 to 1935, starting from Juichin, Kiangsi Province in south China, the Red Army soldiers scaled snow-covered mountains and crossed virgin marshlands in eleven provinces until they triumphantly reached the revolutionary base in northern Shensi. Overhead they were under daily reconnaissance and bombing by scores of enemy planes, while on the ground they were encircled and pursued, obstructed and intercepted by hundreds of thousands of Kuomintang troops. They encountered severe difficulties and dangers. One of the thousands of marchers, the artist vividly recorded for posterity scenes from their life, concentrating on the revolutionary and optimistic spirit of the Red Army men.





*Anshunchang*

In the drawing entitled *Anshunchang*, eighteen fighters are forcing their way across the Tatu River, which was considered to be almost impassable, sailing their boat from the south bank to the north through the wind and waves. The lines are free and fluid. At the side of this picture, the artist has inscribed: "Anshunchang. The Red Army, under the leadership of the Communist Party, is invincible. We can conquer any natural barriers. Shih Ta-kai\* was defeated here, but today many of our brave revolutionary heroes have already landed on the north bank of the Tatu River, opposite to Anshunchang and wiped out the enemy defenders!"

\*A general of the peasant insurgent forces during the Taiping Revolution (1851-1864). After he had split from the insurgent forces, he led an army to make a southwestward push. His whole army was wiped out at Anshunchang on the bank of the Tatu River.

*Wild Leaves Replace Tobacco* depicts the Red Army entering the Tibetan region. Lacking supplies of tobacco, the Red Army men gathered a variety of wild leaves as a substitute. The artist's inscription on this sketch reads: "On arriving in the Tibetan region, the comrades who smoke are worried. They can't find any cigarettes, not even tobacco for pipes. However, they have discovered certain wild leaves which, it is said, can be used for smoking. Those who smoke search around for these substitutes for tobacco. They have

*Wild Leaves Replace Tobacco*



some taste — a rather peculiar flavour.” His lively inscriptions and cartoon-style sketches are very moving. In *Grinding “Chingko” Barley Before Crossing*, a Red Army man is hard at work. The inscription states: “Before crossing the marshlands, each man has to grind *chingko* barley. The stone for grinding is small but it can produce thirty catties in twenty-four hours.”

*Marching Forward* depicts some men striding swiftly through the swamp, some carrying pots and pans or helping others. The scene

*Descending the Snow Mountains*



*Marching Forward*

is lively and realistic. *Descending the Snow Mountains* shows the joy of the soldiers, who had encountered terrible hardships climbing the huge snow-covered mountain where the air was thin. On this drawing is written: “Our joy on descending the snow mountains.”

This album first appeared in Shanghai in 1938, under the title of *Sketches on a Journey to the West* during the War of Resistance Against Japan when Shanghai had already fallen to the enemy. Because the collection was published from reproductions of photographs which had passed through many hands, the publisher mistook the artist’s name. In 1962, before it was reprinted under its real title *Sketches of the Long March*, the artist was identified as Huang Chen, who acknowledged that the twenty-four drawings made on whatever paper was available at the time were his work.

## Restoration of the Yunkang Caves

The world-famed Yunkang Caves, hollowed out of the southern slope of Mount Wuchou in the western outskirts of Tatung in Shansi, stretch for about one kilometre from east to west. Fifty-three main caves still remain which can be divided chronologically into three groups: four on the east, nine in the middle, and forty on the west. In addition there are many smaller caves. In all, they comprise more than eleven hundred stone niches and more than fifty-one thousand Buddhist images large and small, making up one of the most impressive treasure-houses of ancient cave sculpture in China.

The city of Tatung was known in old times as Pingcheng. For nearly a hundred years from the end of the fourth to the end of the fifth century, it was the capital of the Northern Wei Dynasty (AD 386-534). The Toba Tartars who ruled this dynasty belonged to the Sienpi group of nomadic tribesmen who had ranged the area between the northern Khingan Mountains and the River Argun in the upper reaches of Heilung River in northeast China. Towards the end of the first century AD the Toba Tartars moved southwest and grew more powerful. By the fourth century they had occupied

a large part of the Yellow River Valley and established the Northern Wei Dynasty. In AD 398, they moved their capital from Horiger in what is now the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region to Pingcheng, present-day Tatung. Later, in AD 494, they moved it south to Loyang in Honan. The Yunkang Caves were built more than fifteen hundred years ago when the Northern Wei rulers had their capital at Pingcheng.

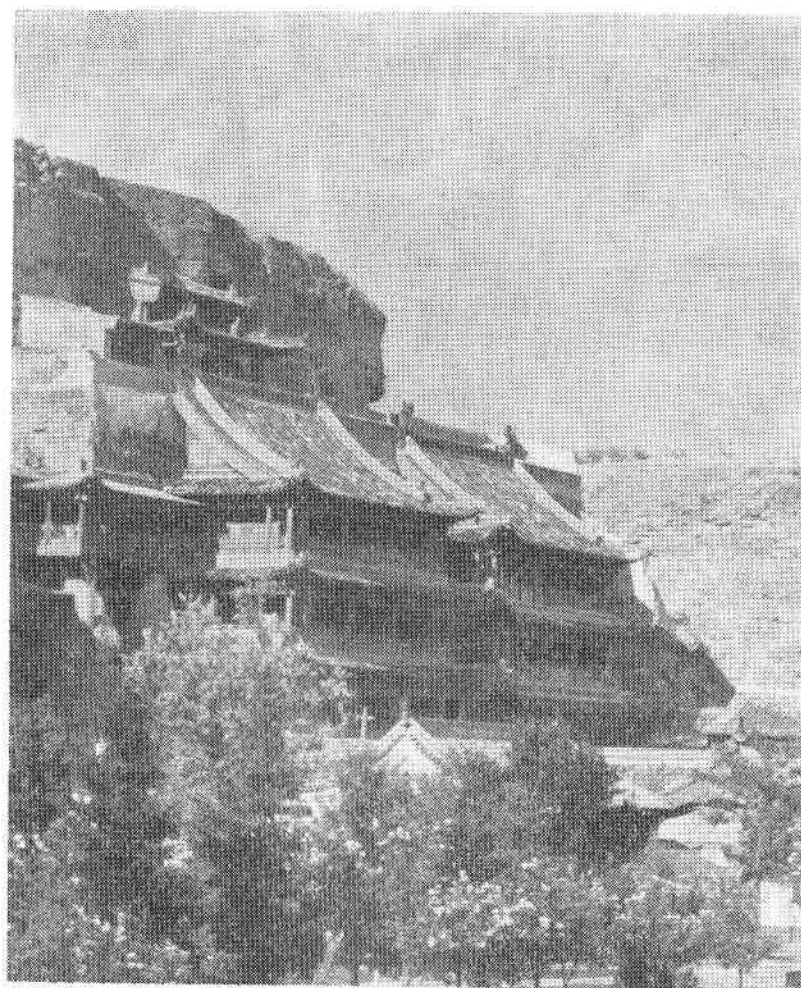
Most of the Northern Wei rulers believed in Buddhism. They had these caves built at Yunkang to propagate their religion and thereby help to preserve their feudal rule. In the fifth century, Northern Wei emperors went seven times to worship at Mount Wuchou, the choice of this site providing a holy place for Buddhists in the vicinity of the capital. Enormous amounts of wealth and human labour were expended to construct the main caves at Yunkang in a period of little more than thirty years. The labour force was drawn mainly from prisoners of war. According to historical records, in AD 417 Northern Wei conquered the northwest kingdom of Later Chin and moved two thousand families of artisans to the capital; in AD 439, when they conquered the kingdom of Northern Liang embracing Lanchow and the region further west, they transferred another thirty thousand families of minor officials and artisans to Pingcheng; and after the conquest of Chungshan in present-day Hopei and other parts of north China, they forced another hundred thousand families of workers and artisans to move to Pingcheng. A few of these captives taken to the capital were given as rewards to officers, but the great majority were put under government control. The laws of that time forbade private families to keep artisans, who were compelled to work in perpetuity for the government. Their descendants, too, had to carry on the same trade and were not allowed to take up other professions. They had a low social status, being forbidden to marry outside their own class which was in a position between free subjects and slaves. This enabled the ruling class to exploit and oppress them more cruelly than ordinary citizens. The construction of the caves at Yunkang was entirely the work of these artisans. Their names have not come down to us, but their mag-

nificent sculptures testify to the outstanding creative talent of the toilers of ancient China.

From the third century onwards, Buddhism played a big role in China's contact with foreign countries. And after Northern Wei brought most of north China under its rule, there was more traffic with countries in Central Asia along the famous Silk Road. Trading caravans as well as Buddhist monks travelled by this route. It is recorded that, from AD 435 onwards, Northern Wei often sent envoys to countries to the west; and towards the end of the fifth century there were many foreign monks, artists and merchants from Central Asia and countries further west living in the Northern Wei capital. Such frequent visits promoted cultural exchanges between different countries and helped to develop their economy.

Ancient Buddhist art came to China mainly through Central Asia, and the early Yunkang sculptures show the influence of Gandhara art in the Buddhist images themselves, the drapery over their shoulders, sometimes with the right shoulder bared, and the semblance of thick woollen material. The early Buddhist images have rugged features, deep-set eyes and prominent noses like the people of Central Asia, whereas those of the later period have leaner faces, longer necks and sloping shoulders like those of the Han nationality. By the end of the fifth century, some Yunkang images are also clothed in Han-style costumes with flowing robes and belts. This shows how foreign features gradually became assimilated with traditional Chinese styles.

Although the Buddhist legends on which most of these sculptures were based came from abroad, as did certain characteristics of Gandhara art in the early images, the basic artistic style is distinctly Chinese. By the Chin and Han Dynasties (221 BC-AD 220) Chinese sculpture had already attained a fairly high level with distinctive national characteristics, and Northern Wei sculptors carried forward this earlier tradition. In the Yunkang Buddhist images we see the traditional techniques of Han stone sculptures: line carving is combined with carving contours, and the folds of garments are shown by means of incised lines on the massive statues. The largest of these colossal images reaches a height of seventeen metres. Their huge dimen-



The wooden structure outside Caves 5 and 6

sions impress us with a sense of majesty and symmetry; yet in the depiction of details, as in the sculpturing of Buddha's hands, the artists convey suppleness as well as strength.

In short, the whole plan of these caves, the arrangement of the images and the depiction of details all show artistic skill of a very





Musicians in Caves 9 and 10

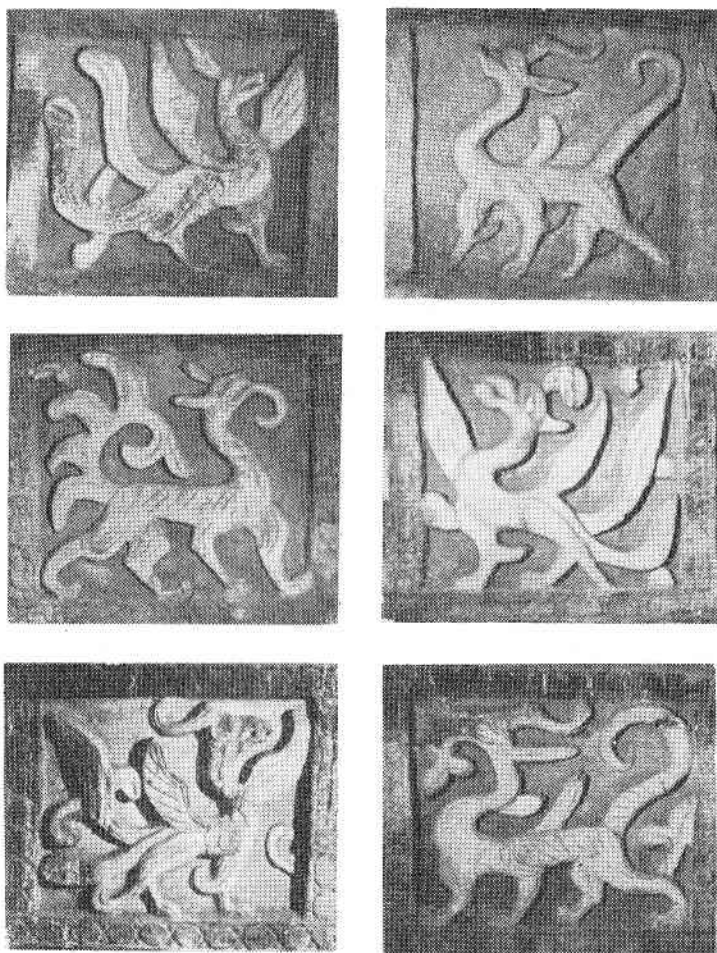
high order, which could not have been attained in the brief period after the promotion of Buddhism in Northern Wei but was the continuation of an earlier Chinese tradition.

When we come to the images of the middle period, their smoother, less angular features, their costumes with broad robes, belts and sharply pleated folds, as well as certain traditional Chinese architectural forms, all display Han characteristics even more strongly. This is evident too in the smaller images, many of which use high relief to bring out different angles and skilfully depict the folds of garments. The drapery, haloes behind the images, and the animals and plants serving as decorations are effective foils to the different facial expressions. In all these respects, the sculpture of this period reached a



new and higher level. Though based on Buddhist legends, the images are in fact distinctively Chinese. For instance, the image above the lintel of Cave 6 has been identified as the saint Vimalakirti, but judging by his features and costume, his Tartar cap and his fan, he resembles one of the Northern Wei landed gentry.

Other new features distinctively Chinese in style are certain decorative borders of this period with reliefs of animals and plants, such as the holy mountain above the door of the back chamber in Cave 10, which with its trees and running beasts combines still life with motion and shows great artistic skill. Or again, the border designs above the lintels of Cave 10 and Cave 12, which present in high relief figures of birds, deer, lotus and boys on symmetrical belts with



Garudas in Cave 6

leaf patterns. Reliefs with architectural designs, musicians and dancers, provide us with useful material for the study of ancient Chinese architecture and art.

The Yunkang sculpture of the later period shows even clearer Chinese characteristics, as in the belt carved in relief showing extremely life-like water-weeds, fish and birds on the west wall of Cave 15.

The relief of acrobats on a high pole in Cave 50 sheds light on Chinese acrobatics in early times.

In the fifteen centuries since the construction of the Yunkang Caves, some of the sculptures have undergone serious erosion and parts have disintegrated, while the monasteries built in front of the caves have been destroyed time and again in the course of wars. After the fourteenth century, many images were damaged by being plastered with clay and daubed with paint. In the last hundred years, still more damage was done by Chinese compradors and foreign imperialists who ruthlessly looted the place. It is estimated that before 1949 more than fourteen hundred Buddhist images were stolen or smashed, with the result that by the eve of Liberation the Yunkang Caves were falling into ruins, overgrown with weeds.

After the establishment of the Chinese People's Republic, the Yunkang Caves were listed as one of the important cultural units to be protected by the government, and an institute for their preservation was set up. Tatung's Bureau for the Preservation of Cultural Relics has done much reconstruction work and repaired some of the caves in jeopardy. This work of restoration started in 1974 and was successfully finished by September 1976. For some years now the Yunkang Caves have been open to foreign visitors.

*Lu Yung-pin*

## Chu Yuan, Poet and Patriot

Chu Yuan is the earliest of the great ancient Chinese poets. His place in the history of Chinese literature is immortal.

Chu Yuan, also named Ping, was a native of the Kingdom of Chu and probably lived between 340-278 BC. This period witnessed the rise to power of the feudal landlord class who had ousted the defunct slave-owning one. Dozens of city states had merged into seven powerful kingdoms, namely Chu, Chi, Yen, Han, Chao, Wei and Chin, all of which were struggling for supremacy. The former slave-owning dynasty of Chou by this time existed only in name.

Of the seven contending kingdoms, the three most powerful were Chu, Chin and Chi. The Kingdom of Chu covered a vast area in central and southern China and had a large population. Chin, situated in the northwest, was in a geographically advantageous position to dominate all lands to the east. Chi, situated on the coast, was rich in natural resources and enjoyed great material wealth. During Chu Yuan's lifetime, the eastern kingdoms had tried to unite under

the leadership of King Huai of Chu against any aggression by the state of Chin. The Kingdom of Chin, however, attempted to forestall this by sowing dissension among the allied forces in order to isolate and defeat them in turn and thus annex their territory. Since Chu and Chi were allies, Chin strove to split them.

Chu Yuan was a deputy prime minister of Chu under King Huai. In order to strengthen Chu and prevent Chin's aggression, Chu Yuan had taken positive steps to foil Chin's schemes. Trusting Chu Yuan, King Huai sought his advice and often sent him to negotiate with the other states. Unfortunately, one of Chu Yuan's colleagues, a minister named Chin Shang, was envious of his power. King Huai had asked Chu Yuan to draft some laws which Chin Shang demanded to see. When Chu Yuan refused, Chin Shang slandered him saying that Chu Yuan was ambitious and seeking all the credit, claiming no one else could do it. King Huai, weak and easily influenced, believed Chin Shang and started to doubt Chu Yuan's integrity. The result was the banishment of Chu Yuan from the court to exile north of the Han River. After Chu Yuan's dismissal, King Huai came to rely more on such ministers as Chin Shang and Tzu Chiao, as well as on his favourite concubine, Cheng Hsiu, all of whom favoured a conciliatory policy towards Chin, thus opposing Chu Yuan's strategy of making an alliance with Chi against Chin. King Huai, finally accepting their policy, severed relations with Chi and was then persuaded to go to Chin to sign a treaty with King Chao. Chu Yuan, hearing of this and suspecting treachery, returned to the court to warn King Huai against going. Not heeding Chu Yuan's advice, King Huai went to Chin where he was detained and died. His son, the new king, retained confidence in the same ministers and Chu Yuan was banished to the south this time. Chin then took this opportunity to attack Chu, occupying the capital Ying, near present-day Chiangling in Hupeh Province. The power of Chu thus gradually declined.

Chu Yuan was immersed in grief at the usurpation of power by the reactionary ministers and the ruin of the state of Chu. Using his pen like a sword, he attacked and fought the reactionary forces in his poems.

屈原造像  
 丁巳仲夏  
 吳昌碩畫



The poems of Chu Yuan can be divided into two parts: Those written before his exile, such as *In Praise of the Orange Tree* or the *Nine Odes*; those composed after his banishment, such as *Li Sao* (The Lament), *Tien Wen* (Heavenly Questions), and the elegies *Mourning the Lost Capital*, *Crossing the River* and *Embracing the Sand*. The feelings expressed in his later poems naturally reflect a different spirit from the earlier ones. *In Praise of the Orange Tree*, for example, expresses lively optimism. With the exception of the ode *To Our Fallen*, all the other songs in the *Nine Odes*\* were dedicated to gods and goddesses and are joyous in tone. In his later poems his search for truth is still evident, but his joy is replaced by inconsolable grief and a passionate denunciation of evil. Throughout his poems, his patriotism shines.

During his banishment north of the Han River, he was concerned lest King Huai under the influence of his evil counsellors would jeopardize the state of Chu. Thus in the poem *Li Sao* he said:

I do not fear calamities myself;  
 Only lest our kingdom come to grief.

For his own welfare he cared nothing, only for the fortunes of his country. He hoped that his king would desist from following the wrong advice of evil ministers and that he might once more assist in the good government of Chu. Thus further in *Li Sao* he stated:

Value your youth and spurn the impure.  
 Will you not change the error of your ways?  
 I have harnessed fine steeds for you to ride;  
 Let me go before you and show you the way.

But Chu Yuan's enemies, well in control of the government, accepted bribes from Chin and continued to pursue their reckless policies. In his poem, Chu Yuan pointed this out:

That band of fools enjoy their careless pleasures,  
 But their way is dark and only leads to danger.

The situation worsened and after the death of King Huai and the succession of his son to the throne, the persecution of Chu Yuan intensi-

\*For one of the *Nine Odes* see *The Lady of the Hsiang* in this issue.



fied. Chu Yuan, although wronged, continued to pour out his feelings and oppose and expose his enemies. In his poem *Mourning the Lost Capital*, he said:

Yet many vicious tongues, jealous of their fame,  
Spread ugly slanders and said they were not good.

Despite his loyalty to his king, Chu Yuan was banished. Yet he cherished the hope that he would be recalled to serve his king and state and in alliance with Chi resist their common aggressors. This was in vain, but Chu Yuan never compromised with his enemies. In his poem *Li Sao*, he openly declared his position:

Can the round and square ever fit together?  
Can different styles of life be ever reconciled?

While an implacable foe of the ambitious ministers who had seized power and endangered Chu with their policies, Chu Yuan praised those who had fought against Chu's aggressors. Chin waged nine wars against Chu, resulting in heavy losses for Chu. In his song *To Our Fallen*, Chu Yuan described the bravery of the soldiers on the battlefield thus:

Grasping our great shields, wearing hide armour;  
Wheel locked to wheel, fighting hand to hand.  
The sky dark with banners; the enemy like clouds.  
Through a hail of arrows our warriors advance.

His poem continues with a lament for the fallen and his stirring words aroused the people's patriotism. He wrote:

All now lie dead, left on the field of battle.  
Venturing forth, never more to return.  
So far away, they lie on the flat plain;  
With long swords at their belts, long bows in their hands.  
Heads from bodies sundered, but hearts remain unvanquished.  
How truly courageous and noble their spirit!  
Strong to the last, they are not dishonoured.  
Their bodies have died, but their souls are living.  
They will be heroes in the Kingdom of the Dead.

Chu Yuan also revealed his deep patriotism in his concern for the sufferings of the people of Chu who, through bad government, were

forced to flee their homes as refugees and were separated from their families. In *Mourning the Lost Capital*, Chu Yuan said:

High Heaven has proved to be fickle in its bounties.  
Why should it frighten our people thus?  
Men are scattered and friends separated. . . .

And in *Li Sao* he told of how he sympathized with the people:

Deep are my sighs and profuse my tears;  
Grieving to witness lives of such woe.

Another aspect of Chu Yuan's patriotism was his reluctance to leave Chu. Though twice banished to remote regions and though suffering many deprivations, he still persisted in following his ideals. In *Li Sao* he explained:

Endless is the road and long;  
Everywhere I continue in my search.

His spirit was indomitable until he finally realized that all was doomed. The government was beyond hope of change, and the state on the point of collapsing. Disillusioned at last about his king, Chu Yuan committed suicide by drowning himself in the Milo River. He had died for his country and his patriotism is remembered to this day. Each year, on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, people south of the Yangtse commemorate Chu Yuan's death by having a Dragon Boat Festival in which they compete with each other in boat races symbolizing the attempts to rescue the poet, eat sticky rice wrapped in leaves and throw some into the river, so that the dragons will not eat his body.

Before Chu Yuan's time, most literature was handed down orally. The *Book of Songs*,\* for example, consisted largely of folk-songs collected from various parts of China by the government. Inheriting these fine traditions, Chu Yuan went further to create a new form of poetry, known as "the poems of Chu", based on local Chu folk literature and the *Book of Songs*. There were more characters to each

\*See *Chinese Literature* No. 3, 1978.

line and the lengths of the lines were irregular. Thus they were longer than the earlier folk-songs and more expressive.

He was the first Chinese classical poet to write in a positive romantic style derived from realism. Positive romanticism and realism are often related and Chu Yuan successfully combined the two, for example, in his poem *To Our Fallen*. He does, however, belong to the romantic school, of which he was the finest exponent. In his poem *Crossing the River*, he wrote:

In my youth I loved these wondrous clothes;  
Now despite my years, my joy has not diminished.  
A long sword hangs resplendent at my side;  
A hat high to part the clouds on my head.  
Moon-like jewels at my neck, jade at my belt.  
A world plunged in chaos with none who comprehend,  
Yet I ride on and remain undismayed.  
On dragons dark and serpents white,  
I'll ride to paradise with King Shun.  
Ascend the highest peak and feast on jade,  
Remaining eternal as heaven and earth,  
Vying with the splendour of the sun and moon.

Such lyricism and imagination have not been equalled. Other poems which show his positive romanticism are *Embracing the Sand* and *Mourning the Lost Capital*, while it is even more marked in *Li Sao*, his long poem of three hundred and seventy-three lines. Chu Yuan was a master in the use of language to weave ancient myths and legends into a colourful tapestry of splendid imagery. Beautiful ladies and fragrant herbs symbolized the truth, whereas terrible beasts and rank weeds symbolized evil. The great revolutionary writer, Lu Hsun, when commenting once on a poem of Chu Yuan, said: "By its magnificent language and sublime images, it towers over all contemporary writings." Lu Hsun highly valued Chu Yuan's poetic achievements and his use of positive romanticism.

In the history of ancient Chinese literature, the Chu poems and the *Book of Songs* occupy a unique position as the zenith of poetic achievement and these two collections of poems have become the models for all later Chinese poets. Chu Yuan's outstanding contribution to literature and his use of positive romanticism have had a lasting

influence on Chinese literature and art. During the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), many poets tried to imitate Chu Yuan's style or write poems taking his life as their theme. In the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907), great poets such as Li Po and Tu Fu admired Chu Yuan's poetry, the former in particular being influenced by his style.

China's classical literary tradition cannot be inherited uncritically. Chu Yuan's patriotism was limited in that it was centred on his king. Chinese intellectuals in feudal times usually expressed their patriotism in terms of loyalty to their sovereign, thus taking the side of the feudal landlord class and supporting its preservation. While declaring his indignation and discontent, Chu Yuan nevertheless did not wish to overthrow his king, only hoped that he would pursue more enlightened policies. Chu Yuan was not a rebel against the feudal system. Yet we must assess him in the context of his times. Chu Yuan was a poet of the Warring States Period of over two thousand years ago, and we cannot expect him to break through the limitations of his age.

*Illustrated by Fan Tseng*

## Chronicle

### A Hundred Flowers Blossom on Peking Stage

On the occasion of the traditional Spring Festival, Peking's professional performers staged forty-eight items including Peking opera, modern drama, *Pingchu* opera, modern opera, Hopei clapper opera, *Chuchu* opera, dance drama, puppet shows, concerts, dances, ballad-singing and acrobatics. The themes were drawn from contemporary life, revolutionary history and ancient myths. Some good traditional operas were restaged as well. The popular musical comedy *Ayikuli* gave a picture of a minority nationality's life in the Sinkiang border area, and the modern drama *The Last Act* depicted a drama troupe during the anti-Japanese war period. Dances from Mexico, Japan, Egypt and other countries performed by the Tung Fang Art Ensemble were among the most acclaimed items.

### Shantung New Year Posters on Exhibition in Peking

An exhibition of traditional New Year posters in the distinctive style of Weifang County in Shantung Province opened recently in Peking. Weifang has been known for some three hundred years for its good folk posters. The Weifang style is characterized by a wealth of detail, done in vigorous strokes and powerful lines, with vivid colours and a rich rustic flavour. The posters are highly decorative. The one hundred and twenty-four exhibits carried forward the style of Weifang New Year pictures while adapting them to present the life of our time.

## New Books Published by PLA Publishing House

Novels reflecting life in the People's Liberation Army were recently published by the PLA Publishing House. Among them were *Liberation of Shibchiachuang*, *River Ula*, *Wind at the Border* and *Cross-fire*. The collections of short stories *Battle Front* and *Rearguard*, one depicting the PLA's fighting days in the past, the other the Red Army on the Long March, and the novels *Woman Guerrilla Leader*, *War Panorama* and *Azalea* will soon be off the press.

### Canadian Toronto Symphonic Orchestra Tours China

The Canadian Toronto Symphonic Orchestra gave its première in Peking in January. With Andrew Davis as its conductor, the orchestra performed works by classical European composers like Brahms, Liszt and Beethoven and the contemporary Canadian composer Morel. At the concert, guest contralto Maureen Forrester sang six songs by Mahler from the ballad *Songs from a Youth's Magic Horn* as well as some Chinese songs. The performance was well received by Chinese musicians and the general public.

The Canadian Toronto Symphonic Orchestra also toured Shanghai and Kwangchow.

### Iranian Painting Exhibition in Peking

An Iranian Painting exhibition sponsored by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries opened in Peking recently. One hundred and two paintings were on display, most of them classical. These paintings showing the traditional Iranian style of painting as well as the artists' creative talent were greatly appreciated by Chinese artists and art lovers.

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Mountain Flower (woodcut)

by Teng Tzu-ching



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