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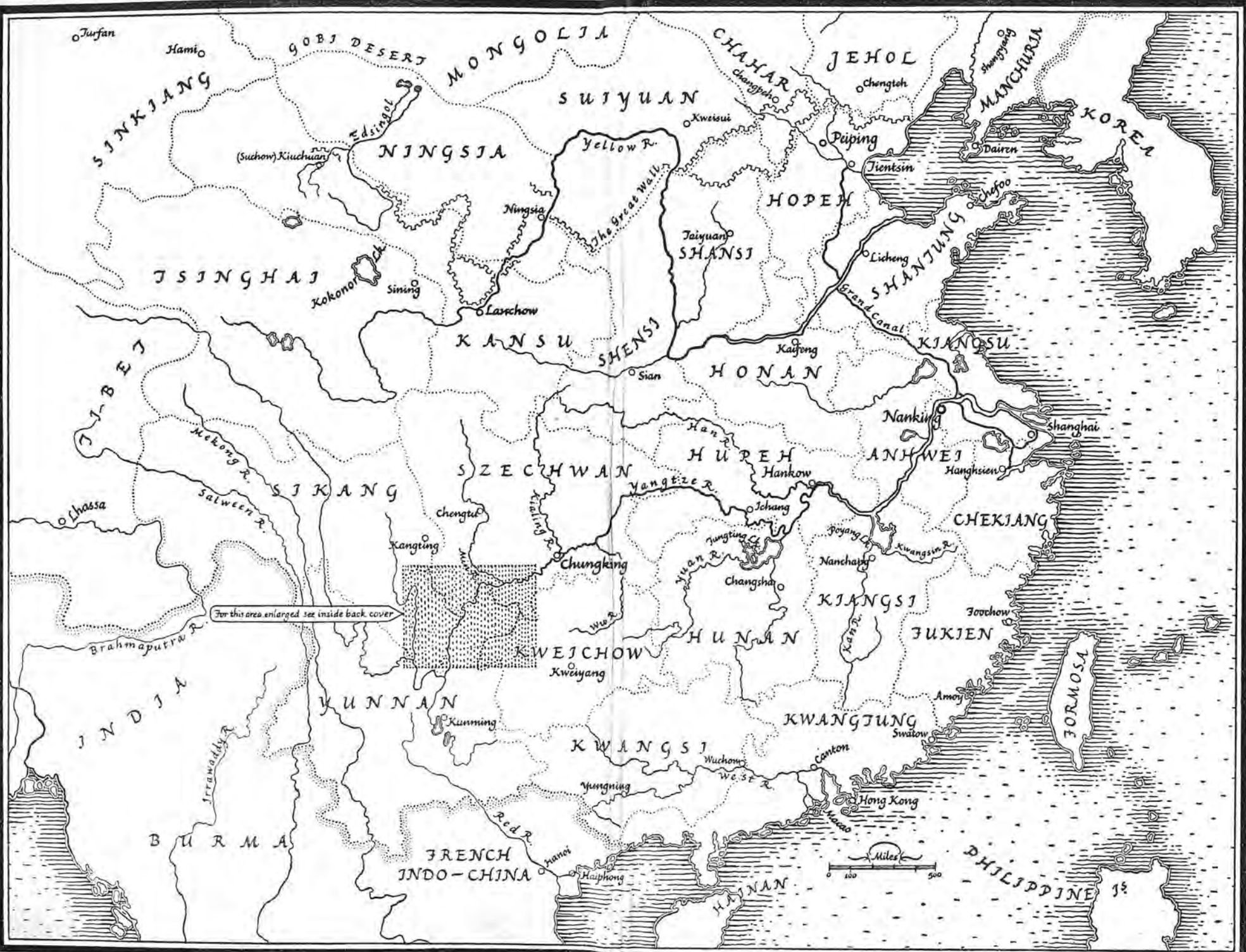
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STRONG TOWER

STRONG TOWER

A. J. BROOMHALL

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CHINA INLAND MISSION

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CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	<i>Page</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	6
<i>Chapter</i>	<i>1</i>
1. VIGNETTE OF A NOSU	13
2. EARLY DAYS	23
3. COUNTRY AND PEOPLE	36
4. BACKGROUND TO ADVENTURE	46
5. HAND TO THE PLOUGH	56
6. NEW HORIZONS	63
7. PLOTS AND PERPLEXITIES	72
8. THE HEAT OF DAY	81
9. THE MANAGER	94
10. SCATTERED OUTPOSTS: I	108
11. SCATTERED OUTPOSTS: II	124
12. BITTERSWEET	139
13. WEATHERING STORMS	153
14. BRIEF INTERLUDE	170
15. TERROR BY NIGHT	183
16. <i>HORS DE COMBAT</i>	196
17. BACK TO THE FRAY	202
18. HARD PRESSED	213
19. ALARMS AND EXCURSIONS	222
20. CAST UPON GOD	235
<i>Epilogue</i>	249
<i>Historical Note</i>	250
<i>Glossary</i>	253

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Dust Cover: The design on this cover shows the geographical location of the story, together with a typical Nosu strong tower and ancient hieroglyphics as used by their sorcerer-priests.

THE HEAD OF THE KIEHKOW VALLEY AND CHIOPA'S HOUSE AND TOWER DIAGRAMMATIC SKETCH OF CHURCH COMPOUND, KIEHKOW. (From left) MR. PEACE'S COTTAGE AND GARDEN ORCHARD; TWO SCHOOL BUILDINGS; CHAPEL; EVANGELIST'S QUARTERS WITH STABLES BEHIND; MUSHIH'S HOUSE	facing page 16
LOOKING DOWN THE VALLEY FROM KIEHKOW. THE MANCHU BRIDGE NEAR ACHICHE AND KIEHKOW	17
THE RIVER OF GOLDEN SAND. ON THE ROAD TO KOPU, LOOKING SOUTH	32
"ARISTOCRAT!"—INDEPENDENT NOSU	33
AN UNMARRIED MIAO MAIDEN WITH COILED HAIR. A TYPICAL MIAO TRAVELLER WITH BEDDING, UMBRELLA, HAT AND STAFF. A LISU LAD, TRIBAL COUSIN OF THE NOSU	48
A MIAO GRANNY DIGGING. THE CONE-SHAPED HAIR INDICATES A MARRIED WOMAN	49
A WHITE NOSU EVANGELIST OF KIEHKOW	64
A BLACK NOSU PASTOR OF CHAOTUNG	64
A WHITE NOSU MAN AND WIFE	65
THE LANDLORD, A BLACK NOSU WOMAN, SOWS THE SEED, PRECEDED AND FOLLOWED BY HER SERFS, ONE USING A PRIMITIVE OXEN PLOUGH, THE OTHER THROWING IN FERTILISER	96
AN TEKUAN'S COURTYARD AT TEMOPIN	97
PHONETIC SCRIPT: A PAGE. THE LORD'S PRAYER, FROM THE COMPLETED NOSU HYMN-BOOK, WRITTEN BY MR. PEACE'S OWN HAND	97
TWO BLACK NOSU LANDOWNERS. WHITE NOSU SERFS	112
AN OUTDOOR SERVICE OF WHITE NOSU, LED BY A BLACK NOSU PREACHER	113
GORGE IN NOSULAND	128
ON THE ROAD FROM KIEHKOW TO KOPU	128
TWO STURDY BURDEN-BEARERS	129
GUARDED ENTRANCE TO A NOSU STRONGHOLD	144
LOOKING DOWN ON KIEHKOW COMPOUND FROM THE EAST	145
ARMED NOSU RETAINERS	145
A WELL-DRESSED WHITE NOSU WOMAN	160
KIEHKOW MARKET WHERE NOSU, MIAO AND CHINESE MINGLE	161
CHRISTIAN BAPTISM IN NOSULAND	176
A SCENE IN KWEIYANG, PROVINCIAL CAPITAL OF KWEICHOW	177

*Sketches by Dr. A. J. Broomhall. Photographs by General D'Ollone,
Dr. T. C. Lau, W. G. Windsor, H. L. Taylor, W. T. Simpkin.*

IT HAPPENED IN THIS WAY

THE Japanese were striking at Kweiyang, pivotal city on the Burma-Chungking road. The order came, "... EVACUATE TO KUNMING . . . INDIA," and within a few hours we had packed a suitcase each, stowed away all we could, and started off. Three days by horse and stretcher-chair over the hills, two by truck, a month of waiting and an R.A.F. transport plane across The Hump to India; then months more, hoping for passages by sea to England—and jumbled notes of happenings at Kiehkow, a few impressions of the place and people, began to take form and turn into a story.

As exiles, we had no more than a few pages of brief notes with us. Everything had to be recalled from memory, and not a single word could be verified. So building on a broad basis of historical fact and an *ersatz* corner-stone or two, I have tried to put together a story strictly true to life, whose bricks may have been shuffled round and bound together by imaginative mortar, yet which is not fiction. Every single feature have we seen ourselves or heard in essence from the lips of the characters concerned, or, in the case of scientific material, learned from authoritative writings.

It is a composite picture, a kaleidoscope, combining our own experiences with those of the main character where his were certain to have been much the same, in order that a realistic impression may be given of his world. It is not the story of a "potted saint." It tells about a Christian man with many limitations who even so may put the readers of his life to shame. And yet it is with his own permission to tell the Church at home, for he himself was keen that all who pray should know the struggling state of his beloved Nosu church and the dangers that beset his family. "Mr. Peace" is the name by which his missionary friends referred to him among themselves, and is a translation of his Chinese surname. As for the characters of others in the book, they are as I have judged them to be, and those no longer alive, as various reports have painted them. For wisdom's sake, despite all efforts, I have had in some instances to dilute the truth and to alter a few names.

This book is intended to reveal to interested Christians the true conditions in another corner of the world, as experienced by the

missionary who lives among the people. Its main value, I believe, lies in the background, to which the narrative itself is supplementary. It shows the hard and pleasant side by side. The information that it gives about the Nosu will be enough, I hope, at the risk of overburdening the story, to indicate the needs of the Nosu people for missionary aid, and to show the clear distinction that exists between the "Sinicized" and the "Independent" sections of the race.

Apologies are due to those who know far more about Kiehkow, and indeed about the story I have told, than I happened to learn in a mere four months and a half; and tribute is paid to those who lived and worked for years in this environment. All these are covered by the use of one term, *mushih* (pronounced "moo-sssh"), which, because it carries the atmosphere in which the book is set, is chosen rather than the cumbersome word "missionary," which has its own association of ideas.

In order to limit the hyphens and apostrophes which can be confusing to those unfamiliar with the romanization of Chinese words, I have eliminated both from proper nouns and terms that recur in the story, retaining them in speech and wherever else it seems desirable. An attempt to indicate the pronunciation is made instead in the glossary, on pages 253 to 255.

A. J. B.

FROM A MISSIONARY PERIODICAL

“In one of the tribal centres of Kweichow Province in western China there is a Christian gentleman named Mr. Peace, who from the earliest days has been connected with the Nosu Church. His knowledge of the country and tribes people, not only of his own race, but the Miao as well, and his high social standing in the district, made him from the beginning a great asset to the infant church. Acquaintance with other parts of China widened his vision, which trials of one kind and another have been unable to destroy. Early in his experience he proved the power of prayer and mercies of God, which qualified him for an active part in work among the Christians scattered through his native mountains. His growing family and the fruits of his Christian witness encouraged and helped him to weather the storms of trouble and opposition in the church, and the fellowship of leading Christians and missionaries elsewhere in the province did much to carry him through the bitterest blow of all which well nigh ended his usefulness. But his spiritual resilience brought him once more into the fray in which he continues to take a lead. His trials however are as much as he can bear, and special prayer is asked for this godly man.”

Behind a brief paragraph in a missionary periodical there nearly always lies a tale. The form of this narrative is an attempt to illustrate that fact and to bring such a paragraph to life.

“The Name of the Lord is a Strong Tower:
The righteous runneth into it and is safe.”

The Proverbs of Solomon.

CHAPTER ONE

VIGNETTE OF A NOSU

"In one of the tribal centres of Kweichow Province in western China there is a Christian gentleman named Mr. Peace. . . ."

I

AS the first stars gleamed in the greying sky and the shouts of school play ceased, Mr. Peace the schoolmaster was standing in his garden-orchard at Kiehkow. He was gazing down the valley when he first caught sight of the solitary figure toiling up towards him. The steady stride, rhythmic, almost mechanical, was that of any countryman in these mountains with ground to cover before the darkness fell. Nor did his dark blue turban and coarse felt cloak help to reveal his identity.

The light was fading steadily, and on the far-off hillsides the flames of bonfires began to stab the gloom. In his mind's eye, Mr. Peace could see the people squatting round with pipe and bowl, the day's work over. Across the valley floated distant calls, mothers calling their children in, friends bidding good night, mingling with the low of stalled cattle and the cries of belated birds hastening to their roosts.

The garden where he stood was skirted by a path, a little mud-walled lane that led up to the school and chapel, and onward to the pasture-lands above. Up it each day came herds of cattle, ponies, pigs, sheep, goats, tended by teams of ragged boys and men. Out across the terrace by the school they clattered, and away, to glean for grass among the flowering shrubs and dwarf oak of the forest slopes, while the shepherd boys sat dreaming round their fires, come sun or rain, watching the smoke rise lazily from the homesteads down below them.

Mr. Peace was troubled. He felt alone. He had much to think about, responsibilities he did not wish to bear. High over head the great sweep of heavens drew the towering mountains up to meet them, and beneath it all he stood, a little, stooping man.

But now the traveller was approaching, and as he came up through the huckwheat field into the lane his face was visible. He was a young man, little more than twenty years of age, whom

Mr. Peace had seen about the premises for several weeks. His hands were bound in ragged bandages, but even so he carried a slender staff topped by a small axehead of shining metal, for self-defence or bivouacing by the road.

"Mr. Peace!" he cried, naming him first before a greeting, as the custom is.

"Where are you making for?" asked Mr. Peace, coming to the wall, for the boy's home was not in this direction.

"Coming to see you," he said.

He turned down the side path that led to Mr. Peace's cottage yard, and Mr. Peace moved over to his gate to meet and welcome him. They went indoors and drew up benches round the glowing fire. The young man's hands were badly mutilated, ugly claw-like things of little use, and as he spoke he held them on his lap as if they still caused pain.

"How are they now?" the schoolmaster enquired.

He knew the story well. It was not unusual in a district where this youth was but one of many like him. Although his family was high in the social scale, he had belonged to a local rich man's armed guard and followed him everywhere to fight at his bidding. They had been ambushed by another gang, and while he was dragging a friend to safety behind a rock, a bullet had passed through both his hands, smashing most of his fingers. For three weeks he had been untreated, because in the past he had had no dealings with the church people and kept away; but at last he had listened to advice and now was almost healed.

"Splinters of bone still working loose," he answered, "but nearly finished now"; and then continued: "I went down to the market this morning, Mr. Peace, and met one of your servants from Hopien. He said he had a message for you, but could not come to Kiehkow, and asked me to tell you instead. Your house at Hopien was burnt down last night, and your wife says you are needed there as soon as possible."

His house burnt down! That was his real home, the home which was the background of his life. Burnt down. He did not need to ask how it had happened; falling sparks from torch or lamp, flaming straw spreading the fire to matting and farming stock, to rafters and roof, till all was gone. He had seen it before. It happened all too easily in these country homes where naked flame was the only form of light. He groaned, and asked how much was left. And

while the young man ate the bowl of steaming corn meal that Mr. Peace had ordered to be brought, they talked together, till the last fragments had been shaken on the floor, and the youth stood up.

"Must go," he said; "it's late," and tucked his axe-head staff under his arm. Mr. Peace took a handful of dry reed bamboos and thrust them into the fire. A few strong puffs and they sprang alight. He led the way across his little yard and up the lane, holding the torch aloft. Across the gravelled playground, past the chapel, he took the messenger, and keeping only a stick or two, handed him the rest to light his way, and watched him go off through the field of tall green flax behind the preachers' quarters and the stables, and down across the gully to his home.

2

It was morning, and he had arranged to leave the school in someone else's care while he went home, twenty-five miles away, to salvage the remains of what had been his father's house and to start rebuilding it. He could not leave his wife to do it all alone, capable as she was.

Once more he was standing in his garden-orchard where he had stood last night, looking out over the valley. He was waiting while his horse was being fed and saddled for the journey. It was early morning still, and usually at this time he would not be about. Most people waited till the sun had risen before they stirred outside, but he had work to do when he arrived at the end of his seven hours' journey.

The sky above him, so often cloudy, to-day was infinitely distant, and diminutive flecks of cirrus catching the golden light seemed miles up in the air. Over his head the sky was blue, but spreading downward it paled away into a hazy horizon where it met the serried line of a mountain range twenty miles to the south. From that distant point the hills cascaded wildly toward him with dropping, intersecting slopes, here in smoothly flowing contours, there in sudden precipices, extending in light and shadow right to the foot of the valley of Kiehkow itself. And across the scene two winding bands of mist coiled whitely, rising slowly from the streams they nightly clothed, into the warming air, dissipating into nothingness.

Behind him a collar of mountain rose with wooded hollows and deep rain-scars on its face, the roosting place of cloud, and fell

irregularly on each flank in sweeping curves. On the east its line was broken by a pass that Mr. Peace was soon to traverse, and rose rapidly again to the summit of a twin-peaked mountain slowly being lit up by the sun, a friendly, immovable old thing, a Mount Ararat on whose shoulders any ark would choose to rest. And over to the west the highest ridges, crowning hills much higher, steeper and less fertile than elsewhere, switchbacked southward to the bottom of the valley, where a wooded bluff stood out and ended suddenly in craggy cliffs above a gorge. On every hand glorious forest of tree and scrub alternated with terraced fields, cultivated by the owners of the homesteads scattered here and there, and watered by hidden brooks and springs.

A sound of hammering came from the stable regions.

"Probably Yohan the preacher," thought Mr. Peace, "mending his pack-saddle. He said he must do it before next market day."

He was getting tired of waiting. His own affairs were settled and his few effects put ready for the journey. He was a methodical man. He wandered up and down examining his flower beds. It could not be said that he "paced"; if he ever tried to pace or march or even to walk briskly, he would have looked ludicrous. He was not built that way. He was slight in build and gentle in manner. Were it not for his dark, clean-shaven face, very much a man's, his appearance might have held a trace of the feminine in it. But never the effeminate. In his large turban, encircling a classic Chinese cap with crowning button of knotted cord, his ill-fitting gown of coarse blue native cloth hanging badly because of his slight stoop, and patchy in colour with many threads devoid of dye from much washing, he looked as he was, an educated but simple country gentleman. For Mr. Peace is a gentleman above all things, by birth and nature and upbringing. Even his cloth shoes, frayed at the toe and heel and soled with pulpy leather and rusty studs, could not detract from an appearance more dignified and respectable than most of his acquaintances.

He looked again at his flowers, turning their heads gently with his slender hand that the sunlight might pass through them. It was just like him to grow his own flowers and to know their names in Chinese and in English. They interested him. He was the type of man for whom, if life had been kind, the name of Peace would have been most appropriate. But times instead were hard, and, though he was no more than thirty-six years old, the furrowed brow above



THE HEAD OF THE KIEHKOW VALLEY AND CHIOPA'S HOUSE AND TOWER

DIAGRAMMATIC SKETCH OF CHURCH COMPOUND, KIEHKOW.
(From left) MR. PEACE'S COTTAGE AND GARDEN ORCHARD;
 TWO SCHOOL BUILDINGS; CHAPEL; EVANGELIST'S QUARTERS
 WITH STABLES BEHIND; MUSHIH'S HOUSE



below A-CHI-CH'IE '44

LOOKING DOWN THE VALLEY FROM KIEHKOW
THE MANCHU BRIDGE NEAR ACHICHE AND KIEHKOW

his ungainly spectacles and his restless hands betrayed a troubled mind.

By race he was a Nosu, but his father had been an official in Chinese Government employ, and he himself was fully appreciative of his Chinese citizenship. His deepest affections, all the same, were toward the Nosu, and few knew more about their ancient history and extent. This love of his own people made him eager that they might turn to God, but he was disappointed.

3

The voices of his children stirred him from his reverie, and he sauntered over to the cottage and looked in. Three boys now, and a girl, he had, but the youngest was at Hopien with their mother. They were roasting potatoes on the fire as an early morning snack, for breakfast would not be till ten or eleven o'clock. He took one for himself and went on up the lane to see what ailed his servant and the horse.

As he reached the terrace by the school, however, a small procession clattered through the gateway by the preacher Yohan's house and crossed toward him. Following Yohan and the horse came his own son Jenpin, a schoolboy of fourteen, and a White Nosu yokel who was to travel with him.

"Sorry, Mr. Peace," called Yohan. "This red mare of yours had shed another shoe. It's slow work fitting a new one to her sometimes."

Back at his cottage again, it did not take them long to swing his wadded quilt, or *pukai*, across the saddle and rope it down with its covering oilcloth as a protection against rain, and they were ready. The yokel started on ahead, carrying on his back a large basket holding his master's change of shoes and clothing, and Mr. Peace turned with a slow smile to Yohan, saying:

"Good-bye, Yohan. Remind Chiopa about the Sunday service, won't you?"

"He won't forget; there's not much wrong with Chiopa!" Yohan answered.

Jenpin took the horse's bridle and led her to the bank beside the little cowshed for his father to mount.

"Good-bye, *Aba*," he said. "Wish I was coming with you!"

Mr. Peace stepped up on to the bank and swung his leg over the

STRONG TOWER

bulky saddle. Having the *pukai* on top was not ideal, but it made the saddle softer for a long day's ride and relieved the coolie of some weight so that he could travel faster. He fitted his heels into the clumsy stirrups which Jenpin and Yohan held ready for him. He had tried the *mushih's* way of putting his toes in, but it felt too unsafe in the event of a toss. The method of his father's was good enough for him.

He looked down at his son to bid him free the horse's head, and the animal, glad to be away on the road again, broke straight into a trot and swung out of the yard in the coolie's track. Mr. Peace turned in his saddle at the corner and raised his hand in farewell to his boy. He was proud of him, strong and sturdy even now, with big bones and a large and manly head; handsome already with his deep brown eyes, dark skin and full eyebrows. He had great hopes for this son of his.

Down the path they went, through a pink sea of buckwheat bloom, over the lip of the gully, and soon were picking their way carefully down the slope. Across the brook, half hidden behind a clump of trees far over to Mr. Peace's left, a building thickly thatched lay squatly, fenced about with plaited thorn. And set apart, but in the same enclosure, was a tower, a tower of refuge, of the customary shape, as high again as the house, with sloping roof, a doorway six feet from the ground, firing slits in its stone walls, and a protecting shield behind which defenders could lean out and attack any who reached the walls beneath.

"Poor people!" mused Mr. Peace, now settled comfortably in his saddle. "We Nosu are indeed a benighted race, that to this day there should be need of these."

The red mare stumbled as she crossed a ditch, but Mr. Peace's thoughts had drifted far away, back to his youth, before he had ever heard of Christ, and, farther still, back to the tales his father and his uncles used to tell, of the fighting Nosu of long, long ago.

There were a good many tribal legends which he enjoyed handing on to his children from time to time, and tales from Chinese history about the early tribes of south-west China which were interesting too, but the true origin of his race seemed to be lost in the mists of by-gone time. It was enough that they had sprung from warrior stock, from ancestors who had migrated from afar and dominated the weaker races amongst whom they moved. This warlike nature had been in them from the beginning; they had never lost it. Small

wonder then if their descendants were a pugnacious, restless type who could not settle down, who must have battle: men such as the messenger of last night, a youth with many good points, but a shedder of blood until maimed himself for ever.

But there was hope. As Mr. Peace reflected, he himself was the second generation of a peaceful and law-abiding Nosu family. Yet he was proud of his race as he thought of them. What a fine breed they were! How lithe and awake beside the stolid if cleverer Chinese. And how fine their features, with deep-set eyes and characterful nose, a race of rulers, once they were awakened to the modern world.

In his thinking, as he jogged along the winding trail, he unconsciously included only a fraction of his tribe, the landowners, the true blue-blooded Nosu—the “Blacks,” or as the Chinese say, the “Blackbones.”

Away in antiquity, the aborigines whom the ancestors of the Blacks had overrun, and the Chinese they took captive, had become their slaves and servants and tenants. Their conquerors never intermarried with them, though they lived together and in time came to share the tribal name. But they acquired the name of “White” Nosu to distinguish them from their overlords. Their features on the whole were different, though the colour of their skins was much the same. The distinction is always clear to the Nosu themselves.

And so a feudal system had developed, with princes, or *Nzemos*, few and far between; with very wealthy landowners, or *Tumus*,¹ “eyes of the earth” or “head and eyes”; with the remainder of the Black Nosu, rich and poor, owners of property in their own right; and with the White Nosu, once all serfs but now many of them free tenants. Those who were not freemen were the property of their masters and content to be so, even at the present day. Their marriages were arranged by their masters, their women-folk would go with the daughter of the house as part of her marriage dowry, and they, the Whites, would do all the work and fight the battles of their lords, when attacked or when it pleased him to take the offensive. If they ran away or defied their master’s will, no one would question his right to punish, maim or kill them.

For this reason, it was not strange to Mr. Peace that the man trudging now behind him, burdened with his baggage, should be

¹ *Nzemo* is a Nosu term; *T’u-mu* is Chinese, but a Nosu rank.

dependent entirely upon him and belong to his household; or that in his house at Hopien and his cottage at Kiehkow there should live White men and women, boys and girls, doing his bidding and that of his sons and his daughter Meili. That they should be shivering in sackcloth in the same house as his family struck neither them nor him as unjust. They were the Whites of his lands and family, and he and his children were Blacks.

In the valley from which he had just come, the Blacks and their White servants occupied the upper village, and the White freemen and their families the lower, just above the gorge. They were on completely peaceful terms with each other, but by common belief were irrevocably separate. It was not that the Whites were despised, even though inferior. In fact the control of household matters and of the worship of the Blacks' ancestors was in the hands of their White Nosu stewards. These worthies consequently had a considerable hold upon their masters and mistresses.

But Jenpin could never marry a daughter of Yohan, if he had one. Even though Yohan was a freeman he was a White, and Blacks and Whites never intermarry. Even the *Nzemos* and *Tumus* would not marry into each others' families or Blacks below their own social rank. From close inbreeding they were fast-disappearing classes who in desperation were taking Chinese wives rather than break their caste. In spite of his hopes for his race, the well-grounded fear sometimes lurked in Mr. Peace's heart that they were doomed to extinction, doomed by their own tragic customs. On this journey he would soon be passing near the home of a *Tumu* who had sent eight days' off to the wild Independent Nosu regions for a wife of his own degree.

Yes, the Nosu race was widespread. Throughout the mountains of south-western China, there were tribes descended from Nosu stock. And he had heard of their presence in the south-east and even as far away as northern Burma. Some retained the name, some claimed to be only Whites and others only Blacks, while yet more had changed considerably and claimed no relationship though in language and customs they were closely allied. They must be offshoots resulting from divisions of land between sections of a family, or from quarrels, or the rebellion of subject peoples who had acquired Nosu ways and speech. Mr. Peace had never been in those regions, but he harboured a half-wish to have the opportunity one day. There was a Christian Church flourishing amongst them in one

part at Salawu, he had heard. As for his own mountains, it was only a few years since the gospel had come amongst them.

He sighed audibly, and the horse pricked up her ears at the sound and whipped her long tail at the flies on her quarters. The sky had filled with fantastic heaps of cloud that cast huge drifting shadows on the distant hillsides. Why hadn't someone come earlier with this news—before his mother died? It was not surprising, though, with China so vast and willing Christians so few. Now, however, it was different; there was a Church here. And, please God, it would grow, till Black and White, sire and serf, had come to a knowledge of the Truth. Or would the inherent characteristic of the Nosu prove too strong, an individualism and insularity that could check expansion? This was an obstacle that tried his faith.

A labourer tilling a nearby field lifted his primitive wooden plough such as had been used for centuries, and whistled to his ox. Guided by the note the beast turned and began another furrow. There was no rein or whip to use. A woman, the man's wife probably, followed behind casting a handful of manure and a few grains of seed at intervals for the returning plough to cover as it bit into the soft earth at one side.

The pleasing sight brought Mr. Peace's mind back to the present, and he halted his horse by a low bank to dismount. His servant rested his load on a rock and breathed out forcibly between his teeth in a long, airy whistle. They chatted with the ploughman in Chinese, and with his wife, for there was no objection to their speaking with a woman. But to do so, they had to use the Nosu language. While Nosu men were picking up the Chinese tongue increasingly quickly and often did not know which language they were using, the women were slow and had not the same need for it, as they seldom went to market or to town.

And so they travelled on hour by hour, resting from time to time and eating from the provisions in their packs, for nothing could be bought along the way. And as the day progressed, the fresh air and exercise braced Mr. Peace for the sight which awaited him on his arrival.

It was much as he had expected. The old house, setting of his most prized memories, was no more; only a black shell of it remained. It was no longer his father's house, it was one more burnt-out building not unlike the many he had seen. It could be rebuilt, but the new structure would compare but poorly with the latticed

STRONG TOWER

excellence of his boyhood's home. He blamed no one; only an emptiness seized him and he sat down. He felt weak and very forlorn. There was desolation within him as there was before his eyes.

Then he stood up, not suddenly, for his movements were never so, and, wiping his spectacles on the corner of his gown, he characteristically applied himself to his sad task.

CHAPTER TWO

EARLY DAYS

" . . . who from the earliest days has been connected with the Nosu church. . . ."

I

MR. PEACE had always been ambitious, not for himself, but for his fellow tribesmen. Handicaps and difficulties had weighed him down, trying his sensitive spirit to the point of despair, but he had always risen above them with his purpose unimpaired. It all began when, as a student, he believed the Christian preachers and threw in his lot with other Nosu who had done the same. Then with his leaving school a series of events combined to start him on a life-work which he would gladly have foregone had he not felt compelled to persevere.

It must have been about sixteen years before the burning of his home, and Mr. Peace, aged twenty, was starting on another journey. He was waiting outside the city gates of Chaotung for his companions and the animals to come and join him. Two servants of his new friend, Chiopa, were to show the way. They had gone off with his own retainer, after everything was settled at his lodgings, to buy a few knick-knacks for the road.

This morning he had reached the point of separation between youth, schooldays, and manhood, and was soon to leave Chaotung behind, seldom to see it again. The grey rock of the city walls beside him reached upward to their battlements, visible from the distant rim of the plain on all sides. And in front, low houses or shacks of a pitiful suburb lay ranged along each side of the dusty road leading to the city gates. Others, looking wretched with their walls of mud or warping lath and plaster beneath badly baked tiles, cringed beside the cart-track that skirted the city for a hundred yards or so. The heavy iron-studded gates were open, and laden pack animals passed in and out of the cool darkness of the gateway tunnelling the wall. Other beasts stood tethered to rings and stakes near at hand, pathetic, half-starved creatures, hairless where packs and harness had chafed bald, dark grey patches on their hide. Some

had open sores, and all were beset by clouds of flies, retreating and returning as the animals lashed at them fretfully with bedraggled tails.

School friends homeward bound hailed young Peace as they rode by, and humbler acquaintances bowed respectfully or greeted him politely—"Mr. Peace going home! School broken up, then!"—saying the obvious as is the Chinese custom: and received a brisk recognition. It was right and proper that they should call him "Mister." Every educated man and student was entitled to it. Education and learning were not for nothing the first in the proverbial scale of "scholar, farmer, artisan, merchant, soldier." And the term was well applied to the one they were saluting. He was the eldest son of a well-to-do father, not tall, but a well dressed, slim and active young man in the full vigour of youth. His spectacles, thick-rimmed though they were, and his accompanying slight stoop, increased rather than detracted from the respect in which he was held. They had tried to keep him in the city lest they lose him altogether, but his own countryside called; no job, however tempting, would hold him back, and soon he would be there. A brief trip into the neighbouring district to fulfil an urgent duty, and then he would turn for home, another five days' travel to the east. It was summer; he must get home before the rains began.

As the small party set out from the city gate and rose to higher levels among the grave-mounds that surround the city, Peace scanned the horizon to the north for clouds. Clouds hanging in a certain gap among the hills would mean rain before long; but to-day there was only haze. This was good. He particularly wanted fine weather for this trip. He was hoping for a sight he had always longed to see.

They made good progress, young Peace in front on a sturdy little horse harnessed in leather, with its straps wound neatly in tight coils after passing through their buckles, and his attendants walking in line behind. (Most people's harness was of plain knotted rope.) Up into the hills among the rolling treeless pasture-lands, with little sign of cultivation, leading westward and bearing to the north, he rode. Here and there a lone tree broke the monotony, but there was no life apart from small herds met infrequently in the care of underclad urchins or a witch-like old hag with matted filthy hair.

Throughout the long day they marched till afternoon drew on, and growing weary they began to search for the landmarks that would lead them to the place where Mr. Peace had been

EARLY DAYS

recommended to ask lodging for the night, a group of hovels belonging to Christian members of a tribe called the Miao. Among these simple aborigines, believers had been multiplying rapidly in recent years, family by family, turning from demon-worship to the One True God.

2

The next day the country changed. It became more mountainous, with steeper gradients, rougher roads, and barely enough space to pass by other travellers they might meet. Once or twice they came upon streams coursing rapidly in deep-cut beds, beginning unexpectedly and lost as soon. It was, in fact, when one of the men who had been this way before was pointing out a cave into which a churning little river disappeared completely, and when their attention was distracted from the road by this interesting sight though they had all seen other examples of it nearer to their homes, that they failed to notice the approach of another party until it was almost on them. They drew to one side to let it pass. In front, a tall man was striding purposefully. The first thing Peace noticed as he looked up was the man's feet. They had a peculiar action in walking. Although the ground at that particular place was level, his feet at each step tilted up as if negotiating a steep incline or afraid of stubbing his bare toes on sharp stones. Peace had often seen this phenomenon on the Chaotung streets, and knew at once, without looking further, that these were Papis, the barbarian members of his own race from across the great river toward which he was travelling—men of Independent Nosuland.

His eyes followed up from the rough, chipped, widespread feet to blue cloth bindings round taut, muscular calves, to voluminous blue trousers of cotton cloth swinging loosely as he strode, to a short jacket fitting closely beneath the cape of thick felt hung over his back and shoulders, more over the left than the right, and fastened at the neck by a cord.

But the young man's gaze was held in the moment of passing by the traveller's face. Two things struck him: its waxen pallor that cried, "Opium!" and its sternly sculptured lines framing eagle eyes and nose, which proclaimed him "Aristocrat!" From the lobe of his left ear dangled a single long earring. Crowning the head carried with such strong character was a dark turban rising to a peak in front and to one side, concealing a "horn" of coiled hair.

Behind him a shorter and younger man, dressed much alike, but with long hair cut evenly at the level of his ears, and no "horn," was leading a horse. It was smaller than Mr. Peace's, but radiated vitality in its gleaming coat and vigorous movements. Its small head and hind-quarters contrasted markedly with a powerful neck and shoulders. This was another of the renowned Papu horses, so named from the Chinese term *pa p'o ma*—the hill-climbers—a name which had extended its use to the men, noted for the same agility. Following them came others, servants of the leading lord, loaded with baskets, full, and carrying firearms. And in a trice they had gone.

Peace breathed again. He had seen their like before, but they never failed to impress him. The personality of these men struck out into the atmosphere around them, and their speech, different enough in pronunciation from Mr. Peace's own, added to their aloof mysteriousness. These were the nearest representatives of the stock from which he was descended.

When the Mongol Genghis Khan subdued some of their ancestors, and the Manchu emperor Yung Cheng, in 1727, almost completely quelled the rest with savage ferocity, a valiant remnant that would not admit defeat took refuge with their kith and kin in the mountains across the treacherous upper reaches of the Yangtze River. There, in all but impenetrable fastnesses, they have held out through the centuries, in an enclave guarded by gorge and precipice against both friendly approach and invasion. More than a million of them, known in recent years as "Independent Nosu," have lived within that area of about ten thousand square miles (considerably larger than Wales), and have had to slake their thirst for blood and battle in feuds among themselves and raids in strength upon their enemies. To this day the name "Lolo," with which these latter dubbed them centuries ago, is regarded as a slight and is deeply resented.¹

After this encounter Peace rode forward more expectantly. He was getting near to one of his objectives now. A difficult descent lasting two or three miles through spruce and silver birch woods brought

¹ The position may be summarised as follows: The derogatory Chinese term, "Lolo," as now used, is very broad in application and includes Nosu and other groups of aboriginals. The Nosu are an ethnological entity geographically divided into (i) Independent Nosu, limited to the enclave within the loop of the Upper Yangtze, and (ii) the "subjugated" or "friendly" or "tame" Nosu, widely distributed elsewhere. As will be apparent from this story, many of the latter are as lawless as the former. Both groups are subdivided socially into Black Nosu, the landowners, and White Nosu, their retainers.

them out into a hot valley to which the breezes of the cool heights scarcely penetrated, and where midges hovered round ears and eyelashes, and bees hummed drowsily. Flowing quietly over flat rocks, and tumbling deliciously from ledge to ledge was a clear, blue-green river.

Presently they found bridging it a primitive structure that no horse would be willing to cross. Several trestles of tree trunks lashed together stood in the water on the rock bed of the stream. On them lay pine trees, straight and strong; and transversely like faggots loosely strewn with a semblance of orderliness, were split logs about a yard in length, covering the gaps unstably for the whole distance across the river.

Peace dismounted agilely, handing his reins to a servant, and, running up the slope on to the bridge, went over gingerly lest the logs should slip apart and his foot plunge between, tipping him off into the water. His servant led the horse to the water's edge, hitched the reins lightly over the saddle bow, hissed "Ssst!" between closed teeth, and slapping him sharply with the flat of his hand, left him to find his own way to the other side.

On the farther bank they lit a small fire of twigs and dry fir cones, and, unpacking an old copper vessel, boiled some water to accompany the dry provisions they carried. And thus rested and refreshed, they began the long climb to the highest part of their journey, a point at nine thousand feet above sea level.

Peace was leading when they reached the top. Empty-handed, with only the horse to think of—hurried onward, in fact, by its urgent energetic climbing behind him—he arrived well ahead of the burdened others. The track followed the hillside obliquely until it actually reached the pass, and then, turning abruptly left, past a rock on which stood pedestalled a gnarled and spiralling pine tree, it seemed to fade out into space.

The country fell away beneath him, and he stood transfixed. Away to the north-west in a cloudless sky rose a stupendous mountain mass, a snowy ridge some fifteen miles long, culminating in a point thousands of feet high, the Snow Mountains of Shama. From the summit a series of gigantic terraces fell leaping into the depths of a valley fifteen thousand feet beneath, dropping by precipices hundreds of feet in height.

It was at times like this that Peace envied men with better eyesight, for to him the scene was misted. But he could see, and that was half

STRONG TOWER

the battle. Now he could understand the name he had often heard, "The Bridge of the Sun." When it set, it must do so over that massive ridge.

He peered into the regions at its foot, trying to distinguish the far from the near side of the river, but they were too far away. Down there, he knew, flowed the rocky unnavigable waters of the Yangtze, known over this two-hundred-mile stretch as the River of Golden Sand, the River of Gold, as local men would have it. And beyond lay the land of the Independent Nosu, with the Valley of Meiku, the Beautiful Maiden, the plateau of Chaochio, and the Dragon's Head Mountain further north, a spiritual as well as a geographical fortress, a stronghold of the Evil One where any setting foot were in the gravest danger of enslavement or a cruel death, unless invited in.

3

Down among valleys and lesser heights again, the view was obscured, though Peace looked often in the hope of seeing something. As day was drawing in, they were concerned to reach their destination, particularly as they intended to achieve their business and return in two days' time. So when the mountain air grew chill and faery veils of mist began to lie in hollows ahead of them, they were glad to see the hoary bifid tree that gave its name to the home of the young widow they had come to visit.

The daughter of Chiopa, one of the early Christians of Kiehkow, had married a retired general many years her senior, and he had died, leaving her and her infant son to inherit most of his wealth in lands and houses, cattle and money, the accumulation of years. He was a Nosu, and although he had blossomed into Chinese manners and mode of living in his professional capacity, at home he had retained the ways of his forebears. He had been fond of this his only surviving wife, particularly as she had been the first to bear him a son. With this he could die in peace, knowing his line would be carried on.

He was a wealthy old man, and a plum to be plucked when he died. Scarcely had his coffin been put out on the hillside, walled in and roofed over to await the auspicious day chosen by necromancers for his burial, than like the shot from their ancient muzzle-loaders, robbers fell upon the homestead. Everything that could be taken was carried off. Strings of men laden with loot filed out into the

half-light, guarded by mounted outriders. Clothing and bedding, grain and silver, ponies and cattle they took away, leaving the house stripped, and its occupants in terror.

Shaken as she was by the horror of these happenings, Chiopa's daughter had fought down her urge to pack up what remained and return home to her father. Instead, she sent him a message pleading to be allowed to come back without delay, and asking for some of his Whites to help her. But Chiopa's answer had been: "Stay on where you are, and keep a firm hand on your tenants and servants lest they get out of control and irreparable damage be done while there is no one in authority." At the same time he promised her as an encouragement, a visit from young Mr. Peace, known to her at home. He would call and represent the strength of her family behind her in exerting her authority. That would make people think twice before moving boundary stones to their own advantage. His servants would take care to impress upon everyone that Mr. Peace senior was an official of importance—for their own glorification—so there was no need to prime them of the need to paint an impressive picture. As for him himself, the silk gown, made specially for the leaving ceremony at the close of school, was folded neatly in his bundle.

But perhaps the scholarly spectacles would count as much as anything.

As they approached the house the servants grasped their staves more firmly, and their master, leaning from the saddle, broke off a small branch and trimmed it as he checked the animal, startled by the sound of breaking.

Into the courtyard they swung, and down leapt Peace as four ferocious dogs charged, barking hideously, with lips retracted tensely, baring their sharp fangs. They flew first at him, seeing him before the others. He stood between their onslaught and his mount, swinging his stick lustily at their tender muzzles when they came too near to him or to the horse's legs, and calling out loudly, "Anyone at home? Anyone about?"

Catching sight of the carriers, the dogs divided, and, with backs to the fencing of the yard, the men kept them off patiently, watching alertly but unafraid. They knew the game; and the price of unwatchfulness. Not for nothing had they been bitten before and lain for weeks with swollen, painful limbs resistant to every treatment they tried. But no one came. Afraid of whom it might be? Or out in the fields? They could not tell.

STRONG TOWER

And then one of them spied a little child of five or six, naked, grimy with filth that quite likely had never known washing. She stood half hidden, curious but afraid.

Peace called in Nosu, "Come, kiddie. Call the dogs off! Don't fear, little sister. We are good friends!"

Not altogether believably, the child came out, sniffing at the viscid mess that defiled her upper lip. Her high-pitched little voice penetrated the din of barking as she ran among the dogs, regardless in her bare feet of the dung and refuse littering the yard. One by one she dealt with them, each by name, sending them snarling dangerously back to their corners.

"Where is the mistress?" Peace asked, bending down.

"Over there. . . . Coming!" the little girl twittered, jerking her head in the direction of the house.

And in a moment footsteps and voices were heard as the young widow appeared, calling out instructions to her servants to prepare refreshments for the travellers.

The house was single storied, but high and capacious. It had a central room with doors opening out into two smaller ones on each side. So lofty was it that division of the side rooms into two stories did not really make them cramped. In an ordinary Nosu dwelling, the arrangement would have been the same, with a movable ladder in the main room to give access to either attic. The woodwork would have been rough, and the floors of beaten mud, and over all a thatched roof would have stood open at each end to serve as smoke vents in lieu of chimneys. But this, being the home of a wealthy man, had a tiled roof and varnished wooden panelling between the rooms. Moreover, the floors of the lofts were of plank-ing, instead of mere reeds that sagged if they were walked upon, and each side had a step-ladder in the inner apartment, leaving the central room free.

Outside were further buildings set at right angles to the house, enclosing the yard in which Mr. Peace and his companions had arrived. And at a little distance were smaller outhouses to do with the farm, yet near enough for the chief living rooms to be never free from flies, for this was a land where every householder is farmer even if at the same time he should follow another occupation.

The main room was furnished in semi-Chinese style. By both side walls were little tables with stiff-backed chairs or stools; and at the farther end a big square table stood, such as no Nosu home would

normally contain. But in the centre of the room was the hall-mark of "civilized" Nosu homes, a cylindrical earthen stove set up on stones and bound with a hoop of iron.

In this stove there glowed a fire of red-hot coals, and cakes of mixed mud and coal-dust. No chimney led up from it; there was no need, the coal was smokeless. Round it the travellers sat, at first all together, roasting corn cobs in the hot ashes and enjoying the rich, dusty flavour. But soon a middle-aged White beckoned Peace's companions away, and in the adjoining kitchen regions they relaxed, and staved off their hunger more effectively with cold corn cakes while waiting for the evening meal.

To Mr. Peace respectful servants brought a steaming bowl of five poached eggs floating in brine. And as he ate, steering the eggs to the lip of his bowl and sliding them into his mouth, sipping the hot, reviving fluid, his hostess joined him by the fire. She had no men-folk, apart from servants, to do the honours, but, moving in and out on silent bare feet, White women of the household chaperoned her unostentatiously. They talked about the journey, about the city, and about home. Peace had seen her family more recently than she, but not for several months. Her father's servants would tell her more of them. She spoke wistfully, wishing she could accompany them on their return, for she was a stranger here, even in her own house.

He admired the calm courage behind her youthful face. Her turban, he noticed with interest, was smaller than the women were accustomed to wear in the country districts, maybe because the city customs had influenced her. But it was still very large and heavy, probably no less than ten feet long and more than one broad when unwound. And she had put on a fresh gown with flowing sleeves and much embroidery to greet him.

Later, when it was dark, the table was laid thickly with tempting dishes, illuminated by a guttering lamp of oil in an iron saucer, just a wick of rolled cotton dangling limply over its rim, sending up a smoky flame of light. And as they ate, dogs wandered about their legs seeking discarded tit-bits on the floor, and acquainting themselves with the new arrival. Chiopa's daughter only made a show of eating while she pressed him continually to help himself, and told him about the robbery, about her injured retainers, and of the child wantonly killed because it cried aloud in terror.

Then, their meal finished, they moved back to the fire and went on talking. No, they were not Papu raiders who had robbed her,

but a band who had swept down from the lawless regions a day's ride to the north. The Independent Nosu had done less and less raiding across the river in recent years.

As they talked, two servants of the house brought in a wooden bed and padded it with straw, which they covered with a large felt mat; and Peace's servant, following them, unlashed his bedding roll and spread it out. Whereupon his hostess, surreptitiously observing that these preparations had been made to her satisfaction, stood up and took her leave. And Peace, enquiring after his servant's arrangements, prepared for sleep.

Lying in comfort, and watching the faint red glow of the undying fire, he saw again the mountains of Shama; and fell asleep to dream of the people over there.

4

It was part of the plan that Peace, looking as impressive as possible, should be seen in various parts of the late general's lands. This would start gossip, to quash any seed impressions of vulnerability of the widowed woman that might have taken root. Wherever they went people would stare, and wherever they were seen people would talk—in a land where everyone does both.

So, starting as soon as the neighbours would be up and about, they began a tour of the property. Peace was looking his finest in gown and spectacles, his lusty followers leading his spirited horse, striking in handsome harness and groomed coat, and they were accompanied by the old general's White Nosu steward and other retainers. There could be no question that inspection by this small cavalcade would impress where its effect was needed.

Nor was it ill-timed. As they passed round a jutting promontory at a remote corner of the land rented to a small farmer with no means of self-defence, they heard the sound of fierce quarrelling, interrupted by energetic digging. The sight they saw when they came into view was of the irate tenant trying to stop a determined neighbour from digging his, the tenant's, field. But, threatened by the sharp and shining mattock, the pickaxe-hoe of all China, he could not prevent the work which had already covered half the ground.

There had always been quarrels over this piece of land, and now the neighbour, taking the bull by the horns, was set on planting his buckwheat seed, the second crop of the year, in this soil, and thereby



THE RIVER OF GOLDEN SAND
ON THE ROAD TO KOPU, LOOKING SOUTH



"ARISTOCRAT!"—INDEPENDENT NOSU

claiming the right to its use. His seed, his crop: and who could deny it? It would be the thin edge of a wedge that would be hard to dislodge without an expensive law-suit. But he had failed. The timely arrival of the widow's representatives had put an end to the matter for this season at any rate.

Over breakfast at mid-morning they reviewed the situation, impressing on the girl and her steward the strength of her position if they put a bold front on things. Even if her father's home and outside help were a week's journey away, a fortnight to return with aid, it was also true, after all, that a woman in Nosu regions is as powerful as a man if she is the acknowledged head of the family. And then, to encourage her, Peace suggested that she should put her trust in God, as her father had done already.

"I do," she replied uncomprehendingly. "I have had one of my few remaining sheep sacrificed to the gods, and spent much money placating them, but my heart is fearful."

"But those are the gods of evil; they are demons." Peace said: "I speak of God the Creator, the Father of Good, before whom the devils fear."

"Have many people done as my father did and followed this new idea?" the girl asked unhappily.

"Scores of our own people," he answered, "and hundreds, maybe thousands, of the Miao tribe. But it is no new idea, only has it been hidden from us until now."

"Does my father go with the Miao then? And is he growing so feeble in his mind that he forsakes the ways of our ancestors?"

"He is a stronger man than before," said Peace eagerly, understanding the bitterness of her question, "and both your uncles are with him. Before God they have become as children and worship with the childlike Miao; only thus could they enter God's kingdom; but before men they are as giants, fearless of the sorcerers and their threats, and just toward those who were their slaves."

"I have heard tell of strange happenings in Yenshan, south of here," she replied more softly, passing a small hand across her troubled forehead. "The wealthy Lüng's have reorganized their whole household, and treat their slaves as freemen. It is not good. The riffraff will not be able to stand such treatment, they will get out of hand. My Whites know their place and are contented. What prestige the Lüngs have lost! They used to step from their

horses' backs on to the shoulders of a kneeling slave, with the others kneeling around them, and so to the ground. Now men must laugh to see them climb off on to a rock."

"No," murmured the young man, for he sensed her depth of feeling. "Their son was at school with me, and says that the servants love his parents now where they feared before, and are more respectful than ever."

"It could not be so with me. If my men laid aside their spears and sang hymns like the Miao, we would be robbed by the local bad men as we have been by the armed outlaws from the north."

"Yet to be out of the Devil's clutches is far better."

"You speak like the preacher I heard at Kopu."

"I speak from my heart, knowing where happiness lies for you."

"Did you too believe these men because your father told you to?"

"Only I in my family have gone this way as yet. My father is grieved and calls me unfilial and dishonouring to my mother, who is dead."

"And are you not?" she challenged.

"It will seem so until his eyes are opened too, and then he will understand and bless me. Your father longs for you to do as he has done."

"It would be weak to become a Christian just now, out of fear. Besides, I'll tell you a story:

"A good many years ago there was a priest, a Roman Catholic, not far from here, who met a raiding party of Papus, armed with long spears and cross-bows, part of an army of three thousand who had come across the river to rob and seize slaves.

"They killed his servant with six thrusts of a spear, and himself they stripped of all his clothes, lifting him bodily from the ground in the ferocity of their assault. It was so cold that he asked for some covering, and they offered a flogging to warm him, enjoying the joke greatly.

"They took him to a house from which the owners had fled, made a fire of the furniture, and 'cooked' several pigs they had seized. The meat was still raw which they offered him, and warm with its natural heat, having been in the water only long enough to soften the bristles which still covered the skin. It made him sick, but for fear of his captors he ate three or four mouthfuls.

"The Papus made fun of him, boxing his ears, plucking his beard, and roasting his chin with a brand taken from the fire, threatening

him with knives and spears. Later they set him to grind at the mill until too exhausted to continue, and then taunted him, taking him for a Chinese and claiming that they were within their rights to do as they liked on what had been their forefathers' territory, from which the Chinese had driven them. These raids were only 'collecting rent,' they said.

"One of them told him he had better escape or he would be knifed in the night, but he was too weak to move. He knew that when they went on it would be 'March or die!' but all he asked for was a chance to be warm and to sleep. They let him draw near the fire, but some wag tipped cold water over him, and the rest roared and shook their sides with laughter. When he saw it about to happen again, he summoned all that remained of his strength and fled, pelted with stones, and fell headlong into the slush of a rice-field for safety, and stayed there though it was November.

"When the Papus left, he returned to the dying fire, and made a girdle and cloak of straw. In this less than beggar's garb, he was spurned by everyone in a Chinese village to which he found his way. Only late at night did a man take pity and share his bedding with him."

"Did his faith help him?" she concluded.

"What did he say himself?" Peace asked.

"He wanted to meet them again because one had been kind and eased his sufferings several times. Thought he would make a good convert! He called it intervention by his God. It was enough to affect anyone's reason."

There was a long silence. She was not in the frame of mind now for the conversation they had been having. But presently, conscious of her duties as hostess, she said,

"Tell me, what have you to do to become a Christian, in case I think differently one day?"

The young man was glad, and, oblivious of scuttling hens at his feet, and people coming in and out, he told her about the discoveries he had made not long ago.

Her servants saw her interest increasing, and did not bring her little son to her.

CHAPTER THREE

COUNTRY AND PEOPLE

"His knowledge of the country and tribes people, not only of his own race but the Miao as well. . . ."

I

THERE is something about a return journey that makes remembered impressions of the first trip seem foolish. Landmarks that became fixed in the memory lose their appeal on second viewing, and distances shrink or grow interminably long. A steep, laborious climb becomes a descent which is hard to recognize, and a grateful, refreshing brook looks turbid and unattractive to a cool traveller.

So young Mr. Peace's return to Chaotung lacked the excitement of his outgoing, and was but the first of several days' journey before he reached his home. The morning climb to the high pass was in wringing mists that obscured all views, and the barren hills seemed to have no end.

They travelled till late evening on the first day, in order that they might get further than Chaotung on the next. Chiopa's daughter had bidden them a brave farewell, holding her little boy in her arms that they might tell his grandfather how he looked, and how he would have come with them. But she could not hide the betraying lines of strain about her eyes and nose.

By noon the next day they had crossed the Chaotung plain, viewing the Gap with misgiving, and reached the last of the Chinese villages on the far side. They saw the final traces of cart-tracks fade out on gravel slopes, and pressed on up easy gradients to make the village of Black Earth River by nightfall. With the sunset throwing their attenuated shadows yards ahead of them, so that each pace of horse or men looked like fantastic goose-stepping by freak giants, they reached the highest point of their climb, and looked down into the gloomy fissure where they must pass the night.

The name, Black Earth River, was inevitable. The hills, the houses, the very water flowing deeply, looked unwashen, and outcrops of coal were visible in the hillside and river bed. Zigzagging down the steep slope, they passed by a number of disreputable hovels, and crossed an ageless stone bridge. Here the road forked,

east in their direction, south to a cluster of houses leading up to the doors of a large whitewashed residence, the home of a local Tumu of evil reputation. His house was so arranged that attacking enemies must pass the homes of his fighting men before reaching his own; and it needed to be so, for he was involved in several vitriolic feuds.

Peace knew better than to seek lodging among those men of blood. He turned left, and soon reached the courtyard of a White Nosu who allowed his place to serve travellers as an inn. His house was substantial, built of stone, but inside and out it was filthy. The yard was a quagmire of farmyard seepage which mine host, instead of draining, had tried to absorb with cornstalks and straw and bracken, so that to cross it was like walking on sponge, each foot-step making a puddle of black ooze. A naked baby squatted at one side snivelling for attention. A small black pig with a surface aura of lighter bristles snouted about upturning the superficial muck and releasing a disgusting stench. Here no angry dogs greeted them. Only a yellow pup slipped past them into the "road." There was no need to fear intrusion in so poor a place, and travellers must not be discouraged.

Peace entered the open door. The chief room was almost filled with a stone mill, a plough, a harrow, winnowing trays, flails, and other paraphernalia. A doorway just inside and on the right was blocked by a munching cow. That it opened apparently straight into the stable was confirmed by the rich odour strongest just there. A ladder with broken rungs led up to a loft covering the front half only of the room. But to the left within the door was a mud stove of live coals, and grouped around it on boards and blocks of wood, a motley crowd of people.

The "landlord" sat coatless, naked to the waist, and busy delousing his garment. He finished his immediate task, involving close attention, and looked up, nodded, spat into the corner, loudly cursed a boy of about ten for not making room by the fire for the gentleman, and was lost again in concentration on his job.

Treading on discarded corn cobs and peach stones that littered the floor, Peace sat down carefully on the stool offered by the boy. It was a section of pine tree split axially so that there were two branches at each end, cut at the required length, forming legs, while the flat surface formed the seat, standing a few inches from the ground.

He looked about him. Other children sat crouched on their haunches beyond their father. A grimy woman of forty—or thirty,

there was no knowing; she would have passed as fifty were there not a diminutive infant hanging asleep at her emaciated breast—stared at the young student, and, becoming conscious of herself, pulled her tattered gown around her. The other occupants of the room rose or shuffled along to make room for Peace's companions, who, having unsaddled and haltered the horse, had bought fodder and were now free to rest their tired legs. There were flies everywhere, flies sleeping, flies polishing their legs, flies feeding, flies fidgeting. With the disturbance, a cloud of them rose frenzied into the air and buzzed like swarming bees till they settled again as suddenly, but for a few who sought the men's shining skin with undaunted persistence.

They were an interesting company round that fire. He himself, a Black Nosu; his companions and the householder, Whites; in the shadow by the wall, two Miao tribesmen, short, squat, distinctive in shabby but once gay embroidered capes; and to one side, a Chinese small trader returning to the city. But after months of city life Peace was glad to be in the country again, and watched these rough peasants with interest.

A coarse earthenware rice bowl was dipped into a large black pan of stewing tea on the fire, and each man drank in turn. As they reached the dregs, they swilled the bowl with the last drops of tea and poured them under their seat or on to the floor behind them. With the red light on their faces flickering as the rising steam cast its soft shadows here and there, they chatted, and some smoked rank, acrid tobacco, passing the long, brass-tipped pipe from mouth to mouth, waiting for the evening meal.

2

Replete with steamed corn and some bitter vegetable supplied by the landlord, drowsiness came over Mr. Peace, so, taking the opportunity of a disturbance, when someone got up to put fresh wick in the lamp, he made a move to retire to bed.

His bedding had been hoisted to the loft, and, climbing the rickety ladder, he sought it out. Over a few rafters, dwarf bamboo stems had been laid and battened down. Their lower surfaces were black with grime and soot from the fire, shining with age, but on the upper surface straw had been cast. This was the springy floor and bed on which the better class of travellers spent the night.

Peace spread out his felt mat and Chinese quilt, removed his shoes and gown and belt, placing them beside him, and lay down to sleep. There was no window or chimney. Up here, directly above the stove, the fumes were distressing and the tobacco smoke seemed stronger than ever. He lay listening to the drone of voices, and to the clatter of hooves as later on his horse was led through the living-room into the stable. Drowsily, he was conscious of a late-comer joining the rest below as they settled down on the ground about the remains of the fire. Probably none of them took much notice of him at that hour. No one joined Peace above, in respect for his social position, but the new arrival tried the ladder and looked round. And soon after the door had been bolted with its great beam of wood, deep breathing and muffled snores arose from the sleepers.

Hours passed. The fire went out. There was no light but a single ray from the moon piercing the roof.

In the stillness a single pellet of corn fell and bounced a few inches. It must have been well after midnight.

Peace slept lightly. He was awake at once, but did not move or alter his breathing. Moments went by, and another grain fell, bounced gently, and lay still. He was alert now and understood. He grunted and turned over to face the ladder.

There was silence for perhaps a quarter of an hour, except that his thumping heart must surely be audible to others beside himself. Another grain fell nearer to him, and, bounding lightly, sank into the straw by his arm. And the ladder creaked very faintly.

Now he was certain. Raising himself on his elbow, he said softly in colloquial Chinese:

"La m' k'uai? What's up?"

No other sound broke the quietness but a soft movement first on the ladder and then beneath. The landlord stirred and said:

"La ko? Who is it?"

A voice answered, "No one. It's me!" And they slept again.

Peace folded up his gown with the belt containing his money inside it, and placed them under his head. He had been foolish, but had not thought anyone would attempt it with so many people present. It was a good thing he had not slept heavily with fatigue, a full stomach and the fumes dulling his senses. He would not have heard the testing grains of corn thrown to see if he slept deeply

STRONG TOWER

enough or not. That might have led to the loss of his things or to a struggle. As it was, a noisy scene and perhaps injuries had been avoided. This was the East, and Eastern ways had proved peaceable.

With early dawn the big door-bolt was taken down, and the late-comer stepped out with a nonchalant "*Ch'ing-o!* So long!" to those who watched him with sleepy eyes.

3

Heavy mist filled the valley out of which the travellers had to toil that morning, and the ragged, rocky pathway tore their home-made sandals of plaited straw to shreds. For fifteen hundred feet they climbed laboriously into a region of peaks where low cloud swirled and eddied, threatening to drench them. Peace and one of Chiopa's men had outstripped the others, but near the summit they decided to wait. For the next two miles of mountain-top wilderness there was real danger of meeting robbers, and the best plan was to hang together. Voices not far off made them keep silence till certain that they came from shepherd boys taking out their animals to graze. But in any case it was an uncomfortable place to dally in. The mountain sides were steep with numerous scree, down which large stones and rocks hurtled from time to time. So they were glad when later they descended to the calm pastures on the far side of the range and left behind the last chasm, where a threshing river dived into the mountain face beneath them.

Now the trail swung gaily up and down, winding through the rolling hills as if glad to be emancipated from those sinister surroundings. Smoke rose from cottages wrapped round by inviting woods, and shepherds called from hill to hill, their voices carrying clearly across the intervening valleys. On the open forest land mixed flocks and herds were grazing, hemmed in on every side by shepherds, men and boys, and up to them led broad, well trodden cattle-tracks like main roads gashing the tawny turf and crossing the red fields. But the real long-distance roads were never so well worn, and often were no plainer than a footpath in a meadow.

Walking and riding alternately, Peace pressed on hour after hour with his men. They had been invited to spend the night with Miao Christians at the hamlet of the Great Pine Tree. And not the least important reason for getting in before dark was the presence in this area of deep pits in the fields and beside the path, sudden drops of

thirty, seventy or more feet into the ground. Because many were too steep to climb down if an animal fell in, and were excellent places for the secret disposal of bodies, their popular name meant "pits of the fallen and withered." Sometimes a subsidence took place unexpectedly, and it was well for users of the road to see the ground they walked on.

Towards nightfall, as mists were settling and it looked like rain before the day was done—already their shoulder-wide oiled hats were dripping moisture at the brim—they came upon a herd, homeward bound, disappearing over the last rise of land. The ponies were out of sight in front, the sheep and goats, cows and calves straggling after them, limpers at the back, pigs lining the sides or impeding the others in the centre. Here and there cloaked shepherd boys called and whistled, touching up the stragglers with long sticks. And dogs ran ceaselessly up and down trimming the flock.

The country was rough, with rocks and depressions flanking the cattle-track, and the shepherd bringing up the rear was huddled into his felt cape and walking as if tired, no doubt looking forward to his fire and food. In his reverie, unobservant, he had allowed one or two lame sheep to fall back, abreast of and even behind him. And not many yards away the sleek form of a wolf was slipping from cover to cover, waiting to head one off that he might kill her.

Simultaneously Peace and his men raised a shout, and the wolf, foiled of his purpose, slunk into the thicket and was gone. The herdsman, turning, realized what they had done for him and hailed them gratefully. They drew up to him and saw that he was a Miao of middle age, and, as they expected, of the tribe of Large Flowery Miao, so named from the design on their embroidered capes, worked cleverly in red and black on a white ground.

He peered carefully for a moment, asked with brightening eyes, "Is it Mr. Peace?" and, scarcely waiting for the reply, sent his voice ringing away ahead of them:

"Mr. Peace has come! Tell them Mr. Peace the Nosu has arrived!"

4

The last hundred yards of the journey became a procession. All the members of the families with whom he was to stay came out to welcome him; wrinkled, smiling men; beaming women with squat cones of hair capping their heads; girls with fringes of dark hair over their foreheads, and full-pleated skirts swinging about their

STRONG TOWER

legs; younger girls and boys happy and excited because their parents were, running amongst them. They had not been Christians so very long, and it was a new and wonderful thing that the wealthy (compared with them, so very rich) and haughty Nosu should be so changed as to come into their mean dwellings and treat them as friends. That they were Christians was already obvious from the relative cleanliness of their persons and premises, though even so flies were legion and some hasty sweeping was necessary before they asked him in.

Master and men were fêted by all who could find an excuse to attend them. The best baked oatmeal known as *ch'ao-mien*, was produced, and precious little cakes of brown sugar, made from sugar cane by the Papus across the river, were broken up and dissolved in boiling water. Then, sitting round a fire of oak and pine logs in the headman's hut, the travellers stirred their oatmeal into the syrup and supped cheerfully, first eating it as a thin porridge and then working it into dusty dry balls. And, finishing, they scraped their bowls clean, eating every crumb, and rolled their chopsticks together till they were as good as washed. Outside, a group of busy men were killing and cleaning two sucking pigs for supper, and soon sweet scents were bubbling out of the black pot among the flames.

The Miao had heard at the great church gatherings of the young student who had been converted in spite of his father's opposition, but they had not met him before. Nevertheless, they all talked hard together of the early days when a few soul-hungry men had walked far over the mountains to the distant city of Anshun to beseech old Mr. Adam to come and teach them the Good News of which only echoes had so far reached them; and of his death by lightning, which was to them in unbelieving days a sign of the displeasure of the spirits, and had been a sore trial to the faith of some. Then there was Sam Pollard of Chaotung and his work at Stone Gateway, to which he turned because the opportunities were so great, although the Independent Nosu had invited him to live amongst them; and one and another friend from across the seas, to whom they could not but refer.

They discussed the mass movements of whole villages and districts when hundreds and even thousands turned to God, and the insular Nosu followed suit and began to worship with the lowly Miao. And of many carried in by the current whose hearts were evil still.

Deep shadows of the squatting men leaped and quivered on the rough surroundings and blackened roof as the night breezes blew in between the leafy branches, the logs and the bundles of stripped flax stalks which formed the only walls of the shack, and played with the playful flames. The acrid wood smoke curled and eddied, stinging the sore eyes of numbers of them, and light ash, like snow, floated down on to the outer ring of listeners.

Then when the meal was over, and all but Mr. Peace with shameless gusto had made the most of a rare celebration, when the women and children had followed, sitting to eat only when the men had risen, and when the dogs had cleared the floor of bones and scraps, someone in a far corner began to hum. One or two others not taking part in the conversation joined in, and soon all talk was lost in singing. The Nosu servants sat amazed. They had followed the evening's talk with difficulty, but this was entirely new, for they had only been to organized meetings in the past. This was a spontaneous outburst of sincere feeling.

The headman of the hamlet suggested quietly that they all close in and find comfortable seats on logs or the ground, and for over an hour, with prayers and reading of Scripture, they continued, Peace taking part, till some began to move away to their own huts, and the travellers, heavy-eyed, begged leave to sleep.

Separated from the rest by a partition of a few planks coming little more than waist height, and from cattle in the stall beyond by a similar barrier, Peace slept, as their honoured guest, on three boards laid across two segments of a tree trunk. The others would curl up on the ash-strewn earth about the dying fire.

Late into the night, when the young man woke slightly and changed his position, he heard the Miao still singing—and marvelled at the beauty of their voices, singing by natural gift in harmony.

5

Leaving his Miao friends next day, young Mr. Peace and his companions went on to Kopu, fording a wide river where the water flowed, black and powerful, beneath the horse's belly.

Then after a short climb they saw beneath them the tall oak tree and cluster of buildings that marked the Kopu church and schools. This was the centre of both Miao and Nosu churches, and the home of missionaries. Here hundreds gathered each Sunday, and thousands at conference time, decked out in tribal finery.

STRONG TOWER

There were greetings and gossip to be exchanged, and much tea to be drunk in the homes of various friends in the community. But the following morning saw them on the road again.

From Kopu to Kiehkow was not far, only four or five hours' ride, the first half down hill toward Kolo, the chief market in this region, but after that rising from six thousand to nearly seven thousand five hundred feet above the sea. Reaching Kolo was almost like being home again, a place of importance if compared with the wastes they had traversed. But the hill was a long pull up.

They stopped to rest and eat *ch'ao-mien* in Miao style when half-way to the top, letting the horse go loose to wander in search of what green grass it could find. A little below them and away to one side were the huts of some pagan Miao. A few decrepit old crones in ragged garments and untidy coils of hair were busy in the fields and about their hovels; and somewhere across the side valley sweet music floated up from Miao reed pipes. The sound was beautiful, and would have seemed so to Peace's ear had he not known the unconverted Miao so well. As it was, he rose to go on. His soul moved now in clearer air, and his mind was full of fresh thoughts, new ambitions forming, hopes for the Nosu church. The pipes brought to mind the ways of the Miao at night, meeting on the hillsides or in a communal shack, roused by the erotic stimulus of this seductive music to vile excess. He could not stay; his emotions were incompatible.

The mountain top was glorious. On all sides the hills rolled away in waves to the horizon, and Kolo Valley lay spread out beneath him in the distance. Near at hand the slopes fell abruptly. To start rolling down would be fatal; nothing but a crash into a tree or rock could check one's progress. Yet the path was sometimes only a ledge of one or two feet in width. At first the mountain was tree-clad, but, following the tortuous crest gradually to the east, it became bare and lacerated by almost vertical water courses, the scars left by cloud-bursts. Even here, though, the penniless Miao had carved precarious little terraces and found enough stony, reddish earth to make three or four short furrows at each level in which to plant their grain.

The last small spur was crossed by a shallow defile, and suddenly the whole valley of Kiehkow lay below them. There was the great horseshoe or collar of hills, on the near summit of which they were themselves standing; there the wooded bluff ending precipitously at the foot of Mt. Ararat. And scattered up and down the valley were

the copses of *sahmu* trees with brightly rusted tips, which sheltered the homes of his Christian friends, Chiopa, the Widow, Old Man An, and lower down, the village of Whites, many of whom were believers. On the uncultivated slopes the sun had caught and made alive the flaming red and golden leaves of bright autumnal trees. They held him, fascinated. And, quite unsought, a new idea as suddenly possessed him.

Why could not the Nosu stand on their own feet? Why go miles and miles to their nursing mother, the Miao church, every Sunday? What better than that this very valley should be the centre of the Nosu church of all the districts, north, south, east and west? Without attachment to the Miao, they would get a better hearing from the pagan Nosu they were out to influence. He must think this through, digest it and discuss it with his seniors. It was good. What more natural centre was there than Kiehkow?

Though he was no more than twenty years of age, the vision that developed from that time became to Mr. Peace the pattern for succeeding years. Ever afterward he was aware that he was not his own. God had commissioned him to live and work, as St. Paul laid down that every single Christian should, not for himself, but for the One who died for him and came to life again.

He could not linger on the mountain top, much as he might wish to. Chiopa's servants were almost at their journey's end and had already passed him. The path before him fell away toward the valley and he had to follow. It brought him down to spend the night with Chiopa, to tell about his daughter and her affairs. But Peace's mind was full of greater things; he found it difficult to concentrate on those of lesser moment. And, moreover, he was only one day's ride away from his father and home.

reminded him of his son home coming. Daily as the sun sank he listened for Wenliang's voice and continually, to pass the time, poured himself another cup of bitter, strong tea from that stewing by the hour on the fire. He was excited, impatient, but would not admit it.

2

Thirty or forty miles to the north was a very different type of family of the lawless kind. Far from any city or market town, and therefore from the control of law, more wealthy and unscrupulous than most—the latter the cause of the former—they had always lived by force of arms and cunning. Their menfolk were educated, but education failed to alter them, they used it in their evil purposes.

The place was hard to find among a world of peaks all much alike, yet once found it was not hard to see in it the most that could be desired: a wide plain or plateau, well watered, with rich soil, good timber, and shelter from the biting north winds of winter. The name of the place could be made by a slight turn of speech to mean Thieves' Inn Flats, and it was indeed a Rogues' retreat. No doubt it had been acquired at first by foul means, and ever since had lived up to its name.

There were certain other families with which the Rogues were at daggers drawn. They did not know how it had ever started, for the feuds had gone on for generations, but that was immaterial; more recently men had been killed, and must be avenged. The Rogues therefore had a permanent body of armed men on guard and often out on foray, led by one or two of the young bloods of the Black family. They travelled many miles, each carrying his own food for the road, and fell upon the homes or animals or retainers of their enemies as opportunity presented. Sometimes soldiers from the city had gone out to catch them red-handed, but always they were quietly at work in the fields or nowhere to be found, for news always travelled faster than the troops, possibly by what is called a "happy arrangement."

But on the day that the young student was riding homeward, he narrowly escaped entanglement in their affairs. The Rogues had nothing against him or his family, but a mistake might easily have been made.

He was descending a bare hill into a broad hollow when he saw a party of mounted men and footmen approaching on the same



AN UNMARRIED MIAO MAIDEN WITH COILED HAIR

A TYPICAL MIAO TRAVELLER WITH BEDDING, UMBRELLA, HAT AND STAFF

A LISU LAD, TRIBAL COUSIN OF THE NOSU



A MIAO GRANNY DIGGING. THE CONE-SHAPED HAIR INDICATES A MARRIED WOMAN

road. Most were armed, but at ease, laughing and chatting together, bandying bawdy jokes about the favourite butt of the gang, an ogle-eyed ruffian who, the worse for native corn whisky, was trying to embrace another villain, a man on whose face the lines of every kind of vice were written. There was nothing to be done but to ride on, hoping they would not molest him, so young Peace ran the gauntlet of their stares and remarks to each other, caring only to get past and away from them again. He judged rightly that they were raiders off on the spree.

He had not left them more than a minute when shots rang out behind him. He turned in the saddle and was relieved to see that he was not the target. But tearing down the hill a little to one side of the path were a score or more men in blue turbans, jackets and trousers, deployed loosely and firing as they ran, converging on the party he had just passed. Peace's servant, plodding ahead of his master, glanced swiftly once and did not look again. He knew better than to meddle or to risk being able to identify anyone. But Peace himself watched all he could, hoping that the scrub oak he had come amongst would hide them sufficiently from view. Yet he too kept moving that they might get out of sight and range as soon as possible.

The two bands had taken cover and were fighting it out at close range now, their horses held at a distance by one or two of their number. As soon as one had been killed or too many injured the action would be broken off until another time. It was a grim game with rules and procedure understood. Revenge in measured quantity and kind was the goal.

As the firing grew fainter, Peace and his man discussed the encounter, talking in general terms about the different families involved in these feuds. They knew of the Rogues well enough, though not by sight. What they did not know was that more than once the tides of life in his family and theirs were to clash in tumultuous waves of grief. But not yet.

The ferryman was an old friend and refused payment on this auspicious day, the return of the eldest son of the big house after months at school. He was returning for good, a gentleman now, no longer a schoolboy who could be sent packing. Most passengers on

his stout ferry boat had to coax their own animals on board to cross the river, but to-day the ferryman's lordly air was lacking, and, taking the rein from "Mr. Peace," he led the horse to the water's edge, and, pulling and urging in a loud voice, worked till it gathered its hooves together and, rearing, leapt with a clatter up into the boat. A generous attitude was good policy to-day. He would not lose by being pleased to see the young master, and talked prodigiously all the way across.

But Peace was too near home to be a ready listener once they grounded at the farther bank, and, mounting, left his servant to follow at his own pace, and cantered on. His beast smelt the home air too, and, forgetting almost ten days of hard travelling, braced itself to the last half-mile. The hedgerows bowed to welcome him with an array of hips and haws and early autumn flowers, and the evening sun smiled through the trees beyond the farm.

When he saw the roof tops he yelled. The dogs dozing in the farmyard raised their heads from their forepaws, listened, and burst into a chorus of barking. They charged out to challenge him, and changed to ecstatic gambols when they saw who it was.

His old father was the first to follow them, but soon the others outpaced him; his sister, the servants, and even his brother on his crippled foot.

After the first excited greetings and exchange of remarks someone sniggered and the rest joined in restrained amusement. Young Peace was mystified and looked to his father for the explanation. So far they had spoken only in Nosu, whereas Peace had for months spoken little but Chinese in school.

"It is nothing, Wenliang," cried the old gentleman. "Your pronunciation is a bit like a Chinese speaking, but we smile easily because we are glad to see you."

And with his hand on his son's shoulder he led the procession back into the house.

He had reserved a gesture for this moment, often thinking of it, for this was a great occasion. He forced his protesting son into the seat of honour beyond the central fireplace, the cylindrical mud stove on its base of rock. Then, trembling slightly, though this was so small a thing, he went into his own room and unlocked the heavy door of the inner grainroom, where all of value was stored. From it he brought the choicest spices and preserved meats, the dried fungi from far away north of the Yangtze, and a jar of pungent soya

sauce. These were things no ordinary Nosu home would have, but he had not attended countless official functions without acquiring new tastes and refinements. In his son's presence, he gave them to the cooks. They had already sent out to slay the young fatted pig and a fowl. And he let Wenling go up into the loft for lard for her brother's welcome, though only the elder members of the family were allowed to climb that ladder. The bouquets of peppers and onions over the door were smaller too.

They would feast together to-night.

4

Round the fire, cracking sunflower seeds and nibbling crystallized orange peel, brought by Peace from Chaotung as a present to the family, they talked. And talked. There was so much to say, they could say almost nothing of importance. The unimportant things loomed the larger. Peace wanted to tell them about the city, about the mountains of Shama, about the famous Lūngs who had been converted, and his own adventures; but they were more interested in immediate details touching themselves and this day's travel, and the petty things drove out the bigger matters. Had he been older he would have expected this, but he did not mind, he was home.

Presently, however, the dogs raised an uproar. Hearing the voice of a friend calling out, "Old Mr. Peace! Old Mr. Peace!" the old gentleman, hands on thighs, rose to his feet and went out. The visitor had not heard of the return of the son of the family, and apologized profusely for arriving at this moment, but he was dragged in with much polite force by his host. Wenliang had vacated the seat of honour, and the new arrival was thrust into it after greeting his old friend's son. They knew him as the *pêmo*, the sorcerer-priest, from a nearby valley. He explained apologetically that he just had a matter of business to discuss and then would go, but the old man was talking hard at the same time, saying how appropriate his coming was—in time for the feasting—and that it was he who should apologize, but that there had been no time to send out invitations.

Peace had feared meeting this man, for a *pêmo* is the supreme spiritual authority over a wide area. He has no superiors, with the exception of his teachers in the school of priestcraft to which he may have been after learning all he could from his father. But he may

have several subordinates called *mila* to perform minor religious offices. The visitor, however, had heard that the young man had embraced Christianity, and plunged straight into conversation in an affable spirit.

"I hear your new religion has a legend about the Flood," he said after a few preliminaries. "Tell me about it; the comparison would be interesting."

So Peace told the story of the Flood, taking the opportunity to include its cause and significance, while the *pêmo* listened intently with exclamations, slapping his thigh and crying now and then, "Ah, that's right!" or, in a rising scale, "Eh! . . . Wrong there!"

Finally, Wenling, who was standing back a little, said: "Tell us our version, *Pêmo*. It's a long time since we heard it."

The *pêmo* was pleased. His voice changed to a professional recital, and he told how Pu-m'vu-vu, the second of three brothers, for his kindness to some messengers of God, was told how to save himself in the coming cataclysm. In his wooden box he rode out the storm, and gathered into his boat many animals which were floating on the waters. His kindness to them later on won him one of God's daughters for a wife, and of their union three sons were born.

As he chanted, young Peace watched and listened. These sorcerer-priests were the only ones able to read the racial writings, ancient manuscripts containing tribal history and incantations for use on all religious occasions. The knowledge was passed on with the office from father to son, and the devilry of ancient times was thus perpetuated. All the benightedness of the race was concentrated in these men, amiable farmers when not performing their specific functions. They were wizards, necromancers, exorcists, but above all priests, representatives of the people in offering sacrifices and making contact with the spirits. Up to a hundred years ago human sacrifices had been made in some places, slaves offered up by the noblest lords, but now on the greatest occasions when each of the twelve clans met in a forest clearing, perhaps once in nine or ten years, only sheep and fowls were slain, one for each family.

The *pêmos* were therefore a latent menace to the infant church. Yet their incantations contained many things that made Peace see hope of convincing even *pêmos* of the truth. Often he had heard them say, "*Np'i-mo*, the Creator God, is very near us," and exhort their listeners about heaven and hell in which they firmly believed, the one a place of joy and the other of torment. If they could be

led to believe in Christ it would be a great thing, for they kept the register of all males born, and were in intimate touch with all Nosu homes.

But they were blind; and his own family too. Peace longed to tell them at once that "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ," His Son: a positive truth that could transform them. One day he would. Yet he knew he was not up against men, but against the very "supernatural power behind the national gods."

Coming to the end of his story, the *pêmo* began to discuss further the differences between his creed and Christianity, but at that moment there was a disturbance at the door, and a White servant reported one of the horses ill. Peace offered to see about it while his father tackled his business matters, and went out.

It was not his own animal, but a valuable one none the less. It was lying in its stable and clearly very ill. The onset had been fairly sudden, and it was showing signs which he recognized as a dangerous malady calling for immediate and drastic measures. He knew the customary treatment, and set about it without delay. While one servant went for dry oak leaves and cornstalks to strew the stable floor for warmth, another was sent off to bring a small stove of hot coals. Peace himself collected chillies, pepper, old rags and other oddments, and made them up into pledgets which he soaked with neat spirit and burnt, sending the irritating fumes into the horse's nostrils. Encouraged by some response, he went on till he succeeded in getting the animal to its feet. Then, heating the handle of some fire tongs in the stove, he branded it with two searing cruciate wounds on its flanks. It stood motionless and unprotesting at first, while the smoke of burning hair and hide rose hotly in the dark stable, but with the second application it tossed its head, and on being released turned to its manger and began to eat the corn mush they had prepared. It would live and recover quickly now. Peace left it and returned indoors.

5

The *pêmo* had taken his leave and the meal was waiting. The old father was rubbing his hands and radiating goodwill as he hailed them to sit down for a family celebration in which all would join. Relay after relay would sit round the table in the main room of the

house, beginning with the family proper, the Blacks, just the old gentleman and his two sons and daughter, and going down through the White men, women and children till the humblest menial was replete and enjoying the memory of it drowsily on his pallet of straw in an outhouse.

Young Peace was happy. Schooldays were over, and life lay before him. And he had his ideas on life. When they all retired to bed, he lay thinking. The excitement of being home at last overcame the soporific effect of travel in the glorious open air, and of satiation with good food. Yesterday he had had an inspiration as he crested the collar of Kiehkow, and it still filled his mind.

He thought of the thriving Miao church at Kopu, still spreading strongly, and of his own Nosu, in tens where the Miao were in their hundreds. But there were enough Nosu to stand alone, and they were increasing; he was convinced they would do better on their own. An attachment to the Miao was enough to prevent most heathen Nosu from listening twice to the Christians' doctrine, but if they had their own church organization and buildings, with a school,—and a *mushih* to themselves: dare he hope for it?—there would not be the same objection.

Besides, the nature of the two tribes was wholly different. The Miao were sociable and easy-going: the Nosu were proud, arrogant and insular. The former would gather and respond to preaching: the latter must be won by the tortuous means of personal introductions and conversations, family influencing family and friend bringing friend. The dangers of giving offence were real.

His thoughts drifted on to his own family, and he pondered deeply. His father was ageing rapidly. He had not expected to see so much change. His mother had died in pagan ignorance of Him who could save to the uttermost. . . .

He collected up his thoughts again. Wenling, his sister, so fond of him: she would surely believe if he moved carefully. And his brother. None of them was bigoted; not even his old father was made that way. If their eyes were opened, their natures would not hinder them.

"Everyone which seeth the Son and believeth on Him may have everlasting life."

Then it lay with him to give them the chance.

"And has He not 'called me by His grace to reveal His Son in me'?" he asked himself.

BACKGROUND TO ADVENTURE

His spirit thrilled within him. He could see further now into the possibilities of the future. His ambitions were crystallizing on the thread of faith. . . .

The others were sleeping; his father next door, and his brother not many feet away. Their deep breathing spread a blanket of contentment over his mind. He heaved a sigh of satisfaction and determination, and turned over. The motion of his horse was still perceptible in his pleasantly weary body, and to the sensation of gentle jogging he fell asleep.

CHAPTER FIVE

HAND TO THE PLOUGH

" . . . made him from the beginning a great asset to the infant church. . . ."

I

THE Christians in Kiehkow Valley were already well established believers. It had meant a great deal to them to brave the wrath of relatives when pride of family was so strong, to break with customs and tribal beliefs unshaken for centuries, and to mix with the Miao and Whites on an equal footing. But when Chiopa's mind was made up, after he had been taken by a relative to several meetings at Kopu, there was no changing it. Chiopa was a symbol of stability. Chiopa matched the Mt. Ararat on which he gazed each morning from his terraces at the top of the valley. He would always be a good Christian, whatever his failings.

Down near the gorge the Christian Whites were a compact group who showed promise, and scattered elsewhere were other families and individuals who attended meetings, even travelling the fifteen miles to Kopu at times, and could be reckoned as part of the church community. In the centre, on the wide spur of land that made the floor of the valley convex at this level, with rocky gullies on each side, were a farm and buildings belonging to a well-to-do man like the Peaces, surnamed An, distinguished by being called the Old Man.

Old Man An was small in stature, but a vivid personality, and, needless to say, a Black. What the Old Man said went unquestioned for quietness' sake, and in more ways than one it was a good day for the church when he appeared at one of its meetings, no longer a curious spectator, but as a well and truly converted soul. Old Man An was a philosopher and sage. He had definite views on life, and took zealously to his new-found faith, devoting himself and his possessions to the Christian cause increasingly as he became the natural leader of the others. His growing family had to go with him to "church," both to local gatherings of the valley Christians

and when he went off to the great monthly assemblies and the annual conventions. But they did so gladly, for it was a united home of intelligent and healthy boys and girls.

Old Mrs. An was a duchess of a woman. Her face was of classic Nosu type, with prominent nose, deep, stern eyes and firm mouth. She carried herself erectly and controlled her household with quiet finality. Equal in force of character to her husband, she was a dutiful wife and was not behind him in embracing the Faith with all sincerity. Their eldest son was approaching young Mr. Peace in age, and at school in the city as he had been. Two daughters and three other boys completed the family.

No setting for their home could have been more ideal than it was. They had the run of the fields, the woods, the streams, the hills, and the farm, and expeditions to market at Kolo or Chuwai when they liked. The house was scarcely large enough for such a family, with those of its White servants who did not live in huts of their own. It looked out over mud walls to the south with a display of distance, ripe with tier upon tier of surprises waiting to be revealed by the vagaries of the weather. A small coppice of *sahmus* clothed its northern side, dwarfed by a huge walnut tree, the boys' delight, beneath which ran a cattle track up the hill past the homes of two widowed relatives, Erh Sao and another. To the right, the west of the house, flowed the stream that came down from Chiopa's, cutting so sharply into its further bank that there was a drop of twenty or thirty feet from the field into its pebbly bed. And up this gully ran the main path of the valley, criss-crossing the brook by stepping stones. Nothing fit for wheels existed: in fact, the people scarcely knew what wheels were.

Inside the courtyard—for the house and farm were one—old Mr. An kept the most amazing stock of pigs. Great black and white things they were, with bellies almost touching the ground, and two or three hundred pounds in weight, yet strong enough in the leg to get about; obese, debased brutes ready for the slaughter, digging about in the deep rubbish with which the yard was littered, or lying stuporously in the corners. The younger pigs went out with the herds, lean creatures, speedy on their limbs and adept at ploughing with their calloused snouts for buried delicacies. But the smallest piglets, with pink eyes and white eyelashes, had the freedom of the farm, including some of the rooms, slipping through holes in the walls and petrifying the servants' small children with hideous

squeals. Everywhere were hens; and a pompous goose, like a self-important door porter or commissioner, kept the gate.

It was to this home, so full of life and vitality, that Peace was given an open invitation to call or stay whenever he liked, and which began to play so large a part in the events of his life.

2

In the months which passed after his return home, Peace had taken up regular work in the school for the children of church people at Kopu. There were Nosu boys attending, and the need of a Nosu master had been pressing. It had been hard to arrange at first, because his old father naturally did not want him away from home if it were possible to have him near at hand, and he had no need to earn his living. Peace himself, however, was keen to help the church in any way he could, and gladly undertook to teach. He was anxious, too, to be near Kiehkow, and to help the little group of Christians there whenever possible. An arrangement was therefore made by which he was able to return frequently to his home, calling at Kiehkow *en route*. In this way he saw a good deal of his family, and before long Wenling his sister was heart and soul with him in his allegiance to Jesus Christ. His visits consequently became all the more imperative, that he might teach and encourage her.

At first he stayed sometimes with Chiopa and sometimes with Old Man An when passing through, but as Chiopa was less well able to accommodate him, he tended more and more to go down the valley to the teeming farmstead under the old walnut tree. Then, with the progress of spring and the growth of the church, his trips became more frequent at the week-ends, riding the fifteen miles to Kiehkow on Saturday night and returning before school on Monday. It was good to get out on a horse, to feel its muscular body enjoying the liberty to work, to climb, to leap the small ditches and canter by the tranquil riverside, where kingfishers skimmed the water in colourful flashes. Nor did he ever tire of the changing views and show of colour on the hillsides; the trees and bushes changing winter's drabness for a new flimsy dress of tender leaves; banks of azaleas, pink and mauve and white, with scattered rhododendrons stabbing the softer colours with crimson and port-wine.

Kopu was beautiful too, though more enclosed, so that there was not the same outlook with its veils of morning mist, silvery and

ethereal. There was something special about Kiehkow. The mere difference of altitude was not enough to account for the young man's elation when visiting there, or his faint despondency on leaving. Nor was it the sight of his hopes being realized, the church becoming independent of outside help and acquiring property of its own from the little widow Erh Sao with the bird-like eyes.

3

If the truth be known, Peace enjoyed the Old Man's household. He could not have said why he did so particularly, except that everything there had spice in it. He did not get on very well with the eldest son, An Toma, although much of an age. There always seemed some hint of groundless rivalry that made their relationship uneasy, but there was nothing more to it than that. Some people said the whole family was difficult to please, but Peace did not agree.

From the moment he arrived he was made welcome. When he drew in his horse at their narrow entrance and swung down on to the springy bracken with which it was strewn, as likely as not they would run out to greet him and escort him in. They still treated him with the respect afforded to a guest, but in a very free-and-easy way, not even inviting him indoors to sit down. Yet it always looked as if a pot of water had been boiling in readiness for his coming. A bowl of light refreshment was quickly forthcoming after his journey, some sweetened potato flour made up into a brown, transparent jelly with the crude sugar from Independent Nosuland, or sometimes a more substantial snack.

Usually it was brought by some junior member of the family, with whom he was popular. They enjoyed these visits of his as much as he did. And sometimes it was even Tingying, not yet twenty, which was only right, seeing it was she who made it in the seclusion of the kitchen regions. The proprieties of China were less binding in this Nosu countryside, and, anyhow, Peace was almost considered as one of their own number. He would stand supping the food on the narrow covered verandah outside their father's room, where the cross beams were so low that even his head was endangered if he played about; or inside, watching them make corn cakes, wrapping each one in big green leaves, and laying them in layers, separated by bamboo slats, in the great kitchen cauldron to be steamed.

Tingying and he seldom spoke to each other except in general conversation—that would be going beyond the rules as tacitly understood—but there was an affinity between them which made him glad when she appeared. He liked her fine carriage and handsome face, so like her mother in many ways. And she covertly enjoyed watching him share in the activities of the house.

If there was a fine pig to be butchered for market, Peace would be on the scene, lending a hand. They would tie it down on a ladder and a White with sharpened dagger would slay it and drain its body dry. Then, lifting it on the ladder as on a stretcher, to trestles placed each side of a steaming cauldron, so that it lay over the boiling water, all of them would prepare it together. That was the part the boys enjoyed, the scalding and scraping. But Peace's training as a gentleman student fitted him better for the more sedate part of holding and reading the long Chinese scale beam while others chopped and trimmed and weighed. Fifty or sixty pounds of lard alone was not exceptional from one of these pigs of the Old Man's. He took pride in feeding them well, and was renowned for the hams and bacons in his larder.

If Tingying liked young Mr. Peace from what she saw of him, on his part, he always relished the moments when her work brought her out of doors, though, by inbred custom and discipline, he would not have let it be known, and probably did not realize it in any concrete way himself.

There was work in the fields for which all hands were wanted, and open-air tasks which the women alone undertook; stripping the flax stalks and twisting twine destined eventually to become linen garments; spinning the heaps of coarse wool into thread ready to be knitted into warm garments; or simpler ones, such as feeding the fowls.

But when the flocks and herds came home from pasture it was best. Several people were needed to help the Whites in separating the various animals into their respective folds. They knew well enough where to go, but even the more lordly ponies were inquisitive and liked to peer into the wrong pens *en passant*. Then Tingying would get busy amongst them, regardless of her cumbersome clothes and heavy turban. Peace enjoyed especially her delight over the lambs and kids as they knelt to drink and in excited pleasure jerked their stubby tails, butting with blunt, hornless heads at their mothers' udders. There was so much to make life pleasant in such company.

Each evening the Old Man would lead family devotions, Blacks and Whites all sitting devoutly round while he led them in singing and read from the Scriptures, ending with prayer. A *mushih* had once given him a huge Chinese Bible, inches thick, with large, clear characters for the sake of his ageing eyes. It lived on the window-sill, by day dusty and eaten of silver-fish, but each night Tingying would take it down (she reserved this duty to herself), and, dusting it, would carry it to her father. She welcomed these family prayers, and on Sundays too, in best embroidered gown, was among the first to gather for the combined service. This spirit too was what the zealous young schoolmaster most liked to see.

Old Mr. An believed in the value of education for his daughters as much as for his sons, and until there were schools to which they could go, he undertook to teach them himself, with creditable success. He was a precise old man and therefore approved heartily of young Mr. Peace, who struck him as trim and clean, alert and intelligent, characteristics which fully made up for his physical slightness and faulty eyes.

It was small wonder, therefore, that Tingying's father began to entertain an idea which would necessitate an exchange of views with the old official at Hopien. They had made one another's acquaintance already, but when the news came that the old gentleman had followed his children's example and been converted, Old Mr. An had his black mare saddled, and rode off on a visit of congratulation. In conversation he would pave the way for another matter to be broached, a matter which pleased young Peace immensely when his father asked him what he would say to the arrangement the Old Man proposed.

4

Meanwhile, all was not going too well in the church. The boom period of the mass movement among the Miao had affected the Nosu in a similar way. The popularity and prestige of missionaries from abroad had once been high, and association with the church not without subsidiary advantages. In matters of legal settlements, it had been good to be connected with the Christians. Therefore the ranks of the church had been swollen and diluted by a worthless element. With the passage of time and lessening of secular gains to be had for the price of apparent piety, however, numbers began to

drop off, and it became difficult to discriminate between the wolves in sheep's clothing, whose going was good riddance, and the true Christians, whose lapse would be tragic. Scattered among the mountains so far apart that adequate supervision and encouragement were impossible, waning enthusiasm among the members was liable to go unchecked until the very elect were involved.

This symptom was brought to light at about this time in a distressing way. The *mushih* had been on a tour of the little centres where Christians met Sunday by Sunday, teaching them for a few days at a time and passing on to the next. The custom was for his bundle of bedding and other belongings to be carried by one or two of the local Christians to the next place of call. On this occasion attendance had been poorer than previously, and one village seemed particularly apathetic. When the time for moving on arrived, no one was forthcoming to help the *mushih* with his load. Requests and even appeals were useless: to stay longer was impossible. The disappointed man had to put what he could on his horse and leave the rest behind. It was months before he regained them.

But this was not so serious a matter as it appeared superficially. No sifting or winnowing is comfortable or without its losses, but the products are the better for it. The chaff is best dispensed with. Fine characters were revealed, and men and women who faced unpopularity at a time like this in order to join the standard of the shouldered Cross were going to stand firmly in days to come. They were strong men who forsook their raiding bands, and women who risked persecution in their homes.

The trend of affairs concerned Mr. Peace intimately, for he watched closely the development of the infant church. Rejoicing in the turning of his own family to God, he saw events in their true perspective and was not dismayed. And his personal affairs were going forward smoothly. In the shed which was doing duty as a temporary chapel, he was married to Tingying with widespread rejoicings. And a beginning had been made on a big building in the centre of the valley, looking out prophetically over the mountains and valleys of his own Nosu, whom he so longed to bring to the feet of the Lord Christ. In spite of his youth, he was figuring more and more in the now autonomous church. He was schoolmaster, husband so happily married, and a leading member of the church. This was the dawn of life, and it was good.

CHAPTER SIX

NEW HORIZONS

"Acquaintance with other parts of China widened his vision . . ."

I

MR. PEACE lay prostrate on his bed, brows knit and spirits drooping. A long term of hard teaching was over, and the school had dispersed for the winter holidays. In winter it was too cold for scantily clad children and youths to sit and pay attention. Hands were too stiff and numb to handle pens, even if two large fires were stoked hard to make their warmth felt, filling the room with fumes. But even if they were successful, the expense was prohibitive. So it was holiday until the weather began to warm up again.

Peace was glad his duties were over for a while. His eyes had been troubling him severely, and his work was made burdensome on that account. Unlike Tingying's father, whose eyes were misty with trachoma, Peace's were bright enough, but could not stand the strain of prolonged use. In their temporary home near Kiehkow, he could rest them for longer spells than during term time, and had hoped for speedy relief. But they were just as bad. His sight was still blurred and his head ached interminably.

Tingying sat beside him when her household matters set her free. Only one possibility of real relief seemed open to them, but it was so big a thing that they set it continually aside. Instead, as they talked her supple fingers pressed and stroked his painful brow, alleviating the ache for all too short a time. The skin between his eyebrows was a purplish-red where her skilled knuckles had plucked it up, nipping the taut skin again and again with soothing, counter-irritant effect. But all to no avail. No massage could correct the root defects. The glasses he possessed had been expensive and therefore he used them conscientiously, but they seemed to add to his discomfort.

"Why don't you go to Chengtu?" Tingying asked again. "Your eyesight is so precious."

"It is so far away," he answered. "I would be two months absent from you at least."

"But you would not know yourself for joy if this thing were attended to successfully."

"Yes. But what expense!" he groaned.

"We had rather be poor than you go blind," she said gently.

"How can I leave you, Tingying?" he added after a pause. "I must be near you now of all times."

"I will go home," she said, "and all will be well with me."

And so they talked, for they were good friends.

In the capital of the province north of them, beyond the mighty Yangtze River, was a seat of learning with universities and hospitals. In Chengtu therefore there was hope of the problem of his eyes being fully and finally settled, and correctly dealt with by good spectacles. The die was cast, and he must go if his eyesight was to be spared. Moreover, he must go at once, taking the advantage of the holiday months, and return as soon as possible. He must be back to welcome his firstborn son.

Men from his father's home came filing over the hills, bearing on their backs tall conical baskets of maize and oats and buckwheat. And from neighbouring farms he bought sheaves of cornstalks and straw by the hundred. Without a farm of his own, he was dependent upon others for these things. But this would not always be so. His little house was soon well stocked with grain and fodder for his few animals; and his Whites would take care of everything in his and Tingying's absence. Tingying must go to her own people. At Peace's home there were only his aged father and little sister Wenling, so she could not go to them, as would have been customary if his mother were alive.

On a crisp morning soon after Christmas he set out, alone but for one carrier who would go with him to the Yangtze and wait with his mount for him there. That would be twelve days' travel away. The snow lay in little banks at the foot of the trees. It was some days since it had fallen, and it had only persisted where shadows fell for most of the time. From slender twigs hung fragile icicles already yielding to the morning sun and dripping gently away. As he rode the tinkle of falling ice accompanied him whenever his legs or the horse's sweeping tail snapped them from their weakened stems. As soon as the afternoon mists descended again and the north wind blew bitterly, these icy needles would reform, and the windward side of the branches would be dressed in frosted glass. This was a big adventure for him, and his heart chilled within him when he



A WHITE NOSU EVANGELIST OF KIEHKOW



A BLACK NOSU PASTOR OF CHAOTUNG



A WHITE NOSU MAN AND WIFE

thought of it, as his feet chilled in the stirrups and his fingers on the reins and his cheeks and ears and nose in the keen air. It was worth it, though; they had decided that.

2

Passing through Hopien, Mr. Peace spent a night with his own people. His father looked frail, as if a slight illness would be too much for him and he would sink and snuff out like the last moments of a burnt-out candle. It distressed him and made him uneasy, as he rode on, about leaving him and going off on so long a journey.

But soon the main north road lay before him and days passed in the monotony of motion over the wild mountain terrain. Only after a week of continuous travel did he reach the first church centre on his route, Pichieh. After nights in rough heathen inns shared with obscene and riotous travellers and coolies, it felt like home to be among Christian people again. The presence of Christian Nosu there exhilarated him, though differences of dialect prevented free conversation in their own tongue. Still, it widened his conception of the extent of the Nosu church.

Then on again, still over great mountains and deep valleys. But the general level of the road was falling, always dropping towards the low basin of the Yangtze. All this time Peace scarcely noticed the road he was travelling. For one thing, to spare his eyes he rode part of the day with them closed, or with his turban pulled down over them so that he could see only the horse and the track immediately in front. For another, a good many things were on his mind. Concern over his father, which troubled him for the first day or two from home, was now shelved anxiously in a corner of his mind. Instead, to the fore in his ponderings was his Nosu church. His youthfulness had not debarred him from being an influential member already, and now responsibility was fostering his early urge to see the church thrive.

These hours of patient sitting astride his horse while his carrier stumped doggedly along in front gave all the time he could want, even if rather restless, for working out new lines of thought as they occurred to him. He wanted now to see the church maturing, becoming strong and disciplined. For example, it was time they rose above such things as having spears and knives in the corner of the room where they met for family worship. Maybe it was the sight of an old fort cleverly ornamented with an arbour and classic

curving Chinese roof that reminded him of this subject, and of how some Christians were relying still upon their turreted blockhouses for safety against persecution instead of believing that the Name of the Lord is a surer strong tower in the day of strife.

Similarly, the whitewashed dwellings, as he crossed into the province of Szechwan, threw into contrast in his mind the rude mud houses of his own race. Educated church members, he thought, with school-going children, and a cleaner, more civilized standard of living, should be the result of the impact of the Gospel everywhere. They could rise to that, even without being rich.

A long, long gorge brought him to another mission centre in a city straddling a river on two sides, and the road went on past rich rice-fields and spreading, flatter grainlands. The air was much warmer down here, and the teeming populace looked better and more lightly clothed. They rose industriously at sunrise. A new world was opening before the young man, who, though he knew about it from his schooling in Chaotung, had never seen or visualized it lucidly.

Then came the Yangtze, vaster than he had imagined, a sheet of swirling water so broad that the men on the farther bank moved like insects, and yet he was over a thousand miles from its mouth. His ferry, working upstream at first, was caught by the current in crossing and carried far down the stream, so that it had to work up again on the other side to reach a point opposite that from which they had started. Here for the first time he saw a river steamer and smaller chuffing motor launches.

A day's rest, and the kind church people had seen him on to a steamer bound for Süchow, like a man waking from a dream, blinking in the blaze of enlightenment, such was his excitement and keen interest. Transferring to a little wooden junk, helped once more by the Süchow Christians, young Mr. Peace experienced the pleasures and alarms of travel by tracking upstream, of drifting gently along in smooth water lulled by the mute rhythm of the trackers' tugging, or in danger of rapids and snapping cables. More nights with the water lapping against the boat's thin planking and the red glow of fires on the shore, etching dark silhouettes of men and masts in the blackness, and then Chengtu, the ancient city with a history of two thousand years.

He saw an electric bulb lit up, one of the first in the city, and a motor car, though the City Fathers had decried against cars as lions

and tigers in their danger to human life, fit objects for attack with stones and staves. And a hundred and one other things were new to him, in spite of his introduction to them by his "Western" education. All was so luxurious, by the standards he had known.

Attention to his all important eyes did not take long once he had reached the right quarters. Nervously, he found his way to the Mission hospital, a building vaster than any he had ever entered in his life, and registered his name. Sitting in the ranks of waiting out-patients, he gazed about the hall. On the walls, he saw approvingly, were illustrated posters bearing verses from the Bible. Patients were being called in one by one to see the doctor, but to those whose turn had not yet come a preacher spoke for several minutes, explaining the meaning of the pictures, and afterwards walked round making the acquaintance of his audience. Mr. Peace hailed him when he came near enough, and made himself known as a fellow Christian, for no other reason than that of feeling at one with this stranger in the family of God. When his time to go into the consulting-room arrived, however, the preacher went in with him and introduced him to the missionary. The friendly kindness he received at once put him at ease, so that he actually enjoyed the mysterious processes of testing to which he was submitted. And felt satisfied at last that he had not been mistaken, as he had sometimes feared, in seeing the Pillar of Cloud lead him so far away from home.

But several days of waiting were necessary while spectacles were made to the prescription he received. In this time he saw all he could of the historic buildings and culture of Chengtu, but they tended to depress him. His race was as ancient, but degenerate. Here they had old libraries, but his people were uneducated and his very native language was threatened with extinction. One of the first results of his cogitations on the journey had been that already his modest luggage was heavier by several new Bibles and other books; there must be Bibles and Christian reading matter in every home, and the people must be trained in the use of them. It was a tough proposition, for it was not many years since they had all been in the darkness of animism, superstition and complete illiteracy. Some were slowly learning to read, but the women were far behind the men. He would take what he could with him as a help toward the main goal.

Then at last the day came when his spectacles were ready, not beautiful, but what he needed. The joy and relief as it broke through

into his consciousness that his dark days of fear had been finally banished were as Tingying had foreseen. At once he was in a fever of excitement to get back to her, and, indeed, he had little time to spare.

3

It was a long trek back again, but joy and the urge to get home post-haste lent wings to his spirit.

Before he had started out, a new suggestion had been made, and now from what he had seen had sprung a fresh determination. They would translate some hymns into their own language for the sake of those who could not learn Chinese, and he himself would put hard work into it. As the distance faded behind him, his enthusiasm for this idea increased and led on to another plan: a dictionary of his mother tongue, in Nosu, Chinese and English. In this way, anyone—the *mushihs* too—could learn either language more easily, and the instruction of beginners would be simplified.

The morning came at last when from a hilltop he saw Hehchang, the market town just ten miles downstream from Hopien. Thereafter the road seemed endless and the hours interminable as he slowly covered the ground that remained. Wenling was the first to see him, and she cried out in delight, but immediately to his alarm her pleasure was eclipsed and she called him by the name he had been known by when they were children, saying:

"It's Father; he has gone! He went suddenly a month ago. We are alone."

Dense darkness closed in around Peace's soul. He did not know that his horse's reins were taken from him, while Wenling led him indoors. His world was shattered. It lay around him in amorphous gloom. He sat where he was bidden, with head drooping and hands limp, staring at nothingness, too numb even to think. He had never known life without his father, and since the old gentleman's conversion they had grown closer than ever to each other. Old Mr. Peace had been the very rock foundation of the countryside, the benevolent old squire on whose wisdom and experience all were wont to lean. He was the basis of his son's existence, the massive foreground of life. Without him the world was empty, and every prospect out of focus.

He had died. He had been stricken with sharp pain in his chest and arm, they said, and had retired to bed, refusing food. His

crippled son had slept beside him and in the night heard him cry out feebly as if dreaming. And in the morning they had been unable to wake him.

Later they took their grieving elder brother to see the grave, some distance off, at the foot of their ancestral mountain. The mountain. A new realization descended like a heavy cloak upon Peace's shoulders. He himself was now "The Lake on the Mountain," the head of the family—at twenty-three.

4

A dream of himself, another being, mounted the faithful horse and headed once more for Kiehkow. Piercing through his grief as shafts of sunlight strike through rain had come again and again the memory that he had been on his way back to welcome his firstborn. He had turned it aside, calling himself unfilial, a hypocrite. What else was he if gay exhilaration could replace tears even for an instant? But he knew that for a lie. There was nothing he could do by staying, and Tingying's hour was at hand.

The familiar route, the calming contours of old friendly hills climbing gently to their summits, healed his distraught mind. The plunging grandeur of their unscalable escarpments braced him once again, and the light air of early spring lifted him out of his despair.

It was evening when he reached his wife's familiar home and stepped into the courtyard. The welcome from the family was subdued. They directed him to a room at the far corner of the house. He stood outside the door and said:

"Wenliang has returned."

There were footsteps and a voice from within:

"What is it?"

"It is Wenliang, just arrived."

The door opened and old Mrs. An bade him enter. She returned to her seat on the far side of the fire. He saw no other seat near him, so remained standing. It was dark in there, and for a moment he could see nothing but the glow of the red coals and the moving form of the "Duchess"; no sound, only a fevered hum of flies stirred into commotion by the movement. Then as his eyes grew adapted he could see Tingying's pale face. She was seated by her mother, the two of them side by side on low stools a span's height from the ground. In a corner of the room was a heap of potatoes. There was

nothing else. Nothing. The stove was like every other stove so familiar to him, but impressed itself on his mind, the iron hoop, the air inlets, the cakes of coal-dust and clay.

For a moment he was speechless.

"What?" thought he. "Is the babe to be born in this state of things? Do they have no bed, no basin, no water, nothing but the mud floor?"

But hard on the heels of his first inward exclamation came the answer: "But I know nothing about it. Her mother must know what she is doing."

Quietly he greeted his wife and mother-in-law, and answered their questions about his journey. Tingying smiled when he spoke of his spectacles, but as she opened her mouth to speak again she checked herself. Peace, looking more closely, saw a new expression in her eyes, and, nodding all but imperceptibly, withdrew.

In the household there were several White Nosu mothers, and the birth of infants was not so unusual as to disturb the equilibrium of the family. But the one they were now awaiting was the first grandchild of the Old Man and the "Duchess." Mr. Peace was restless and preferred the solitude of the deserted threshing floor outside to the eager conversation of the family indoors. To them his father's death was already a past event, but still to him it was a new occurrence and his heart was sore.

Slowly the darkness deepened while he waited there impatiently, and as slowly it softened again till the moon appeared above Mt. Ararat. At that moment from the house behind him came the cry he was expecting. It was the voice of his firstborn son.

With pounding heart and bursting pleasure, he obeyed the summons when they brought it, to go to Tingying's room. The flame of a small oil lamp sputtered and flickered, casting an uneven light over a heap of new straw covered by a felt mat on which she lay. In her arms was her babe, swathed in dark wrappings so that only its face was visible.

Its father peered down at his son, seeing, not the little creature the others beheld, but the son and grandson of Christian parents. He had pondered long over hopes and plans for the Nosu church till his expected son began to feature in them. He had seen him growing up, another generation of a thriving Christian community, inheriting his father's zeal and ambitions, and carrying on his work. He

stood up again, and even his slight stoop was banished by the pride of fatherhood. And then he laughed. His dreams had taken shape, and the shape was that grotesque wee thing which Tingying held. Nothing could ever mask Mr. Peace's sense of the amusing when a shaft of humour caught him off his guard. Even in later years, when he was a sadder man, it was the same.

He found a narrow bench and drew it up beside them. On the stove a big black pitcher of rich, amber sugar-water began to boil. He lifted it off and poured out a cupful for Tingying to sip. Once again he was at peace, at home, and in the sleeping miniature of himself, ludicrous as it might seem, he saw again his hopes materializing, and was glad.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PLOTS AND PERPLEXITIES

"... which trials of one kind and another. . . ."

I

MONTHS went by and Mr. Peace's dreams were coming true. From a little group of men and women meeting in one another's farmhouses, and later in a shack devoted to the purpose, they now had a building large enough to seat several hundred, and smaller ones had been erected for a school and for the permanent church workers, the *mushih's* family, the evangelists, and a little cottage in the corner of the grounds for Mr. Peace.

Everything had not gone smoothly by any means. For some time the new chapel had stood unfinished through a falling off of interest, but eventually it had been roofed and whitewashed, and the great annual meetings of the whole district were held in it. It stood roughly in the centre of a wide area through which its Nosu adherents were scattered, covering a territory of two or three days' travel in any direction from Kiehkow. The south-eastern sector contained most Christians, but few Blacks, and due consideration for them had been taken in the choice of this central site.

At conference times small parties of men and boys and some women would set out, carrying their own contributions of food, such as was within their power, and on the prearranged days would converge on Kiehkow, where arrangements had been made for their reception. These were the highlights of Mr. Peace's experience, the demonstration of his hopes in the process of fulfilment.

He himself had moved over from Kopu and was now master in charge of a Kiehkow school for Nosu boys and a few girls. Of all the leading men in his circle he had perhaps the best education and the keenest mind. Every day he would walk up the little lane from his cottage to the school, his Bible and school books, bound in undyed leather by his own hand, tucked under his arm. Seeing him come, the boys would line up and stand stiffly till he had passed, following him into school for morning prayers, which he led himself.

And then a day of teaching. The loud, monotonous chant of memorizing in the Chinese way would go on and on, led by Peace's clear voice. And when writing lessons were in progress he could be seen moving amongst them prompting and criticizing as with slender brushes they penned their characters in black over the model ones that he had written in an ink made of brick-red mud, excavated locally.

Largely through his personal efforts another big step had been taken. A committee was formed of the *mushih* and several leading Nosu, to work out a phonetic script and to translate hymns into their own language. When the work was completed, Mr. Peace sat down and in his own hand wrote them out in the new symbols so that they might be photographed and printed in large numbers. He slaved at it laboriously, many times rejecting what he had written, until he was satisfied and could commit it to the printers. Great was the joy therefore when these books in their own language reached the people. Being phonetic, it was easy for them to learn, and soon the illiterate had begun to read as they sang. But all this work had taken a long time, and keen as he was to pursue his project of a Nosu dictionary, too, it had to be set aside.

With so many activities and accomplishments, it was not surprising that young Mr. Peace rapidly came to be valued by the older men and respected by everyone. His cleanliness and his appreciation of the ways of the foreign missionary had come to be known, and, to his embarrassment, when he visited other homes the floors would be swept and litter cleared away.

He wore a cheap gold ring on the little finger of his left hand, and, unlike most people, carried a handkerchief. This did not necessarily mean that he used it for anything more than a final polishing of his truly Nosu nose, but it showed he was a gentleman. Yet he was not a prig. He had long ago discarded the rest of the petty foppery of city life. His clothing was coarser, made of the material bought in the little country markets and tailored at home, and his manners he had relaxed to be more in keeping with those around him. He was becoming a most promising man, and none could know—least of all himself in his happiness—that the stage was set for his trials to begin.

It was a sad thing for Mr. Peace and Tingying that so early in their married life circumstances should arise to separate them for long stretches of time. With the claims of school and church holding him in Kiehkow, it soon became clear that his younger brother and Wenling needed help at Hopien. Tingying, as she matured from girlhood to womanhood, began to reveal more and more the qualities that made her father and mother so strong and successful. Wenling's gentler nature was not so well able to cope with the management of the old official's home and farm and White servants and tenants.

So they decided that Tingying and Jenpin the little boy should live at Hopien to keep the home and lands with Wenling's help. Moreover, this would free their brother to get married and to move to a smaller house elsewhere on their lands. It was the only possible arrangement, for they were all dependent on their own farm produce as long as Mr. Peace was working for the church for love and no money. He meanwhile would stay on at Kiehkow and visit them as frequently as he could.

Tingying was fully contented and enjoyed her independence. It was not natural to her to be submissive, to take advice from or to be directed by any but her seniors. Her self-confidence fitted her perfectly for the task they had chosen for her. So she did well, treating her husband and Wenling with respect and consideration, but going the way she calculated was best. She was a steady Christian, too, with a good background of early teaching, and as her children grew up, taught them faithfully, leading the whole household in their daily devotions.

Mr. Peace's cottage at Kiehkow was spotlessly clean and tidy. The little lane branching off from the cattle track that led through the church premises ended in a *cul-de-sac*. This was Peace's courtyard, a space not more than ten feet across and twenty feet in length. If its occupant had been anyone else, it would probably have been a soggy pit of decaying vegetation and refuse, but Mr. Peace kept it swept, a flat surface of beaten soil.

Inside the house was the same, garnished as if a special visitor were expected. It was not the home of a wealthy man; the woodwork was unvarnished and the whitewash peeling from the walls. But it correctly gave the impression of being the home of someone

who disciplined himself and his servants. There were two Whites there with him, a man and wife, who did all that was required. The cleanliness of everything under his control meant that he had been untiringly insistent until they too had acquired the habit, no small achievement in a land where the élite will drop orange peel on the floor around them and spit negligently into a corner.

Here he lived and worked on his new Nosu script, and prepared his school work. The central room served for his work and for receiving guests, while he slept and kept his books in one of two smaller rooms to the right. The corresponding rooms on the left were used by his Whites. Behind were the kitchen quarters with the little corn-steamer cooking their ground maize, the staple article of food, and the paraphernalia that accompanied it—stone crocks for water and salt and red peppers, a wooden tub and dipper, and a chopper and block of wood for the vegetables.

Behind the cottage an old walnut tree spread its gnarled, leafy branches protectingly, and beyond that the ground dropped suddenly to a cornfield of the widow Erh Sao's. In front, across the yard, was a little gate opening into his garden-orchard, where a few fruit trees and vegetables and flowers gave him quiet pleasure in his spare time. From this garden he would look out over the valley and gaze upon its splendours, and watch the seas of white mist and the peeping islands that were hilltops, and ponder his plans and problems.

3

One day, when he was at home at Hopien, a strange visitor was announced. His name they knew, but they had never met because his reputation had dictated that the family should always steer clear of him. He had lands adjoining the Peaces' property.

Mr. Peace went out and welcomed him into the house, taking him into the guest-room and providing him with tea of Nosu potency, as he was in duty bound to do. They had been conversing generally for a time and Peace was beginning to wonder what might have brought the old man to see him, when with the sixth sense which comes of many similar conversations he realized that he was leading up to it.

"Fine lot of fowls you've got, I see," the visitor remarked. "How has your farm been going since your father died?"

He wants to buy some of our land, thought Peace, and when I refuse he will start encroaching on it.

"Very well," he said. "And yours?"

"Wonderfully!" the old man said. "I've had better crops these last three or four years than ever before. Couldn't help it after all the deep digging and manuring we've done."

I've never seen any signs of that, thought Peace, and I've travelled by the road that runs through them often enough.

"But I've decided to retire," his guest continued. "It is too much to supervise, and my sons are all away from home."

He is coming to the point, thought Peace, a little puzzled, but what is he going to say?

"How are they?" he asked, wanting a moment to consider a new notion.

"Fine boys!" the man replied. "And doing well. They have nothing to fear, nor I in my old age with them about."

The last Mr. Peace had heard of them was that one was in the Army and playing fast and loose, while the other, though rich enough, was smoking opium heavily.

He said: "Where are they now?"

It was an awkward question, one which he hoped would produce a long, evasive answer. It did. And while the old ruffian wove his lies carefully into a presentable story, young Mr. Peace tried hard to sum him up and decide his line of action. He was pretty sure now what was coming.

His visitor was huge, a man of massive bones and liberal covering. He had once been an archer in an imperial guard of the Manchu dynasty, he was saying, rising to his feet to demonstrate with waving arms how grandiose he looked in those palmy days. His voice was powerful and filled the house, his eyes were dark and even in the room, where the light was poor, his pupils were small, giving him a menacing expression. His grey moustache and short beard were fuller than most Mr. Peace had seen, framing a lecherous mouth. His long, barrel chest sank into a vast paunch, which nevertheless he carried proudly. He was a Black Nosu, and Nosu men, it seems, because so active, seldom go to seed and grow stout. The Chinese settle on their lees and grow obese, but not so much the Nosu. Aged, shrivelled, toothless, yes, but fat and flabby, fewer by far. With women this would be less true, there are plenty of portly matrons, but they are matriarchs, carrying themselves with no less dignity.

When sitting, Peace's caller set his knees squarely, with feet planted firmly on the ground, and standing kept them apart in a possessive, even arrogant, manner, showing his expensive shoes of mandarin design. Here was no easy man to deal with, and Peace decided on a policy of dilatory politeness, whatever he should propose. Peace was no dashing cavalier. He thrived in an undisturbed environment and shrank from any kind of clash.

The time had come. He heard the booming voice proceed: "Now I have decided to sell the larger half of my property. The boys will never need it now that they are secure in their own rights. And because your old father was a good friend to me, I shall not try for profit in the open market. Instead I want you to take it for old times' sake." And he named a preposterous sum.

Mr. Peace gasped. I was right, he thought, he has involved himself in debts which he cannot meet and is desperate to get hold of more money than his lands are worth, to keep himself out of the city courts. What more obvious than to sell at an exorbitant profit to a young schoolmaster and family who know nothing of land values, and whom he mistakenly thinks are wealthy?

He made polite remarks and pleaded that he had all the property he could handle, and no means of buying more.

The old man spat through the doorway, and a hen came scurrying across the courtyard toward them. He watched it absently, and then laughed. "Talk it over with your brother," he said, "and don't tell a soul or your chance will be lost.

"I'll come again and we will fix it up properly," he threatened jovially, striding out and bidding them farewell.

Thus ended the first of a series of visits which went on for months and months. Whenever Mr. Peace came home to visit his family, word somehow reached the old ruffian, and he would come round and fill the old house with his unwelcome shouts. Finding the young man immovable, he began to reduce his price, to patronize them with favours and presents, to coerce them by all the means he could muster. So continually did he pester them that Mr. Peace reduced the number of his visits home, for they had become almost disagreeable.

Then the old man transferred his attentions to Tingying, realizing now that she was really the business head of the family. She made him admit that where he asked thousands, hundreds would still be too much, and managed to secure an interval of several weeks of

peace. But the calm of their life had been broken, and day by day the fear of further trouble made them uneasy. Even at Kiehkow, working on his books, thinking of greater things, of preserving the hoary hieroglyphics of his race, or wandering on the church terrace or in his garden, listening to the subdued drone of the old millstone turning and turning under the labours of two Whites, he was troubled by this absurd thorn in the flesh and their powerlessness to stop the persistent old man. Years later it still featured in his memory as a thing that tended to age him prematurely.

4

Meanwhile, before the old archer's schemes came to a sudden inglorious end with the exposure of an intricate system of plots and corruption in which he was involved, a new problem for Mr. Peace was precipitated. He had seen it coming and had done his best to meet it before it materialized, but without success. Wentling must be betrothed or trouble would arise. The duty which would have been his father's had devolved upon him. If he kept his attractive and clever young sister unengaged any longer, it would be to her real danger. He had gone through in his mind all the Christian families of his acquaintance, to find her a husband, but without result. Of Nosu Blacks, so few families were Christian, and still fewer had eligible sons, for most were betrothed already. The need was getting urgent, yet what could he do? To marry her to a White was unthinkable, and there was no Black to be had, apart from heathen.

Then as he came out of school one afternoon, a well-dressed man came up to him and asked the opportunity for a brief conversation. Seated in Mr. Peace's central room at Kiehkow, he introduced himself as middle-man representing an influential family of Blacks in the country not far from Hopien. Peace knew of them. The head of the family had a large band of armed men who roamed the district maintaining his prestige. But it was a younger son who was due to be married. The caller took pains to point out the desirability of both the youth and his family, to whom Peace's sister had been strongly recommended. Sensing the acuteness of the situation with this new development, Peace managed to defer the matter for consideration, and redoubled his efforts to find a way out of the *impasse*. But even with the help of friends he could see no solution; he was helpless.

Now he heard that other enquiries were being made after Wenling, amongst them some on behalf of a brother of the new leader of the Rogues at Thieves' Inn Flats. The danger of entanglement with this infamous family was extreme. He was getting into a very tight corner, and the burden of responsibility weighed upon him like a real load upon his shoulders. That family would stop at nothing, and, if thwarted, would be capable of any malice. If they made a request for her and were refused, they might storm the house at Hopien and carry her off to be another of several captives already there. He saw that he must announce her betrothal with as little delay as possible. But to whom? That was his grim quandary.

Amongst the other suitors was one different from the rest, more enlightened than the ordinary run of Nosu. He had spent some years in the provincial capital as an official with a minor administrative post, was wealthy, and typical of men of his walk in life, smoking opium and drinking heavily. He gambled, moreover, not by the hour, but all day and all night for days on end, disturbing the sleep of his neighbours with the rattle and shuffle of his *mahjong* pieces through the night watches. He had, however, returned at least temporarily to his home, and was seeking a wife amongst the daughters of his own race.

He had known the old Mr. Peace, their father, in the past, and was attracted by the status of Wenling as a member of such a leading Black family. So when he came to know of other rivals, he pressed his claims untiringly. About his excesses he had no words to say, but his success as a business man and official in the capital were surely better recommendations than any indolent rogues in the mountains could produce! And were not his motives demonstrated as good, that he should want a girl whom he knew to be without a large dowry? He was not scheming for money, as he might have done more easily elsewhere. He wanted a good wife to bear him good sons in the new house he was going to build, and he would be a good husband to her, he avowed.

Tugged this way and that by his despairing moods, Mr. Peace tussled with this terrible conundrum and saw no light. Which was worse; the cruel world of violence and sudden death into which she would be taken if Wenling married into an outlaw family or was carried off by them? Or the deadly existence as the wife, and perhaps only the first, of An Tekuan, a reprobate worldling?

Mr. Peace ran his school with a distracted mind. Even the birth of his little girl, whom they named "Meili," failed to offset the incessant strain. His worst fears had but narrowly been averted. An attempt to kidnap Wenling had very nearly been successful, and only by fleeing swiftly to the safety of the *mushih's* house had she escaped. His eyes searched the Sunday congregations yet again for the one he knew he would not see. The church contained no husband for Wenling. In his spare moments he walked with downcast eyes wherever he could find solitude, and began to fidget with the edges of his sleeves with restless fingers, a habit which he never overcame. Alone in his cottage, he would spend hours in troubled prayer, but without relief.

Then, as he opened his book to start teaching one dreary day, light, of a grey melancholy shade, but as welcome as the first rays of morning, came to him. He had an idea to discuss with Wenling. This needed thought. He set the boys a page to study, and, oblivious of their loudly chanting voices, intoning their piece, he worked out the details of his scheme.

With the first opportunity he repaired to Hopien, and, sitting round the fire with Wenling and Tingying and her babe, they talked it over. It was a painful ordeal for Wenling, the object of all this plotting and desire, but she was facing it calmly, and trusting in God to provide a solution for her. Finally she said:

"I think you are right, Wenliang, this is the better way, and the rival families will look elsewhere. Tell An Tekuan that I will become betrothed to him on condition that he promises to forsake his evil life and return permanently to the country, and that I will marry him only if he breaks off his opium habit and proves by two years of straight living and attention to the Gospel that he means what he says."

This message Mr. Peace conveyed to An Tekuan. He received it with delight, for he had formidable rivals. At the present moment, anyway, he was sincere in his intentions, and promised to reform and take up the supervision of his property and dependents after the custom of his race.

The obstacle was cleared, the way was bright again. Two years must pass before any action need be taken, and if An Tekuan proved worthless, there would be time for help to come from another direction. The flowers in Mr. Peace's garden were budding when he walked there in the evening. And his schoolboys responded briskly to a new zest they detected in their master.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE HEAT OF DAY

" . . . have been unable to destroy."

I

WITH the flight of years the people in whom Mr. Peace's chief interest and affection were centred became dispersed over a distance of about fifty miles, in three different homes. Kiehkow was roughly halfway in between the other two. Tingying was still at Hopien, content to be in charge of their lands and personnel, with Peace's brother and his family not far away. Jenpin the firstborn, was already a schoolboy in the Kiehkow school, a dark-eyed, serious child, sharing the cottage with his father. And Meili, now the delighted owner of a little brother, Jenhan, five years her junior, was with her mother in the old home by the river.

In the other direction, south of Kopu, Wenling was in an old house soon to be replaced by a magnificent new structure. As though to shame his prospective in-laws for their doubts about him, An Tekuan had been true to his word, had sold up all his commitments in the capital, and at no little expense was broken of his opium addiction. In due time he had claimed Wenling as his bride and taken her to the home that had been his father's. It began to look as if he was a good man by nature who had been entangled in the common vices of the day, and unlike the other suitors, evil men at heart and by weight of unalterable circumstance. Around his home he was treated with great respect and known as "The Manager," in deference to his position in the capital. What began as a precarious marriage was holding out hopes of resounding success. With the advent of a son of his own, An Tekuan had settled down as if life could hold nothing better to be desired, and after the first months of strangeness and yearning for her Christian home, Wenling had yielded to her husband's growing affection.

From the beginning Mr. Peace had made a point, when his affairs took him to Kopu, to go on, if he could, to visit his sister at Temopin, her new home. Thereby he hoped in some measure to ease her lot. But visits could not be often so long as he was tied by his duties to Kiehkow and Hopien. Tingying and he had a simple way of sharing their children of which they occasionally made use.

From time to time, when Mr. Peace was returning to Kiehkow, he would take Meili and later Jenhan with him, each child riding in a makeshift framework like a small deck-chair on a coolie's back. They would enjoy a holiday in the glories of Kiehkow and return to their mother at the next opportunity. In this way they came to spend many hours together in Mr. Peace's leisure at their cottage home, or accompanying him when he had visits to make up or down the valley.

2

On one such day Mr. Peace came out of school with a troubled wrinkling of his brow. Before going in to this last class, he had been asked by the *mushih* if he could spare him a few minutes later on. He had grown used to dropping in at the *mushih*'s house to talk about anything and everything, but to-day there had struck him, in this connection, a realization that worried him. It was this that kept him closely occupied on his way down the narrow lane until he almost stumbled over Meili.

Meili was squatting on a plank in the pathway, one of several planks laid down in places where the ground was apt to be soggy underfoot, and playing with a puppy. It was early yet, and he had time to pay a business call before keeping his appointment.

"I'm going to call on Chang the miner," he told her. "Would you like to come too?"

She leapt up, abandoning her playmate, and answering, "*Aba*, of course I want to come!", took his hand and danced beside him till he had deposited his books in the house and they were out once more and on the path going down the valley.

The cattle track was bereft of soil by the rushing waters that swept down it after every cloud-burst, so the going was difficult. They picked their way carefully between jagged stones and puddles until they had passed the deeply sunken path where the bank was higher than their heads and the trees met over them in a leafy arch. Meili loved this bit of their walks. Directly afterwards came a turning sharply to the right, down a slope to the brook. Here Mr. Peace went carefully across the stepping stones, trying a little fastidiously to keep his cloth shoes dry. But not so Meili. Her feet were bare and the brook was her delight. Above, only a few yards distant, a six-foot waterfall splashed and shone with every colour of the spectrum, and the water swirled deliciously at its foot, under the black cave

in the bank. Below, a little rapid caught the dead leaves which she rested on the water, and swept them away like ships on the great rivers.

Then up the gradual incline on the farther side, and past the old opium-smoker's cottage with its crumbling strong tower built of mud. Meili had never seen him, he seldom came out of doors, but had heard the schoolboys speak of him. His sons were robbers and lived in other huts beside his, under the tall pine trees on the wooded slope. Because of these stories she hurried past, making up for time lost at the brook.

The coal-mine was very near, only a hundred yards further up the valley, with a cottage near its mouth. The mine itself was a hole in the hillside big enough for a man to enter carrying a basket on his back, and a levelled space of ground outside where carriers or pack horses could load up with coal. Nearby were a few other tunnel mouths which had fallen in. From one a stream of water issued, staining its channel a rusty red.

Meili and her father were approaching the cottage below the mine when they surprised a buff-brown sow with her blonde piglets as they fed. Snorting and squealing, the stupid creatures fled in panic with Meili on their heels, and tumbled breathlessly into their sty, a scrambling heap of pink flesh and corkscrew tails. Meili's joy knew no bounds. It was great fun coming out with her father. There were always new thrills and pleasures, better, it seemed to her, than on their own farm at Hopien.

The miner and his mates were squatting round a fire of coals on the level platform. There was no sign of activity; their hewing of the day was finished. The miner looked up and greeted Mr. Peace. He was a tall lean man with bloodshot eyes peering through a mask of coal dust, and his greeting was civil but unfriendly. Not long ago his foot had been injured in a fall of coal and cured by the church folk, who were always glad to help, so he felt in their debt, but he belonged really to the opposition clique of godless men who shared the valley.

Mr. Peace did his business.

"Same arrangement for another year?" he said: "I'll have the bushel of corn at my cottage if you send round for it." The general system of purchase was that for a bushel of grain per year, each household could come and collect as much coal as they needed.

"Coal's more expensive now," answered the miner, putting up the price because he was addressing someone from the church, as

was his way. "It must be a bushel and a quarter for the year. But we've struck a better seam and a big one at that. Look at this!" He rose and from a stack of coal behind him lifted out a huge slab, as much as one man could carry. It gleamed with light, a massive black diamond, and broke cleanly in its natural planes when he tapped a corner deftly with his hammer.

"I'll give you this as a present. I'll bring it round myself," he continued, making it hard for Mr. Peace to question the price he had stated for the year's supply.

A pitch-black apparition emerged from the mine, groping his way with bruised bare feet, for he was blind. Trachoma had covered his eyes with a screen of flesh. In the darkness of the mine he was as well off as in the light. Meili was staring silently at the men, a little fearful of their appearance, but her expression softened as she saw the blind man's plight. Involuntarily she cried out and, taking his grimy hand, guided him past a basket of coals with which he would have collided. Would her aunt Liya be like that, she wondered? Tingying's sister was in grave trouble with her eyes, and the anxiety of the whole family had impressed itself on Meili too.

Mr. Peace called her. His business was settled. He turned to go, but Meili stood staring at the men about the fire. Seeing her wide-eyed look of disapproval, he followed her line of vision. There was a stranger in the party, neither Nosu nor Miao tribesman. In his hand he held the end of a length of cotton thread. At the far end of it was a large green beetle flying round and round with a noise like a humming top. The stranger was amused by his plaything and unconscious of cruelty. He drew it in by the thread. Its leg had been broken off at the knee, and a fine twig, attached to the cotton, had been thrust up and impacted in the hollow shell of its "thigh." Meili, so recently gay with enjoyment of piglets and tumbling brook, was blushing with indignation and amazement. But she caught the meaning in her father's look and kept silent, and, turning her back on the smirking men, followed him homeward.

The thing that troubled Mr. Peace was the tendency of everyone to turn to him as if he were the minister or pastor of the church. There was no minister. No one had yet developed far enough for so specialized a position.

Leaving Meili at the top of their lane to run down to the cottage alone, Mr. Peace went along the terrace toward the *mushih's* house. He was perturbed, as his hands and his worried look revealed. There were fixed lines on his forehead that had not been there when he first came to Kiehkow. The last few years had told upon him, working insidiously a change, a weakening, if barely perceptible. He quietly opened the gate and entered the garden: but his quietness was a sign and symptom that he wanted to be inconspicuous.

Mr. Peace's family affairs gave him little cause for worry now, but church affairs were none too healthy. Far from forging ahead as he had hoped it would, the cause in which his greatest hopes were placed was struggling along, now manfully, but now with dragging steps, as if losing heart. There had been cases of undisciplined behaviour by church members and even elder Christians which had remained unchecked through lack of leadership. A so-called "elder" had taken a second wife, and in other places the church funds of stored grain were being borrowed, a dangerous beginning, and not returned, far worse. Added to the luke-warmness in many localities, these gave much food for thought. The subject had been raised of Christians giving their daughters in marriage to unconverted men, but Mr. Peace had found no solution that satisfied him in his sister's case, and withheld judgment on the matter. But it left his mind unsettled.

At the study door he knocked and coughed informatively. A chair was pushed back, a few footsteps heard on floor boards, and the door was flung open with a cheery welcome. Mr. Peace took his usual seat and remarked politely that he would be wasting the *mushih's* time. On these occasions he felt a resurgence of his feelings as a student in the city and as a young man, the keener air where learning and intellect are appreciated, the only place where his old student self felt alive. Elsewhere was very rustic. Here he knew his company was enjoyed and his conversation could be deeper.

They took their time. There was no gain in making business petrify the free spirit of friendship between them. And so they chatted together, just as the conversation led them, bringing in the business matters to their mutual satisfaction in passing. Sometimes another knock would interrupt them, and the *mushih* would see a patient and dispense some medicine, taking in exchange some eggs or pears or oats brought in the folds of the caller's apron, and entering their value in the dispensary and household cash books. But when he or she had gone they would continue with their talk.

To-day, however, as Mr. Peace had feared since his special invitation to call, his advice was wanted. In turning to him, the *mushih* was treating him, Mr. Peace, as church leader representing the others, a man of influence. From this position, he had realized, he shrank. Somehow he had never looked upon himself in that light. Like so many other churches who have hopes for and interests in the mission field, but mistakenly fail to see themselves playing a direct part in it, Mr. Peace would have preferred to help from aside. He himself had never played a conspicuous part in his dreams for the Nosu church. His ambitions were excellent and he would work hard, but his idea was that other people should be the figureheads and executive. He and his fellow Nosu Christians wanted to be led and controlled by the missionaries, wanted them to take the initiative and make decisions, and did not see clearly the advantages of standing firmly on their own feet. Peace's grasp of this need in relation to leaning on the Miao church had not carried him far enough.

But the *mushih* had his work to do, of a different kind. Not being a Nosu, he could never truly be a leader or pastor of the Nosu, could never see right into the complexity of their feelings, their reactions, their motives that accounted for the choices and behaviour of Nosu believers. His was to help from alongside, teaching, guiding, warning, maybe condemning on the authority of Scripture, as much a member of the church as they, but never by replacing leaders from among the people.

It was for this reason that Mr. Peace had come so frequently to call upon his foreign colleague, discussing with him, learning from him, explaining to him, tactfully enlightening him or drawing sympathy and assistance in his own problems. But from being treated as a leader, if not as the chief man in the church while still in his early thirties, he recoiled involuntarily. Yet he felt no shame or guilt of laziness. Nor should he. His reasons were too complex and powerful for him to overcome without strong outside help. The trouble was that his opinion of himself was too poor. He had the ability in him but did not believe it to be so. He preferred to be lieutenant and would never be commander.

In his talk this evening with his friend this subject was thrashed out. Why was it, the latter wanted to know, that no one would give a strong lead either in local Christian circles or in the church as a whole?

"It is *ngo-men Ih-chia-ti p'i-ch'i*," Mr. Peace replied. "It is our nature, our make up. We are so proud, so individualistic. We do not like to be ruled or controlled by others, therefore we know that others will not want us to be in a position superior to them. We do not believe we could lead people who do not want to be governed, and are therefore unable to take the responsibility."

The conception of a leader in the church being the servant of all and possessing no power or authority in his own right was clear to Mr. Peace himself. He stated what was to him the impassable obstacle of the attitude of the less discerning Christians.

But apart from that he could think of no obvious leader amongst them. The older Christians were called "elders," and there were several men who worked for part or the whole of their time as preachers and instructors, but none was really fit for leadership. The problem was of deep concern to him, and as he parted from the *mushih* at the garden gate and sauntered slowly home, he pondered it deeply. But his friend, saying good-bye, marked the trace of indecision in his movements and the hint of wavering in his smile which betrayed his sense of incapacity to fill the bill himself.

4

In leaving the *mushih's* house, Mr. Peace had to pass the evangelists' quarters on his right. The door of the guest-room was open and he could discern in the semi-darkness the Gospel posters on the wall. In there lived Yohan, also surnamed An, a gem of simple mind and tastes. His straggly moustache and goatee beard were at once mildly impressive and unintentionally comic. He wore a brown knitted skull cap on his round head, and on top of the cap was a fluffy ball, a soft woolly thing that wobbled unsteadily as he spoke. His coarse blue gown and white cotton socks proclaimed him poor but respectable, and the primitive brass-rimmed spectacles which he used for reading supported his claim to a little education, a year at school and much diligent self-effort. No, Yohan was a fine man for simple trekking round the country districts, fair weather and foul, robbers or none, and he had a good pastoral spirit which was appreciated by those he served, but he was not a leader.

Yohan was a White, and so was Su Mohsi, a lovable man, vivacious, energetic, humour-loving, with a lean, sinewy body and

a bony lined face, with eyes and nose suggestive of a hawk. But he too was a White and could scarcely read. No White could be a leader of the Blacks till the spiritual maturity of all was very much more advanced. Yet there was no Black suitable for the task. Old Man An was becoming eccentric, and old Chiopa getting beyond it. True there was a promising young man named Li in the Bible School where Mr. Peace had helped with teaching, who might be suitable one day, but not for ten years at least.

As he wandered back in the gloaming, Peace felt alone. He had had great hopes that by this time the church would number thousands. But things were not shaping as he had imagined. Instead of being the thrilled spectator of a great mass movement, by the force of his own longings and by an intuitive grasp of the principles concerned in church life, he had gravitated unwillingly into the position of leader, but with no authority and with an aversion to having it. Besides, he told himself, he had had no training. His one chance of a course in the Bible School at Changsha had come to nothing. Despondently, he reached his cottage and, sighing, pushed the door open. His domestic responsibilities and the running of the school were enough without the burden of the whole infant church. And he was stooping more than usual as he entered.

Sitting by the fire awaiting his return was one of Chiopa's Whites, a woman who looked elderly, but carried a suckling infant in her arms. Mr. Peace was surprised: his visitors of this kind were not many. He drew up a bench and bade her be seated again.

"Can you do anything for this baby?" she asked. "The *mushih* says he can't."

She held the baby out, devoid of clothing. It was only skin and bone, and might have been five months old. The infant opened its mouth feebly to emit a faint whimper. Mr. Peace started. It had two full rows of teeth.

"How old is she?" he enquired.

"She was born three winters ago," the woman replied with an inane smile.

"A little more than two years old!" he reckoned up.

When he had persuaded her that he could do nothing that she could not do, for the child was plainly starved through negligence, he saw her depart. She grinned weakly at him as she left. She was too simple and too stupid either to bring up a child or to feel much sorrow when it died.

But she had come to Mr. Peace because he was so wise, a leader in the church in which even her master played a less important part. And he knew it as he shut the door after her.

5

While it did not lessen his interest or activities in any way, the despondency of that evening coloured Mr. Peace's thinking during the succeeding months and years. It lifted his hopes above the present and made them reach out into the future. If the present generation is so immature, he reasoned, we must make sure of the rising one. And therefore as they grew older he took more and more pains to spend time with his family and to instil his own ambitious spirit into them. He enjoyed them and was himself getting the most out of them. His heart was young even if in some ways his mind was burdened.

By choice, he decided, he would have stayed at home in Hopien, teaching his children himself, with those of a few neighbouring families, and living on the proceeds of his father's land and livestock. But the church would not spare him. They always had something important for him to do. Year after year he was kept on at some work or other, in the school, in translation, in preaching, or teaching at the Bible School. He was never free to go his own way. Nor did he truly want to be. His ambitions were as active as ever, even if sobered by experience. He had the same faith in eventual success. Looking at the Miao church still expanding, he believed such a time would come for his own people. And he set his hopes increasingly on his scholars, some of whom gave him good cause for optimism, and on his own brood. He looked to them to make a good contribution to the progress of the church.

After their evening meal, when the pathetic oil lamp threw too poor a light for homework to be done, Mr. Peace would tell stories to his children. The bowls and chopsticks would be put away, and they would gather round the fire. Jenpin was nearly fourteen, not a diligent schoolboy, but normal and intelligent, and Meili almost ten and very lovable. And when Jenhan, about five, was visiting them from Hopien, he too would join the rest. Mr. Peace would tell them tales to widen their interest and sow seeds of enthusiasm for the cause of Christ; tales from Nosu history, or Bible stories in everyday words with local colour, or stories he had heard in his

student days at Chaotung of their distant relatives across the River of Golden Sand. Often they would break in to ask questions, and he would interrupt his story to explain.

"Aba, why do the Chinese call us 'Lolos'?" Jenpin asked one night.

His father's face clouded slightly and he smiled. He felt no rancour, but the term jarred inevitably on his hearing.

"It is just a nickname because they look down on us," he said. "Most people have names like that for other races."

"But what does it mean?"

"I don't know. No one does. It has been used for hundreds of years. We Nosu used to get very angry when we heard it, and some still do, but not because we understand it."

"Is it anything to do with the little baskets people think their ancestors live in?" Jenpin persisted, "because they are called *lo-lo*, aren't they?"

"It might be," Mr. Peace answered, "but some say it is because the Chinese could not understand our language and thought we jabbered 'lo-lo-lo-lo-lo-lo' all the time; and it may be because our forebears came from the north, and our word 'No' for 'north' has been turned into 'Lo' in their pronunciation."

"Go on with the story," cried Meili. "I can't understand all this you're talking about."

She admired Jenpin's wisdom, but was keen to hear what Aba had begun telling them.

"I was saying," continued Mr. Peace, returning to his story, "that thirty years ago there was an English missionary who went into the Independent country and came out alive. It would be risky for us to go across the river, but for him to go was much more dangerous and very brave.

"There was a rich Nosu man called Mr. Lŭng who was converted, and wanted to take this Mr. Pollard to see his relatives on the other side. One day he got his chance and they travelled together to the market where there was a ferry. In the market were many Independent Nosu, tall fine men who, compared with the black-haired Chinese, struck the *mushih* as quite fair. They had grey felt cloaks fastened at the neck and reaching below their knees, and on their arms some of them wore leather protectors for turning aside the blow of a sword.

"The men in charge of the ferry did their best by presents and warnings and threats to prevent them from going across, but nothing

could persuade Mr. Pollard to alter his purpose. He took his seat in the boat and was borne across the rushing river. When he arrived at the other side and stepped out on the pebbly beach he was stirred by the thought that he was the first preacher of the Gospel ever to stand in this country. He took off his hat and, bowing his head, prayed that the independent Nosu might have their part in the Kingdom of God.

"Telling the party to keep close together, Chief Lūng led the way forward. The path was terrible. They had left their horses behind, and it was a good thing they had done so. Sometimes the way was only a few ledges cut in the rock. At other times a log was leant against a cliff and a few notches cut in it as steps to help them climb. And when they reached gullies and crevices in the hillside, they had to crawl on hands and knees over trees that had been felled to bridge them.

"On the way they heard that an ambush had been laid for them in a gorge they must pass through, but, having come so far, they decided to go on, and when they reached the place they managed to make friends with the chief who had been bribed to kill or capture them. During the next few days they visited several fortified villages and were treated as honoured guests with much feasting. And, finally, they made Mr. Pollard a chief of the tribe and wanted him to marry one of their princesses, but he managed to put them off by agreeing to be her brother.

"Coming home again, a large band of men lay in wait for them, bribed by the Chinese at the ferry to capture them and hold them for a huge ransom. But the Papus are very superstitious, and when they saw Mr. Pollard throwing and catching stones very cleverly as he waited for the ferry, they thought he was able to work magic and left him alone, so he came home safely."

"Did he ever go back there?" Jenpin asked.

"No," answered his father, "nor any other Christian. They are as blind as we were before old Mr. Adam came and preached to us when I was a boy."

"Then Mr. Pollard's prayer hasn't been answered yet?" piped Meili.

"Not yet," said Mr. Peace.

And thus the years sped slowly by, slowly in that the way was sometimes rough going with the cares of church and school and family, in succession or all together, dragging heavily and denying success, but speeding as only time can do, so that the babe of yesterday is the schoolboy of to-day and the strong man of to-morrow; slowly in that the fulfilment of ambition was delayed, speeding in the flight of faith that saw not failure but success in embryo. They were years full of event and excitement in which China had been in turmoil and political armies like pestilent locusts had passed through the land, dragging two captive missionaries with them, when the women and girls of the valley had lived in hiding on the wooded slopes of the highest hills above Chiopa's house at the head of the valley, and only a few defiant ones like the "Duchess," Tingying's mother, had stayed at home.

Full of such thoughts and inclined to melancholy on account of them, Mr. Peace would often stand and gaze out from his garden-orchard upon the glorious panorama of Kiehkow. And as he wandered up and down enjoying his flowers, conscious of the wonder of his surroundings, he would feel puny beneath the magnitude of life. Physically he was small, and mistakenly he thought his personality the same. Yet in spite of this he was playing the part of a man of character, with marked effect. To everyone he was Mr. Peace, gentleman and scholar, leader and adviser, a Nosu of high standing and a Christian of greater maturity than any in his church. His habit of frequent prayer and reading of the Bible had given him a breadth of vision and understanding which marked him out among his friends. His rounded shoulders and faulty stance were not the man but a portrait of his humility and the legacy of his imperfect sight.

There was sufficient reason for his mournfulness. He had known the day when life seemed all dawn and it was good to be alive. That was when the church was born, when the Light at last revealed had ushered in a new era for the Nosu race and the old things were passing away. But now that heyday seemed over. Dark shadows were clinging to the roots of the trees and hiding at the foot of walls. It was the heat of the day, if not the beginning of decline. At times the shadows seemed to be spreading, bulking more darkly, creeping into lighted places: secret sins tainting the church, envies and intrigues showing their hand.

That was, however, just the sombre side, and the neat church compound in which he lived would never have been built if there were not living evidence of the Body of Christ, His Church, among these Nosu people. Mr. Peace was proud of the trim buildings which had grown up in this place, and not least of the *mushih's* house, a simple enough structure by Western standards, but standing two stories high, and attractive in appearance. He conceded gladly the necessity of sane balance by his foreign friends between primitive conditions and the high standard of civilization they were accustomed to. Bare boards and austere furniture were the happy mean.

And the soil itself was a parable to him. The *pêmos* had said it was unlucky ground, so that it had never been tilled, but now it was so rich and fruitful that they said a super-*pêmo* must have guided the Christians to it and broken the spell for them, their gardens had borne so lavishly. Crops took time to grow, and it might be that he had still to wait before his spiritual harvest would be ripe. "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and *die*, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." The dying was a painful process, in the spiritual sense, but in due time the crop would be forthcoming.

CHAPTER NINE

THE MANAGER

"Early in his experience he proved the power of prayer and mercies of God . . ."

I

AN TEKUAN and Wenling lived only a day's journey from the walled town of Weining, so that it was conveniently near for him to go in for trading or to the bank, and yet far enough to be free from trouble by soldiers who made trips into the country to seize timber, livestock and grain. He did not go often, but every two to three months a visit became necessary. It was as a result of these expeditions that he came to know the exact spot on which he wanted to build his new house and tower.

Whenever he drew near Temopin on his return journey, it pleased him to drop down into the valley that appeared to have no outlet, a *cul-de-sac* walled by steep hills with cliffs at the far end. Then when the road reached a wood of *sahmu* trees, it began to twist and turn, following a narrow defile through the hills, invisible from further away. Roughly a quarter of a mile on, the defile came to a sudden end, and there spread out before him were his lands.

A circle of hilltops formed the rim of a perfect ricebowl valley, a sweeping expanse of green fields dropping all round in gentle terraces to the bottom where his flax pit lay. Rocks and trees on the higher slopes broke the regularity of the scene, and the music of two little springs was borne across to him in the stillness. His tenants' cottages lay snugly in their own groves of trees scattered about the valley, and soft coils of blue smoke rising lazily into the calm air or seeping at a myriad points through the thatch of roofs, hung over them and cooling sank slowly to earth again. On the other side from where he used to gaze, sitting astride his horse while it plucked the tender leaves from dwarf oak by the road side, steep cliffs fell from near the summit of the hills till they reached a platform set like a stage high up on the far side of the arena. To its left a huge split boulder, the size of several houses, had tumbled from the cliff face and lay blocking the western end of the stage, the gap between it and the hill filled by contorted pines.

Many was the time that An Tekuan had visualized his new home set like a precious stone, spotlessly white amid the greys and greens of this background. He would stand then outside his entrance gates and look across at the mountains and the mouth of the unexpected defile, and see his retainers and the Miao at work in the fields below. Or at night he would stand and drink it all in in the silence, beneath him the dark and shadowy bowl of his fat lands, and above the inverted starry bowl of the night sky. Behind and above, over the lip of the basin, would be the Miao village from which some of his labourers were drawn. A matchless site.

So he built, as soon as preparations were complete, not a traditional Nosu home, but one modelled on fine Chinese mansions he had seen and stayed in in the capital and elsewhere. He had set aside a large sum of money for the project and was intent on having a house as magnificent as any among his Nosu people. He built it in rectangular style with its courtyard enclosed by the house and entered by massive double doors approached by a flight of steps. The entrance he turned toward the east, facing the main path of access, and overlooking the valley he arranged a blank whitewashed wall with but one small window, a single eye keeping watch. It gave a forbidding, fortified appearance which was all to the good. The front had a larger window and a postern door beside the main gateway, but otherwise was blankly uninviting, with the same intention.

Inside, the stone-flagged courtyard was sunken below the level of verandahs on four sides, and one or two steps led down to it in the centre of each, but on the right a higher balcony with an ornamental balustrade was reached by a stone stairway, having sculptured lions at its foot and head and also above, beside the entrance of the main guest-room. On all sides tall pillars rose from the verandahs to the roof, and the rooms were windowed with elaborate lattice work. When finished, there was no house in the whole countryside as fine as his. His woodwork was carved and lacquered, the rooms were panelled, and some had floor-boards instead of the usual beaten mud.

The furniture too was in keeping, in black lacquer picked out with red, and here again he was far in advance of Nosu practice, for stylish furniture of any kind was rarely seen. Into this little palace he moved with Wenling and his children and the Whites who lived with them. And they sent an invitation to Mr. Peace to call more often now than he was accustomed to do.

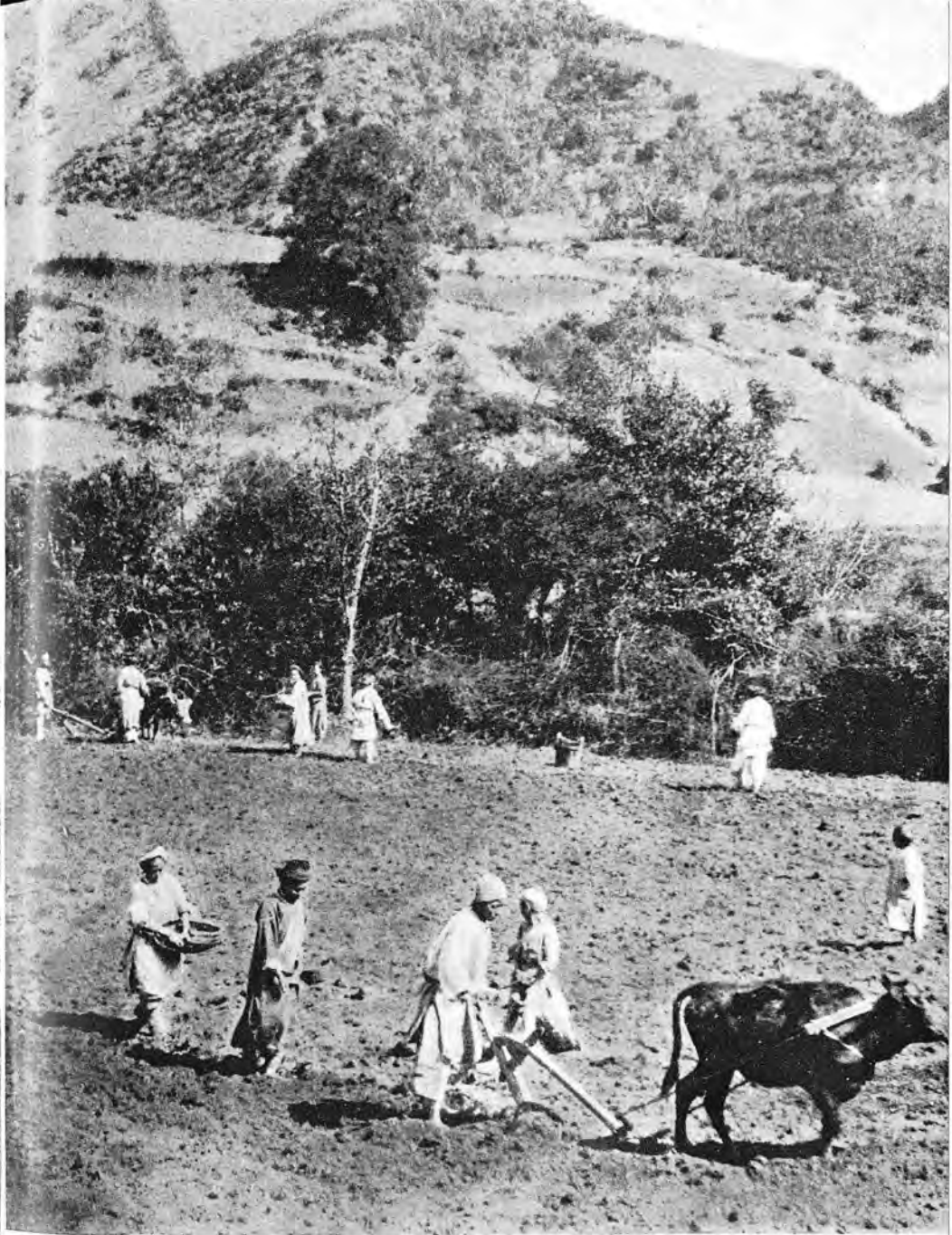
One feature of the Nosu homes the Manager retained: outside the front door he had his farmyard. Far from being ashamed of it, he was proud. His lands and his livestock were his livelihood, and the supervision of them was his lifework now that his city days were over. Therefore his stables and outhouses were grouped around his entrance, and the pig troughs, hollowed out tree-trunks, and the reining posts were at the very door where he and his family could watch the feeding of their pigs with cooked greenstuffs and corn, and of their horses with oats or buckwheat every morning and night. And he could see for himself, without going far from his doorway, how his cattle were, that there were no ticks battenning on them, draining away their vitality. Hens clucked in and out, dogs lay curled up on the steps, and his Whites and decorative Miao servants came and went. His home was prosperous, and An Tekuan had kept another of his promises.

2

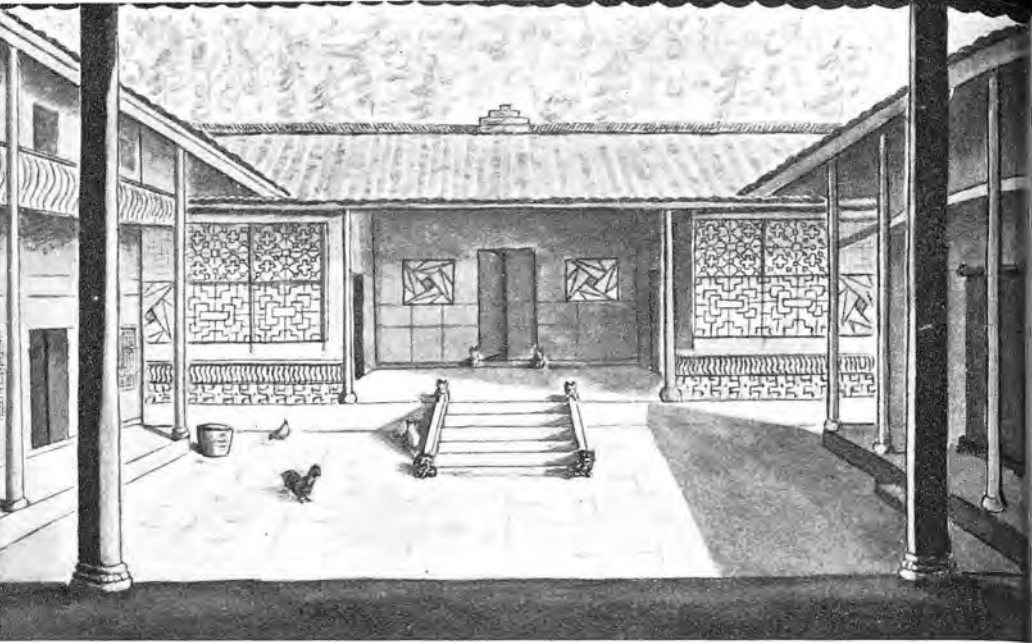
Two thousand miles away a nation to all appearances civilized and enlightened began to reveal their true nature. The rumble of Japan's iniquitous war against China and reports of her transparent pleas of innocence were carried by the winds of market gossip into the remote corners of these Nosu mountains. But apart from hints of increasing taxation, the war had no effect upon the mountain people yet. That was to come in time.

At Temopin An Tekuan had installed a blackboard in one of his lofty rooms, and was daily teaching his eldest child, already eight years old. Their move into the new house was well established, and the tottering old home had been demolished. Out of school hours this cousin of Meili's played in the courtyard or out in the open with the farm hands and animals, but it was not an exciting life for the child who could never go to market or wander far away. An Tekuan and Wenling therefore did all they could to encourage Mr. Peace to visit them, and when possible to bring Meili with him.

They all loved these visits, short though they had to be. An Tekuan liked company. He found the country quiet after city life. Wenling was very attached to her brother, and Mr. Peace, of course, was always keen to keep an eye on her state of health and happiness. But for Meili it was a treat of the first order. The long journey of twenty-five miles was not too much for her who had grown accustomed to travelling between Kiehkow and Hopien.



THE LANDLORD, A BLACK NOSU WOMAN, SOWS THE SEED, PRECEDED AND FOLLOWED BY HER SERFS, ONE USING A PRIMITIVE OXEN PLOUGH, THE OTHER THROWING IN FERTILISER



AN TEKUAN'S COURTYARD
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PHONETIC SCRIPT: A PAGE. THE LORD'S
PRAYER, FROM THE COMPLETED NOSU
HYMN-BOOK, WRITTEN BY MR. PEACE'S
OWN HAND

Mounted on a quiet old mare with her foal at heel, Meili enjoyed the scenery and hearing the people they passed on the way greeting Mr. Peace so respectfully. She realized the place he held in the district. For a day or two she would run wild with her cousin while their parents sipped tea and chatted indoors, or would accompany her uncle and father when they went down to inspect the progress of maize cobs in the valley.

These visits were a pleasant change for Mr. Peace too, because he escaped from the multiple calls of work. They could not be frequent, but he always found a warmth of welcome and genuine friendliness in his brother-in-law. An Tekuan seemed glad to have his company, and, to Mr. Peace's delight, seemed very attached to Wenling.

Whenever Peace came it was understood that family prayers were to be held and on Sundays a fuller service. At first the Manager had tried to discourage these, but he had never put much hindrance in their way. He treated the occasions with tolerant goodwill, and always came to listen if not always taking part. His wife and her brother interested him. They were a type he had not met before. Their love of cleanliness he shared, and his home was kept well swept and freer from flies than most. But he went further. He admired his wife's character and that of Mr. Peace. There was in them a depth and strength of which they were themselves unconscious. Gradually, as he came to know them better, he attributed it correctly to their Christian faith. In deference to their opinion, he had postponed the building of his strong tower, but had the materials and plans ready to complete his purpose when he had overcome their objections.

There were Christian Miao living on his lands, who came to the Sunday worship when Mr. Peace was there, and at other times met in their own homes. They were quite different from the unconverted Miao, and An Tekuan often noted this distinction. They were no richer, but living on the top of life instead of in its gutters, as the pagan Miao did. Their gaiety and harmonious singing delighted him. Altogether attractive people, these Christians, he decided.

And so there began a conflict in An Tekuan in which he took up arms on both sides. When alone he would try to think it out, this clash of evidence between what he had always known and believed and what he now heard from and saw in his new relatives. Sometimes in conversation they would explain to him their doctrine and viewpoint, and exhort him to believe, but his reaction was to treat

it all theoretically and dissociate himself from its implications. Often he would fume with indignation that he had permitted this religious element to gain so strong a place in his home life, but seldom gave way to his feelings in anyone else's presence. A tension was developing within him that had to give vent completely and perhaps disastrously sooner or later. But Wenling and Mr. Peace knew nothing of his mental turmoil, only that he was at times downcast and lacking appetite.

3

The seasons came and went, a summer passed, the rains fell, and autumn burnt herself out on the hillsides. From Mr. Peace's cottage at Kiehkow could be seen acres of leafless forest standing drably beneath the grey-washed skies of early winter. By early afternoon the sun had gone, hidden by banks of drifting cloud, and a drizzle began to fall that drove everyone indoors unless compelled by their duties to endure it. A cold snap came, and biting winds from the north began to cut their way into the poorly built houses. Riding relentlessly over the yoke of hills above Kiehkow they came, sweeping with scythes on their chariot wheels, driving any dead leaves that remained in panic from the trees, caring not for man or beast, lashing their way through felt cloaks and mud walls to swirl and mutter among the tubs of stored grain, the farming implements and the cornstalks in the rafters.

Few if any of the people in the valley had clothing warm enough for winter use. Men and women, old and young, hurried through essential jobs as quickly as they could and joined in the only feasible occupation, *k'ao huo*, hugging the fire. By day they sat around their mud stoves, clad in the few thin garments they possessed, and at night they lay on the ground as close to the fire as they could get, regardless of ashes and each other. The richer ones, possessed of warmer bedding, slept beneath it in twos and threes, making the most of each other's natural heat. But day and night the fires burned on, filling the air with noxious sulphur fumes that had to be disregarded as the lesser of evils to be borne.

Mr. Peace and his family were no better off than the others. In fact, his cottage was walled with planking only, in which were cracks that whistled shrilly in the winds whatever he did to stop them. The school had closed down perforce, and he did what work he could at home. But the winter had set in again. Fine, sunny

days would come, and plenty of them, but for a fortnight drizzle and drenching sleet had been falling. Many failed to turn up to the Sunday services, which went on as usual, but they could scarcely be blamed. It was all the people living near the church could do to keep dry enough on the way there, and none were warm till the service was over, despite the big fires that were kept going.

Then one evening as darkness fell there was a stamping on the doorstep outside and a voice called, "Mr. Peace! Mr. Peace!" He opened the door and, pulling the caller in, forced it shut again. It was one of the Whites from Temopin. He stood there dripping wetness to the mud floor where puddles formed and circled round seeking a channel to flow in, with a thin film of dust clouding their dark surface. The man's teeth were chattering with cold, his face was sodden, mottled blue and cream, and his hands moved stiffly, numb and crinkled with prolonged exposure to the rain, so that he had difficulty in discarding his soaking cape. They made room for him by the fire and poured out a bowl of scalding tea.

"Hard travelling to-day," he said. "Wind against me nearly all the way. This sleety rain gets through everything."

His sleeves and jacket began steaming as he spoke. Turning them methodically as close to the coals as he could, he went on:

"Mr. An's gone mad, raving mad. Mrs. An wants you to come at once. She can do nothing with him."

Mr. Peace removed his glasses and passed his hand across his eyes, peering blindly as if dazed. He replaced his spectacles and only then broke his silence with an exclamation of distress.

"*Ai-ya!*" and again, "*Ai-ya, na-mo-tsu?* What's to be done?"

He asked for details, which the messenger supplied with morbid thoroughness, and, listening, Peace realized that he must go to Temopin, if only to encourage Wenling his sister.

4

The next day dawned sharp, clear and freezing. The frozen mists flashed brightly a myriad reflections of the sun from eaves, fences and tree-tops, where they clung in sheets and pendants of frosty glass. The ground was hard and icy, so that Mr. Peace feared for his bones, but he could not stay. On a borrowed beast of wilful temper but good travelling power, he set out on his perilous, if picturesque, adventure. If he could, he must reach Temopin by nightfall. The driven mists of the night before had become entangled

in the branches of the trees and bushes, and frozen where they met them. They looked like trees of ice, each twig and stem, each branch and trunk coated thickly with it to windward, two, three, four times the thickness of the stem, so that there was merely a trimming of wet bark to trees of crystal.

His journey was eventful, and often he clung helplessly to the saddle with his hands as the horse's legs shot without rhyme or reason beneath or away to one side of him, but continually he urged it forward.

About midday, when he had already crossed the vale of Kolo and was riding up a ravine on the farther side, the beast shied suddenly to the right. The river here was shallow and rocky and separated from the path by only a stretch of coarse pasturage. Half in the water and half on the bank lay the corpse of a full-sized sheep and, slashing at its heart with hungry fangs, a lean yellow wolf. Mr. Peace raised a yell and continued shouting at it till the beast snarled angrily and slunk away into the undergrowth on the rocky riverside. Keeping up his shouts, he succeeded in drawing the attention of the shepherdess, a woebegone slave girl, who, coming to the scene, burst into wailing at the prospect of her inevitable beating for negligence. She tried to blame Mr. Peace, and then to persuade him to stay by the sheep until she could bring help, but he had to press on, and left her rounding up her flock with high, echoing calls.

For an hour or two the sky had been overcast, and flakes of snow had come drifting on a lethargic wind to settle and melt on Mr. Peace's cloak. Now he saw clearly in the distance the black snow clouds shedding their blankets of white. His road wound up and up another long valley, beginning the undulating climb that in three or four hours would bring him to Temopin. On his left he passed by the ruins of a once-pretentious homestead, the remains of a leading Black Nosu family's estate. Defeated in feudal battle time and again, they had finally been driven right out of the district and their property seized. Only a tower of refuge remained, empty and moss-grown, on the tip of an isolated peak across the valley.

On top of the pass the snow had fallen thickly, and descending on the further side became wellnigh impossible, especially if mounted. Struggling downward, slipping and falling on rough stones hidden by the snow, and in hollows filled to the common level, Mr. Peace was despairing of completing his journey as he had hoped when he saw two Christian Miao tramping along and drawing slowly nearer.

Wild life was scarce at any time of year, and although pheasants were sometimes seen, hares seldom showed themselves. When snow fell, however, their tracks became plain and could be followed. The Miao then went out and set snares on the most-used runs, as Mr. Peace now saw them doing.

"Where does this road go? I can't follow it under this snow," he cried out to them.

They hurried across, delighted to hear his voice, and enquired his errand in this bitter weather.

"The Manager is ill," he answered, "and my sister has sent for me. His mind is disturbed and they fear he will harm himself."

"Come," said one of the Miao. "I'll lead the horse, and you follow me."

He would hear no protests, and, leaving the trapping to his friend, led off along the trail. Nothing would turn him back. The afternoon was degenerating into its usual misery of wind and sleet, but to him this was all the more reason why he should see Mr. Peace safely to his destination. He could return next day, he argued. Any one of the Miao at Temopin would share their food and fire with him to-night.

Mr. Peace was powerless and gave up trying to persuade him. The screech and whistle of the mountain winds drowned all efforts at conversation and he was forced to hide his face in his clothing as much as he could. Where it was possible to ride he left the reins to the faithful Miao, and himself sat huddled in a ball with his hands tucked each into the opposite armpit. At one high place known as the Pass of the Strong Winds he found it hard to keep his seat, and his guide was leaning against the paralyzing blasts as he trudged patiently forward. So together they climbed over the high hills, along unstable shingle slopes, through sunken gullies in the alluvial mud of secluded valleys, and past lonely stone-towered houses; on across a broad plain where a *Tumu* lived always within earshot of a roaring waterfall and rapid, and up through bleak pine woods sighing with cold, to Temopin.

When Mr. Peace arrived, he found the household in a state of great agitation. An Tekuan had just been raving round the house, and everyone's nerves were on edge. But his brainstorm had subsided and he had locked himself in his own room, refusing food.

Wenling took her brother to the guest-room which he usually occupied, to thaw out by the fire. Here at Temopin no coal was to be had, so they used open pans of charcoal known as *huo-p'en*. Over one of these he dried his dripping clothes and sat sipping hot water while food was being prepared. He succeeded in calming Wenling's excitement, though she sat with ears alert for the door across the courtyard to open heralding another tornado from her husband. And over Peace's snack they talked and prayed together about this tragedy, coming so disappointingly on top of all their fears about the marriage and subsequent hopes of An Tekuan's conversion. An was naturally a quiet man, so that mania of such violence was all the more distressing.

They had been together for less than an hour when loud bangings and shouts came from the other side.

"Stay here," said Mr. Peace. "I'll call on him alone."

He walked across the courtyard and up the stone stairway. Groups of anxious Whites stood at the entrance of the kitchen regions, watching curiously. Peace waited for a lull in the racket and called out: "Tekuan! Open the door, I've come to visit you."

His voice was strong, but his eyelids blinked and his hands moved nervously. The door sprang open with a clatter and the Manager stood there wild-eyed and dishevelled, a log of firewood in his hand.

"So *you've* come, have you?" he shouted. "What have *you* come for? Isn't Kiehkow cold enough without coming here to freeze? You can't do anything for me!"

He stepped back as Mr. Peace made to enter the room. Even now his respect for Mr. Peace would not allow him to obstruct him. If he wanted to come in and shut the door he could, but he'd be sorry for it soon. An Tekuan cast fiery glances about the room as if afraid of something, but determined to show fight.

"You'd better go home again," he cried, not looking toward his brother-in-law. "It's devils that are after me."

He kept his eyes searching the dark corners of the room and continued: "You had better go away before you get hurt."

Peace took his arm gently and led him to his bedside.

"Sit down," he said, doing so himself.

An Tekuan sat upright on the raised wooden framework of the bed, not relaxing his grim watch. Sitting beside him, Mr. Peace began to talk, scarcely knowing what he said, but feeling he must

keep talking gently about things that might interest An, his farm, his fields, his tenants and his son. After a time there was some response, the Manager relaxed and looked about him, but only for a moment or two. Suddenly, as if caught off his guard, but equal to the occasion, he sprang up, wielding his firewood cudgel, and leapt toward the far side of the room, shouting:

"There he is, there's the old dragon. It is a dragon. I can see him!" and smashed at the furniture by the wall as if to kill something.

Mr. Peace went out, closing the door behind him, and found Wenling where he had left her. His first observations had given him a clue which he wanted to follow up. He had seen men with delirium tremens before now and knew its way of conjuring up delusions of moving creatures before the eyes of chronic drunkards. But this was different. An Tekuan was seeing "dragons" which in another breath he called "devils." Clearly the two were associated in his fevered mind, and as likely as not it was the Chinese conception of dragon and devil as one evil being in two forms that obsessed him. His mania and hallucinations had a religious core.

He put this thought to Wenling, and found that she too had noticed a bias of this nature in his ravings. But often his shoutings were quite unintelligible and he seemed completely demented, or sat on his bed moaning, or marched up and down shouting nonsense. They discussed the matter back and forth without inspiration to guide them in handling the situation. Each came, however, to a conclusion as to how they should act that night. Mr. Peace called two servants and bade them take another bed into An Tekuan's room, while Wenling promised to pray in a neighbouring room as long as she stayed awake.

In with An Tekuan once more, Mr. Peace began his previous methods over again, trying to soothe the madman by a flow of quiet talk as if there were nothing wrong. It appeared to take effect a few times and the Manager even lay down and closed his eyes, but never for long. Up he would jump again to resume his brandishings. This could not go on all night, Mr. Peace foresaw, and abandoned the attempt. He went across to his own bed, slipped out of his cloth shoes, leaving them on the floor beside him, and following the habit acquired from living in houses with mud floors, knelt on the bed, his head resting in his hands on the straw bolster, and prayed. He intended only to pray a while and then lie down, hoping An Tekuan would ultimately do the same.

After a little time, An became silent, sitting on his bed, and later lay down muttering to himself. When Mr. Peace had finished and looked across, he could see by the dim light of the lamp that he was stretched out at full length, and heavy breathing showed him to be asleep. Mr. Peace was aching with fatigue from his journey. He slid down as he was, fully dressed, and in a moment he too slept.

Almost at once, it seemed to him, he was awake again. His brother-in-law was standing by his bed gesticulating and raving as before. Feeble as the light was, it managed to throw grotesque shadows on the high walls, and echoes chased each other from corner to corner like demon voices mocking the sick man in answer to his shouts. They drove him frantic, and, seizing his club, he laid about him, adding the din of blows to the pandemonium of his own cries. Mr. Peace leapt up and seized the lamp, showing that by moving it up and down he could alter the size of the ghostly shapes on the walls. They were under his control: could not be demons menacing Tekuan. In vain.

The charcoal fire was dying down. He dismantled it, laying the hot coals at one side and, building up a heap of black fuel in the centre, replaced the live ones on top. The cold sticks began to glow, to catch fire. An Tekuan watched him doing it. This quiet little man, his brother-in-law, puzzled him. Satisfied, Peace heaped ash over the whole to make it burn slowly. Flecks of white dust caught in the current of hot air were carried to the ceiling like snow floating paradoxically upward, and, repenting, drifted slowly floorwards again to settle widely on the furniture.

Mr. Peace returned to bed and knelt praying. He had no idea of working a charm or miracle, but as minutes passed An grew quieter, lay down, and slept. Peace too lay down, thinking. He was depressed. Was this the breakdown of his hopes for Wenling? Yet it was surely no ordinary madness. Could it be that An had an inclination to believe the Gospel they had so often expounded to him, and the Devil was trying to prevent him? He pondered the subject until sleep began to come over him afresh. But movements on the other bed disturbed him. An Tekuan was stirring. He lifted his head, looked toward the door and, jumping up, yelled:

"There he is! There he is! He's come again."

Peace saw nothing, and said so.

"There, right in the doorway, large as life!" he shouted, and, plunging for the firetongs, danced about, brandishing them as if

daring his tormentor to come on. Peace walked to the door and rattled the wooden bolt that kept it closed. The door was still shut; nothing could have entered. But An's excited brain was equal to that. The apparition had moved across the room, and he was busy defending himself against it.

Drawing the bolt and swinging the door open, Mr. Peace stepped over the high door-sill on to the balcony. It was freezing, but the sky was clear. Stars punctuated the blackness. A dog growled in the courtyard below, and, sensing that the figure up there was Mr. Peace, changed to a whimper of protest against the cold. The distant murmur of a rushing stream was audible, and the far-off howl of a hungry wolf echoed faintly across the valley bowl. He turned back with a shiver. The sound of Wenling praying tearfully in the corner room reached him for a second or two. Everyone in the house must be awake when Tekuan started up.

But the flood of cold air had drawn An's attention and brought him to the door. His eyes were still wild, piercing through Mr. Peace and beyond, savage yet not antagonistic, as if the man behind the tempestuous brain knew Peace as a friend, and depended pitifully upon him. He sat down on the door-sill, his arms resting on his knees, staring out at the pillared courtyard, built to his own design and direction.

Behind him Mr. Peace was praying again, back on his bed, a little moving mountain of bedding with his newly shaven head protruding tortoise-like from one end. Calm crept into An's mind. A falling star relinked his thoughts with the earth, with the fact that he was cold and tired. He got up and closed the door. Glancing at his brother-in-law, he wondered deeply, and lay down. Somewhere within him he connected quiet of mind and sleep with Peace's prayers, and felt safer.

But not for long. Back came the evil thing once more and he awoke sweating and in terror. Mr. Peace, however, had learnt his lesson. He had recalled a likeness between this strange experience and the battle of Rephidim, when victory against Amalek lasted so long as Moses' hands were held aloft. And so whenever An Tekuan stirred up, Peace prayed, a dozen times that night, resisting the Devil and his works, and each time with effect.

Daylight relieved the Manager of his terrors, but left him estranged from his family and Whites. He stayed in his room with the door shut, spurning food, or sat alone on the rocks beyond his

stables, shunning company, even that of Mr. Peace. Already he had been like this for several days, and was growing exhausted. With nightfall his torments returned, but less intensely than before. He was more ready to submit to Peace's persuasion, and though he prayed often in the night, Mr. Peace was able to sleep more soundly.

This continued for another night or two, improving steadily. By day he accepted food and wandered silently in Peace's company along the terraced fields, and looked kindly again at Wenling, and watched his children at play. Meanwhile, Mr. Peace was thinking anxiously of his work and family at Kiehkow, and, seeing the great improvement, begged his sister's leave to go back, promising to return if need be.

6

An Tekuan's recovery was complete. No sign remained of his brainstorm unless it be a mellowness that he did not have before. His gratitude to Wenling and her brother for helping him through his sufferings was unlimited, for sufferings they had truly been to him. Thereafter he took a greater interest in his wife's explanations of her faith and the Bible she so constantly used. He was more friendly and attentive than he had ever been, and was keen to understand and believe. Every day they sat together talking and studying, and An Tekuan learned rapidly with a mental assent and grasp of truths far in advance of his spiritual perception and faith. But he lacked the essential awareness of guilt before God, and as time went by seemed, to Wenling's grief, to be incapable of the final steps which would make him a "new creation" by spiritual rebirth.

Outwardly, however, his attitude was completely changed. He did all in his power to help the local Christians and to support the church, so that some might have called him "converted." But one day he came up against Mr. Peace on this point. It was when the latter was on one of his occasional visits to Temopin. With particular generosity, for which he was well known, An had put into Peace's hand a large sum of money for the Nosu church. There was little, he knew, that could go to his heart so effectively as something to help on this cause among their own people, and was highly surprised when his gift was politely refused. Unknown to himself, Mr. Peace in returning this money was exceeding the depth of maturity and development of many older and more "enlightened" Christians in the churches of "Christian" lands.

THE MANAGER

"Thank you, thank you," he said with a Chinese bow, "but you see, if I took your gift you could not help feeling that the church was in your debt, however slightly. But I want you to realize one day how much you yourself are in need of what she can help you to receive."

He was afraid lest a feeling of patronage to the poorer church should blind him to his own poverty of soul. But An Tekuan was not offended. He did not fully understand, but then there was so much he could not fathom in his wife and her family. They seemed to belong to another world while being such worthwhile members of this one. He puzzled over this new thought, and was spurred on by it in his wish to bridge the gap between himself and them.

CHAPTER TEN

SCATTERED OUTPOSTS: I

"... which qualified him for an active part in work amongst the Christians ..."

I

THE old stock of corn was badly weevilled and the proportion of hollow husks to intact grains rapidly increasing. In the fields the cobs were filling out, but their tufts protruded limply, still pale pink and moist. It would be a month or more till maize harvest when the new stock came in.

To amuse himself and do a useful job, for it was not necessary for Mr. Peace to work on this, he had tipped out a sackful of corn on the narrow verandah around his cottage at Kiehkow, and was spreading it in the sun with a stick, and watching the little armoured insects crawl slowly out and up the wall. Why they chose the wall he could not tell. Perhaps they were making for the shadow of the roof high above, but certainly it was the sun they disliked. As they crawled he cracked and killed them with a pebble one by one, and stirred and spread the corn again.

Mr. Peace looked up, recognizing the footsteps that approached as those of Yohan the preacher. He gave no greeting, just a grunt and nod, for they knew each other well after years as colleagues in the place. To any other caller he would have said courteously, "Mr. So-and-so come. Good!" and they would have replied in the customary way, "Ah, Mr. Peace, sunning your corn, eh!" But Yohan watched in silence for a moment:

"Hheh!" he grunted. "Lots of 'em!"

"Look there," said Mr. Peace pointing to a pile of empty husks representing pounds of food eaten away by the creatures; and Yohan grunted again.

"The *mushih* has been told to go down to the city to take someone's place for a few months," he said after a few moments' pause. Mr. Peace looked up, resting on his stick.

"When is he going?"

"Next week."

"How about the conference trip in the southern district?"

"Can't stay for it. He wants to know if you will go instead. It is too much for just Su Mohsi and me."

Mr. Peace wiped his brow, thinking. There were robbers about the valley. They had been hanging round for days doing nothing, and might be contemplating mischief. It would not be easy to leave the family alone.

"Programme's fixed and everyone will be coming to hear the *mushih*. Mustn't disappoint them with only Mohsi and me as usual," said Yohan.

Very true, Peace realized. The life of the country churches was at a low enough ebb without more to dishearten them. He himself had not been out on a country trip for a long time, and he knew Yohan and Su Mohsi would find it hard to cope with the published conference subjects; they would be hard enough for him himself. He could leave the school to his assistant and an elder scholar to manage till he returned.

"When do you start?" he enquired.

"Day after to-morrow," Yohan said. "I'll lend you my grey gelding. No time to get your horse up from Hopien."

"Right!" said Mr. Peace. "I'll come round and see the *mushih* about it."

And he hailed a lanky servant boy to gather up the corn lest his fowls should get amongst it.

2

The robbers had gone away, and Peace and Yohan were in lighter mood as they prepared to mount for their long trek. It would be three weeks before they were back. Mr. Peace was wearing his usual clothes but for stouter shoes and a voluminous felt cape, but Yohan presented a striking appearance. He was garbed to the knees in a felt cloak made in three layers, each overlapping the other. The upper one was like an ordinary Nosu cape; below it were two side panels which hung down over his legs as he rode; and another apron-like layer flowed out behind, over his saddle and the horse's rump. His feet were wrapped in sacking and shod with straw sandals. Fully dressed, with his bearded face crowned by a wide-brimmed rain hat, and mounted on a spirited black colt, he looked the part of villain in the piece.

Escorted by Meili and Jenhan to the cattle track, they set off down the valley followed at a distance by an old White hired for the

purpose of carrying their spare clothes and bedding and books. He rejoiced in the name of "Wuko," Fifth Big Brother, and maintained his dignity, if any, by a steady jogtrot at his own pace, always slower than the others with whom he travelled.

The road took them down past the lower village, where Christian Whites hailed them and wished them Godspeed. At the bottom it entered the gorge between large boulders strewn the foot of the cliffs, and for five miles they had to wind in and out among rocks and shingle banks, fording frequently, going southward along the river bed toward its junction with the Kolo stream. Yohan had a stepson who lived down here, and after two hours' of continuous riding they were glad to dismount in the boggy yard before the door of his hut among fields of high corn, and to sit for a few minutes in his dark room amongst his ploughs and grindstones and domestic knick-knackery, to re-fortify themselves with corncakes. Yohan's family relationships were too complicated to follow, as both he and his present wife had been married and widowed more than once.

Wuko had not caught up when they remounted, and they had perforce to leave him to come on in his own time. After a mile or two of mud paths on the sides of steep valleys high above water level, they came to a stone paved roadway fully four feet wide. Old Chinese roads like this were occasionally met with up in the mountains, the remains of early activities by the Chinese conquerors of two hundred years ago. They usually led to a colony of Chinese living in a close-built village, with village street and meagre shops. The women were conspicuous by their feet deformed by binding, an evil custom still in practice, and wrapped around with so much bandaging surmounted by red cloth that the result was elephantine and ugly. Nosu women living near these communities tended to copy the fashion, but had healthy feet protruding from ankles six inches thick, a peculiar sight.

Riding into a village like this, called by its old Nosu name of Achiche, Mr. Peace and Yohan found themselves in a throng of marketers. The whole place was fortified with well-built stone walls and towers that made Mr. Peace feel ill at ease. Groups of gamblers were squatting in the open spaces surrounded by mobs of spectators intent on watching the high stakes change hands, buyers and sellers were scattered along the road, and here and there were leather-jerkined men with rifles and well-stocked bandoliers, and

daggers at their waists. They were glad to turn a corner and, by dropping down a flight of steps in the main road, to put themselves out of sight of the staring men.

They had made a late start and day was dying before they reached their destination, the first of a little chain of churches peppered through the mountains. It had been arranged that they should spend each night at a different place, conducting services for the local Christians, and at each of three larger centres should stay for three days, holding three meetings daily. Before starting the final climb of two hundred feet in a mere quarter of a mile, obliquely up the face of the ravine, to the home of the church elder on top, they called and halloed for Wuko. He had their kit and should not be far behind, but they heard no answering sound. He was living up to his reputation for cheerful laziness. But a crowd of schoolboys rushed down to meet them and took charge of their horses. Even for one night's visit by the preachers, it was thought worth while to return ten miles from school in order to be present.

3

Their welcome by the old elders and their families was vociferous and melting, as it might well be. Only once in every three or four months did they get visits from the preachers, if as often, and the rest of the time relied upon one of their own number to lead their worship and expound the Scriptures to them. With a minimum of knowledge and ability to help them, it was not surprising if their limited variation of themes tended to pall on their congregations.

Mr. Peace and Yohan were conducted to a short ladder and scrambled up to a spacious loft. Beneath was a sheep pen from which an orchestra of bleats and scuffings accompanied everything they said and did, till the time they left next day. An old, old man sat mouthing on a wide bed spread with grey and red felting, and disappeared behind a mesh of smiling wrinkles as he rocked himself in greeting. This was to be their dining-room, bedroom and meeting place.

For an hour or two they sat gossiping after the invariable custom of the country, saying little, thinking less, unconscious of time as a factor to be considered, till youths appeared bearing trays of steaming food and everyone drew back while a low table was brought up and the meal laid on it. Around the table some forms were set,

and with much coaxing and pushing the visitors and older Christians took their seats, two on each side, and removed their caps and turbans for a long and all-inclusive "grace."

It was on these occasions that the difference between Mr. Peace and Yohan became pronounced. While the former hung back, his face wreathed in embarrassed smiles, seeking the lowliest seat, Yohan's pleasure was undisguised and he was content to sit wherever he was put.

For the guests of honour rice, mixed with buckwheat to make it go further, was served. Everyone else had ground maize steamed till it swelled into a form like very palatable moist sawdust. A noisy tapping on the table to bring the ends of their chopsticks together—just twigs of bamboo cut to approximately the same length—preceded a hearty launching into the meal. It was as if the old adage held amongst them, "No work between meals, but work hard then." With unabashed plunging and tossing and shovelling, they attacked the dishes. If time was no object before, it was now. Speed showed appreciation, and incidentally secured the best tit-bits. Yet they all behaved with careful etiquette, pointing with their chopsticks at the bowls of meat, provided only on great occasions like this, and saying, "*Ch'ing, ch'ing!* Come on!" Two of the party were women, yet as senior members of the church they sat side by side with the men, conversing and eating. Nosu views on feminine modesty were different from Chinese.

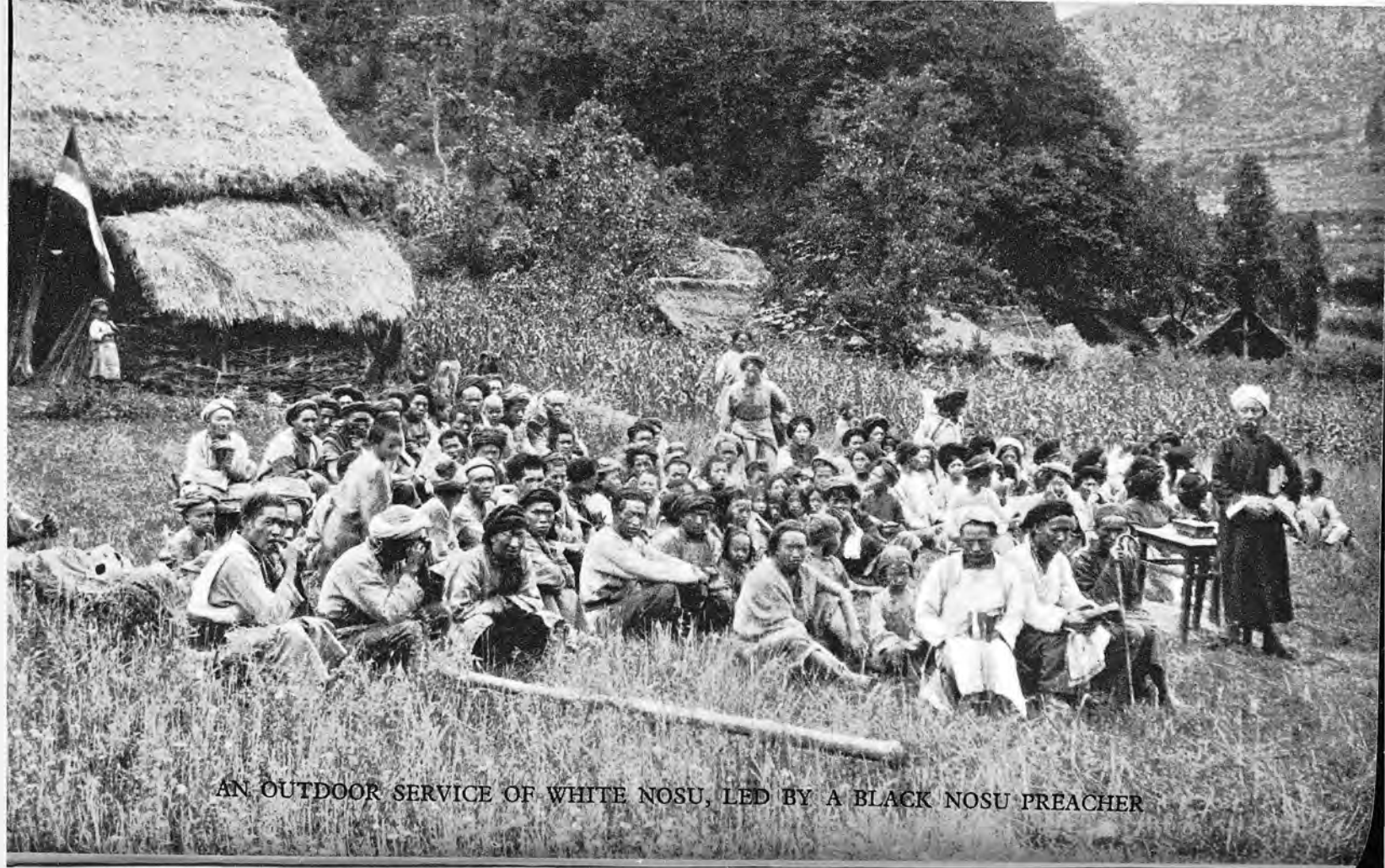
A saucer lamp hung from the scrub bamboo ceiling and threw an inadequate light upon the people as they gathered for the meeting. One by one they climbed the step ladder and found a seat on the floor, on blocks of wood or on a corner of the old grandfather's bed. The table was cleared and Bibles found for Mr. Peace and Yohan. Wuko had still not come, though a few young men had gone out with flares and called through the darkness to guide him. With him were the preachers' books and notes. They would not see them now till to-morrow at the earliest, assuming that he had not absconded with all he had of their bedding and clothes.

The service began with Yohan leading off. Reciting a hymn line by line, he repeated it with all the company. A score of faces looked out of dark shadows, reflecting the reddish-yellow light. At the end of a verse Yohan began to sing and they all joined in, verse by verse, hymn after hymn. Now and then for a less familiar hymn, a pile of resinous pine chips would be drawn upon by a schoolboy of



TWO BLACK NOSU LANDOWNERS

WHITE NOSU SERFS



AN OUTDOOR SERVICE OF WHITE NOSU, LED BY A BLACK NOSU PREACHER

eighteen or twenty, and, turning them skilfully to keep them burning, he would hold them flaming above his head. By their bright romantic glare all with books could see to read. While Chinese words were being used, the women were slow to sing, for they understood and spoke them poorly, but at times a Nosu hymn from Mr. Peace's book of translations would be used, and a new zest would sweep through the congregation. These hymns they loved, and sang with a rhythm and cadence peculiar to their race.

Interspersed with prayer and reading, the meeting had gone on for the best part of an hour when Mr. Peace stood up to speak. He had welcomed this tour that he might see again at first hand the people who were his Nosu church, might assess for himself their shortcomings and take these first-rate opportunities to encourage and inspire them. He told the story of Gideon, who dared to act alone against the devotees of Baal, who sent home more than thirty-two thousand armed men and routed the hosts of Midian with three hundred; of how those three hundred, faint yet pursuing, kept up the chase. His style was never heroic or eloquent. A quiet gentleman always, he related the story and applied its teaching with simple conviction, pointing out its likeness to the Nosu church's state in numbers and opportunity. Among his listeners were those who slept, nudged by a neighbour if their breathing became too heavy, but that was always so, no matter who preached or where. For the most part, faces were intent and glad to hear him.

Ending, he summoned them all to stand and pray, as freely as they liked, before separating. Everyone's eyes were closed and each began to pray aloud his personal prayers and thanksgivings as if he were alone, unconscious of others around him unless he were learning to pray by copying a neighbour. The volume of sound dwindled as one after another stopped, until the last had finished and Yohan said a benediction.

Silently they dispersed, filing down the ladder, and the preachers were left to share the room with just one or two others, and to make their beds and lie down. A few planks and some straw, Yohan's felt cloak and the little bedding they had brought on their saddles, and they slept. They woke from time to time to scratch, for the fleas in the straw were legion, and to chase away the rats that climbed by way of their pillows to some grain baskets above. But mostly their soft snoring mingled with the restless sounds from the sheep pen below.

A long journey lay before them next day, so the morning meeting was cut short as soon as Wuko arrived. He had slept in a wayside cottage after being benighted, and, as was expected, refused to admit that he had been unnecessarily slow. Leading the horses, they zigzagged down from the house through rocky thickets to the river bank. A two-hundred-foot cliff covered with an inaccessible forest of undergrowth and giant trees cast black shadows on the water. They had to cross over, but it was too deep here, and when they found a place Wuko was not to be seen and time was wasted in waiting for him and helping him to ford it with his load.

After that they climbed slowly up and down over succeeding ribs of hill until midday, and came out on to a swell of upland, largely barren, but broken by hazel and rhododendron. Beneath a black rock conspicuous among a jumble of summits they sat to eat and to rest their horses while the carrier caught up. This rock was a meeting place of the worshippers of the spring of water that flowed from its foot. No one knew who first began to worship it, for Chinese and Nosu both joined in the rites with a mixture of animistic and idolatrous ritual. With the bits removed from their mouths, the horses foraged for themselves, plucking hither and thither with strong active lips, choosing the more tender blades from among the harsh knife-edged grass tufts on the bank. And Yohan and Mr. Peace lay stretched out on their backs watching the rain clouds gather.

In several hours of travel they scarcely saw a soul: just a woman in rags with a baby on her back, strapped in position, gleaning potatoes from a forsaken field, and a *pêmo* and his *mila* going to work charms at a sick man's house. Then they struck a main road nearly wide enough for a hand cart to traverse, but broken up by boulders and pitfalls. A train of a score or more Chinese coolies carrying slabs of black salt from Szechwan stopped to watch the two Nosu pass, resting their loads on T-shaped staves and whistling loudly between their teeth as they relaxed.

"How much are you carrying?" asked Mr. Peace.

"A hundred and fifty pounds each," they answered in a chorus quite truthfully, a little puzzled by his pronunciation, and starting off to travel a few more yards before halting again. Small wonder they died like flies!

Not far on two children of Christians waiting by the roadside waved as the horsemen appeared. Yohan slowed down from a fast trot and, greeting them cheerily, swung off his rain hat and handed it to the boy. They broke into a run, keeping up with the horses till exhausted, and fell back laughing. On the top of a hillock ahead a group of men stood up and hailed the preachers. They were farmers dressed in their best blue gowns and leather jerkins, out to give the *mushih* a rousing welcome to their hamlet of Machuanai. When they heard of his summons to the city they quickly hid their disappointment in welcomes to Mr. Peace, and with unfeigned pleasure escorted him to the little mud house that was the meeting place of the church and the home of the children who had met them. The local elder apologized for the poverty of his place and the meagre hospitality which was all he could provide.

"It's only a mud house, he said, "but it was well built," and pointed to where Mr. Peace's horse had found a groove in the wall rich in salt petre, and was licking at it hungrily. "See how deep they have worn that wall," said he. "That shows how long this house has stood already."

Here again the Christians gathered night and morning and listened to Yohan and Mr. Peace taking it in turns to preach and teach hymns and Scripture.

With dusk it began to rain, lightly but persistently, and from that time to the end of their three weeks' trek it rained not all but every day on which they took the road. Rain, rain, rain. The roads became bogs, or so slippery that the animals lost their footing. The streams became gorged and difficult to ford. The mountains were hidden and the route became hard to find, with familiar landmarks screened from view. And Mr. Peace never felt secure on Yohan's old horse, which had weak knees and often tripped. A bridge had once collapsed beneath it, hurling it twenty feet into the gully below. Their capes were soaked and the clothes beneath them. Often it was cold, too, and hard to hold the reins, but they grew used to it. Shepherds and ploughmen were not deterred, simply saying "The mists are heavy to-day," so neither could the preachers be. Arriving at Christian homes each night, they hung their sopping clothes on the farming gear and left them to drip and dry while they themselves hugged the fire and hung their footwear from the beams or drying racks directly over it.

The next day was the first under these conditions, but fortunately

they had not far to go. After only three hours' riding, during which time it poured in drenching torrents, they came to a range of treeless mountains, from the crests of which protruded sharp cones of rock, the fangs of some calcific monster reaching into the clouds, grey limestone pinnacles thrust up in confusion along the skyline.

"Su Mohsi's range," said Peace reflectively.

"And I believe he's up there waiting for us," answered Yohan, pointing with his switch at a solitary dark figure standing by his horse far up on the glaxis ahead. Drawing closer, they could see him more distinctly, wearing a long black overcoat in pseudo-Western style and a great rain hat so broad that the rivulets running from its brim fell clear of his shoulders. His mouth opened cavernously and a roar of welcome came down to them.

"Here come the two *pang k'ê* (guests with clubs). Two highway-men!" he cried, laughing loudly at his own joke as he gazed at Mr. Peace perched on the rotund grey, as harmless as they make 'em.

But the jibe would have fitted him himself. He was a reincarnated buccaneer, a pirate of classic description, as if the Western world had become too tame and he had been lifted up and set in the wild world of these mountains. He was arrayed beneath the black coat in a mustard yellow jersey and long black knitted trousers of his own make. His spirit was that of a dashing, reckless adventurer, but he had the heart of a religious boy. In his own home to which he led them he was the cock of the roost, but a self-deprecating back ranker amongst his fellow church leaders.

Riding forward, he led them at breakneck speed along the rain-soaked slopes, too fast for the terrain, too fast for the good of the horses, but as carefree as a schoolboy in spite of his more than fifty years. Ahead of the others, he made them follow in a crazy procession, sliding his animal on its haunches down muddy banks and cantering it where the others would only walk. He called his beast "the purple horse" because of its coat of mixed red and grey hair. It knew him perfectly and he had trained it to pranks which other horses would refuse.

In his home a minor feast was being spread to celebrate the occasion. Although a White Nosu himself, he was a well-off freeman and had families of servants in his home and around to tend his fields. All had to join in the feasting, so that it was late before they finished and the evening meeting could begin. While his guests were eating, Mohsi stood over the table switching away the flies with a

horse-tail whisk and keeping up a flow of fun. This was his element, a grandfather in the home, surrounded by those dependent upon him, his hens and dogs gleaning the rice grains and bones dropped under the tables, and his guests complimenting him on the food and on the cable-stitch jerseys of his making in which his grandchildren were clad.

"Who taught you to do it?" asked Mr. Peace.

Mr. Su looked solemn, unbefittingly. "Will you believe it?" he asked. "The Lord did. I haven't had a lesson from a soul, just worked it out with the Lord's help. Copying someone else's, of course."

An interesting cavalcade started out from his group of cottages next morning. Yohan and Peace and "Old Mr. Su," as he loved to be called, with his wife, ten years his senior, and a canary-clad granddaughter of eight, were mounted on horses. Between and behind them in single file, which was all that the trail would allow, came a troop of men and women, boys and girls, all bound for the first three-day conference at Cheleko, carrying their food and bedding with them.

5

The hamlet of Cheleko was largely Christian and possessed a ruined barn that they used exclusively as a chapel. The church buildings nearly everywhere were no more than rickety sheds, and lack of understanding about the sanctity of buildings set apart for worship led to neglect and misuse. Mr. Peace himself would store and thresh his oats in the chapel at Kiehkow when it was not in use, because he had never learned the value of treating it as a House of God alone. To them it was a hall for secular purposes as well. At Cheleko the wooden walls had been taken down, logs had been laid in rows on the mud floor as seats, and a rickety platform of planks erected at one side to raise the speakers above the congregation of nearly a hundred people, men to one side and women the other. Three times daily the spiral ram's horn sounded and they foregathered whether it rained or not, singing and praying and following through the sequence of addresses which Mr. Peace and Yohan gave with Su Mohsi's help.

Old Mohsi's handicap was his complete lack of education. To his credit be it said that he had taught himself to read, though he

admitted he could only cope with print, and to write a little of the new Nosu phonetic script. He had served on the committee that had worked it out originally. But often when reading from the Bible he would pause and cough and adjust his second-hand spectacles and make a few guesses, as if his eyesight were to blame for these lapses. And he had another shield or bad habit, too: the repetition of certain words brought haphazard into his reading or addresses—*k'o-i*, *nêng-kou*, and *chiu-shih*, and sometimes *k'ung-p'a*, which mean "all right," "able to," "that is," and "perhaps." At the opening of the conference he made the introductory remarks, throwing back his head and wreathing his villainous face in smiles.

"We have come together this evening, that is, all right, to meet to worship and all right able to sing, and to listen to teaching from the Bible that is. Now among you all right there may be some who have come hoping to hear a gramophone. Well, the all right perhaps *mushih* has had to go away unexpectedly, but you all right must not do the same, will you?"

To those who did not know him this was highly confusing for the first few minutes, but smiles would begin to spread round the listeners and little boys would whisper "all right, able to" to each other, and before he had finished everyone would be so used to it as to neglect its presence altogether except when it altered the meaning too absurdly of what he said.

The numbers dropped a little when the curious grew bored and went home, but for the most part they went solidly through the programme, one meeting before the morning meal, two meetings during the day, and a second meal at dusk.

At this place there was a number of men and women who wanted to be baptized, so a session for the examination of them was arranged in an elder's home. The candidates one by one, or, if bashful women, in pairs, sat on a bench before the preachers and senior elders while questions were asked at random. In the doorways and dark corners knots of inquisitive spectators gathered to watch the ordeal, standing like deaf dolts when told to go, till efforts to move them were abandoned.

"Why do you want to be baptized?" asked Mr. Peace of one young farmer.

"My family told me to," came the answer.

"What do you think about it yourself?"

"Fine!"

SCATTERED OUTPOSTS

This was not very promising, though the examiners knew the candidate as a steady, sincere Christian of three or four years' standing. They helped him along, gradually finding his own reasons and beliefs to be entirely satisfactory. Another was a woman who sat in unbroken silence, too embarrassed to emit a sound, though her mouth opened feebly. She was deputed to wait till she could be questioned by women, to give her a fair chance. Some youths came up, but were asked to wait a further year or two to prove their stability. This was the age of great temptations through persecution, pressure to join in raiding parties, or wife-snatching. But one was accepted, a tall young Apollo who had distinguished himself already.

On the Sunday afternoon the whole conference adjourned to the fields, where a brook had been dammed to make a large pool. Two elders stood in the water with a crowd of church folk and spectators on the banks, and with prayer and singing baptized the five who had been approved. To Mr. Peace, whose work had always lain chiefly in Kiehkow itself, these country trips were always a stimulus. Here he could see the church alive and at work. Here he saw the fine stuff that some of the Christians were made of, and heard first-hand the circumstances that brought about the fall of others.

As they rode on day by day from group to group of isolated Christians, he found their problems becoming far more his own concern. He grieved over the spiritual catastrophes of old believers who had taken concubines after the racial custom, and sympathized with those who had been robbed or falsely accused at law. He talked and prayed with a father whose seven sons had died in an epidemic, one by one. Everyone in the village was exhorting the man to take another wife, for the mother of his sons could bear no more, and he was torn with fear for their old age if they had no son to care for them. At another home a wolf had broken into the sheep-fold, through the rotten bars of a window, and in a night the poor man's wealth had been decimated.

But what he noticed more than anything was the pathetic ignorance of fundamental truths. Some of those he spoke to had the idea that the Virgin Mary was twelve years old when Christ was born, and held to it doggedly, but could not tell him, for example, the importance of the Resurrection. He realized how sorely the church needed building up and teaching, more than one missionary and a handful of half-trained preachers could accomplish. "Just starting

them off isn't enough," he thought to himself. "They must be taught and trained and disciplined. And continuity is essential."

That was the trouble. With the *mushihs'* help, the church had been well organized and shown how to maintain discipline in its ranks, but they had bowed to expediency without regard to the principles involved, and insoluble tangles had resulted. Old Ammon was a case in point. (He had chosen his name from the Bible without consideration of its associations.) Too ignorant to know better, and influenced by the Old Testament, he had taken a second wife. But in his little church among the south-eastern mountains he was the most zealous Christian, arranging and conducting services, catering for visiting preachers, taking messages to distant groups of believers. If he had been cut off at once, the whole church in his locality would have disintegrated. It was a case of jettisoning the daughter-church or keeping old Ammon. They procrastinated, winked at his bigamy for the sake of the others, and rebuked him so ineffectively that he later took yet another wife and was copied by his friends.

Mr. Peace was perplexed at present, but not downcast. It was good to see so many churches firmly planted in his countryside.

6

Day after day they went on. From Cheleko past the home of a famous *pêmo* and a whitewashed building that had once been a chapel but now had no Christians to meet in it, over a pass and into a volcano-like crater, the Great Flax Pit. Here Miao boys and girls came out to welcome them in red and yellow embroideries which had won for them the name of the Small Flowery Miao because of the delicacy of their designs. The elder, a sharp-featured, sharp-witted Lilliputian, and his resplendent but conceited daughter did the honours. Su Mohsi was travelling with them now and received a special welcome, for he it was who loved to sing, in spite of a tuneless voice, and kept them going till the early hours of the morning singing verses of Scripture to new tunes.

At the next place a converted *pêmo* entertained them for a night. Fêng *Pêmo's* home had been burned down and he was living in a shack whose walls were made of anything available—boards, mill-wheels, cornstalks, branches. Big gaps let the wind howl through, but no one noticed that. And the inner room set apart for the preachers contained a coffin, but it was probably not an occupied one as it might well have been in a non-Christian house.

Out on the road, away from their congregations, they behaved like schoolboys, even in pouring rain. That was old Mohsi's influence. One of the party was temporarily horseless, so the others schemed to make him ride theirs. Riding ahead, one would tether his beast to a tree, leaving the horseless one to find it, and walk on, hiding while the others passed, and following till he found that someone else had left his mount and repeated the performance. Mr. Peace in this way came to ride Su Mohsi's "purple" horse, and after taking a toss over the brute's head decided that preachers should behave more sedately.

The people in the next region were in distress. A wave of smallpox of the most lethal type was sweeping through their villages, and robbers were harrying them unmercifully. The welcome to the travellers was cold, and crowds of unsympathetic yokels stood staring at their every movement most suspiciously. They were glad to get away again and on to the next conference centre, though it would mean leaving the home of the poor man who had lost all his sons.

The rivers were raging full. Sometimes the horses could barely keep their feet when fording, but this was what Su Mohsi most enjoyed. Always it was he who led the way, but not always successfully. They came one day to a broken bridge and had to make a detour. Mohsi led them along a high bank till he found it taking them into greater difficulties. To him the solution was simple. He rode his "purple" friend to the edge and jumped to the field below. To Yohan's colt it was a new experience and, essaying to do the same, he fell headlong, throwing his rider in a heap, but Mr. Peace, forewarned, forced his horse down alone and scrambled after it on his own legs, gleefully scorning the bellows of mockery from the old buccaneer.

Yet Mohsi was not all frivolity. He took every chance that came his way to gossip the Gospel with passers-by or with any who might share the fire at night. At the end of a long ride through the wildest country they came one evening to a strong little church led by a faithful Black Nosu. It had been a hard day's travel. Clouds enveloped them on the mountain tops, hiding their landmarks so that they lost the way. By labouring across a ploughed field, however, they managed to find a thatched hovel and called for directions. But there was only a frightened child cowering in the doorway, and their echoes answered them emptily from hill to hill. At last a shepherd pointed out a gravel slope down which they slid into the depths

of a valley. It led them by a great landlord's castellated home into a world of cliffs from which they saw no outlet. A waterfall springing to all appearances out of the very rock face fell a hundred feet, casting its spray almost to the path they trod. Only when they were past it could they see the cleft through which the water came, fed by another fall of the same height. From there they climbed where it had seemed impossible for a path to lie, clinging to their horses' tails while the animals tore powerfully with their hooves at the steep track. On arrival at the chapel high in a valley never free from the roar of falling water, Mr. Peace found that the day's travel had cost his beast three shoes.

Hardly were they seated and drying their clothes over a blazing log fire than a bugle call was heard and a few minutes later, with much noise and ostentation, the captain of the local militia came in, followed by his guard. He had come to favour the visitors with his company. He had little in common with them, but Su Mohsi had found it in a moment and was well into a conversation. The captain, called by the title of *pao-chang*, was in charge of a limited area of countryside, and was responsible for keeping the peace. His senior, the *hsiang-chang*, a wealthy man set over several *pao-changs*, had just been deposed from office by an uprising of the people, so bitterly had he taxed and oppressed them, and the *pao-chang* was feeling the aftermath of lawlessness arising from the upheaval. As smoothly as could be, Su Mohsi guided the conversation into a discussion with him of the causes of the trouble, and the fundamental need of changing men's hearts if their actions are to be made right.

The *pao-chang* had scarcely gone when a clash of rifles with fixed bayonets announced the entry of a local Black and his retinue. This man was blind to everything in life but revenge. Some relative had been killed in a feud fight years before, and fresh hate and lust for blood had been stirred up which would not be appeased until the enemy family had been wiped out. This was no game. Here it was not a retainer that had died, but one of his own blood. He sat by the fire. Hate had completed the work of inbreeding and turned him half-mad. But with him too, fatigued though they all were by hard travelling, Mohsi talked, teaching and exhorting that by any means possible he might bring him to a sense of guilt and the need of forgiveness through Christ. They persuaded him to stay for the evening service, and he sat amongst the Christians surrounded by his armed villains, with picquets posted outside, the light of flaming pine chips

SCATTERED OUTPOSTS

glinting and flickering on their weapons, while Yohan preached the Gospel fearlessly to them. But he went away saying, "When I have had my revenge I will come and hear you again."

Thus day in, day out, in place after place, they taught the Christians, exhorting to life on a higher plane and, meeting those to whom the Gospel was new and strange, preached its unsearchable truths.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SCATTERED OUTPOSTS: II

" . . . scattered through his native mountains."

I

THE last conference was over, and only one more duty remained to Mr. Peace before starting on his journey home. After all the publicity of these three weeks, he was looking forward to the quiet of his own family and home. At this last place the staring schoolboys had been more than usually trying. They had found peepholes through the bamboo ceiling of the preachers' room, and given them little opportunity to prepare their addresses in peace. He knew the country life too well to expect real privacy of any kind, and sauntered out when need be into a copse or among the standing maize. However, in this place even when he withdrew into the fields or forest he had been followed and watched. Yohan's preparation was always sketchy and unlearned, and consequently his discourses lasted longer than anyone's. Any thought that struck him as he preached he pursued to its death, losing his point as completely as his audience did. But to Mr. Peace's orderly mind there was a need of quiet in which to crystallize his thoughts, and the strain of battling against incessant interruption was exhausting.

And then the flies and filth! Wherever they went the houses were full of flies, clouds of them buzzing and settling, preening and scavenging, on the food, in the food, dead and alive. This place too had been the worst for flies. It was impossible to pick them out of the food with his chopsticks because the less fastidious would be finished before he began to eat. Flies lay there as profusely as the pox and had to be neglected. Anyway, if most were found and separated out, the rest would be missed in the half-light and eaten, so why not all? They were on the people too, scores on one woman's back, more of them ranged along her baby's eyes like horses at a trough, and at the infant's nostrils, so encrusted that it snored through its open mouth as it slept. So it was good to think of home and cleanliness again.

This tour, moreover, had been one long round of feasting. Wherever they went it was to the country Christians one of the events of the year, worthy of killing a valuable sheep. Once or twice

it had been pork, and once only chicken, but everywhere else mutton. Meat every day was a luxury, but the taste and fat clung to his palate from meal to meal, always strongly flavoured by the mint with which it had been stewed. And everywhere the intestines were reserved for the guests of honour, chopped in rings and cooked till tough and indigestible.

Between meals, here, the raw meat hung at an open window in the loft above them, and during their conference meetings the attention of the audience had been regularly distracted to watch the one appointed as cook climb up to the loft, chop the required amount of meat from the carcase, and carry it to the back of the room where the meeting was being held. It was always prepared there, and the cook's whisperings and manipulations competed with the preacher to win the attention of the people, while the smoke of the wood fire blinded him with tears, so that sometimes he could not see to refer to his Bible or notes. Yet they could hardly be denied their celebrations. It was only the preachers who met it everywhere, and it was a sign of respect to them. But soon they would be on the road again, heading for home.

First, however, Mr. Peace had to ride out into the hills to call on an old schoolboy of his who was ill and had asked for him. The man's younger brother had gone to Kiehkow and back during the conference to fetch some medicine of known value for this disease, travelling on foot in drenching rain, over eighty miles in two and a half days. From his home a horse was brought by a servant to fetch Mr. Peace to see the patient. The schoolboy had changed. As a man, it was hard to recognize him. He had been emaciated by his illness, but his eyes had become so hard, so evil, in the intervening years.

The house was of fine woodwork, well-carved and latticed, but screened all round by a close brushwood fencing to give an appearance of frugality. Inside it gave more evidence of wealth, yet the patient was lying on no more than a felt mat over straw beside the mud stove. Around him several evil-looking cronies sat, who bade Mr. Peace be seated on a bench. Out of deference to his teacher, the patient tried to raise himself on his elbow, but gladly relaxed again when he protested. His brother brought a large black earthenware pot of water and crumbled into it two cakes of brown sugar, setting it on the fire where it came slowly to the boil, and broke into the bubbling syrup five eggs. Immediately a copious white froth rose to the brim and continued to rise as the young man scooped it off

with a brass ladle and tipped it on the floor. Several hens and an obese dog left the egg-shells and dived for the sweet fluid, pecking and lapping until they were kicked away.

Mr. Peace gazed round the room. On the wall an ancient sabre hung in a wooden scabbard, and beside it two bayonets of the skewer type. Above them were the dried corpses of two birds and a toad, no doubt the charms a *pêmo* had provided to cure the man. He pointed at them and asked why his old pupil had forsaken his early ways.

"It was inconvenient," he answered. "Our environment is not good."

Peace understood. Here was another young fellow who had found outlawry and spirit-worship the path of least resistance, and the Christian way too hard. Near him stood a ruffianly man of about thirty, his chief friend, wearing a turban, coat and trousers all of blue, with a white sash round his waist, yellow puttees, and bare feet. His trousers were of the traditional Nosu pattern, each leg at least four feet in circumference, reaching below the knees. And thrust through the left side of his sash he carried an eighteen-inch dagger, brass-handled, with a large red tassel dangling from the sheath. He was a man capable of any wickedness, and Mr. Peace shrank from him. This was the company his old scholar had been keeping.

Satisfied at last, the young brother served four poached eggs and syrup in a bowl with chopsticks, and presented them to Mr. Peace. At this the patient could neglect his old master no longer, and, rising up, climbed to a bench in defiance of united protests, and ate a syrupy egg himself. His downfall was as sudden and complete, and he sank again to his rough bed. There was little Mr. Peace could do but give him sage advice, so when he had recovered enough to take it in, he delivered the medicine with instructions and, his purpose accomplished, rose to go. Nor did they attempt to delay him, knowing that he had a journey still to make that morning. The younger brother saw him down the path, and crying in Nosu "*Lieh ma hon!* Don't come any further!", Peace climbed into his saddle and was away.

By now he was tired of travelling. Day after day in drizzling rain they had ridden, day after day the weary round of arriving wet and sitting talking and eating snacks or roasting corn-cobs on hot ashes

till darkness fell and supper was produced. For Yohan it was different. He favoured these small, frequent meals with large ones wedged in between. At last, however, they were homeward bound.

One morning they came upon a big gang of workmen excavating a hillside. He knew at once what it must be, the new strategic motor road of which he had heard tell, a road right through their mountains linking Szechwan with the new Burma Road. There were said to be a few score of Chinese from the coastal provinces supervising the work, who were unused to the rough life of the country and insisted on good food—rice, fowls and delicacies. Clashes had occurred between them and the local people who objected to being forced to sell at arbitrary prices. Knowing this, Mr. Peace and Yohan made a detour to avoid the scene. No good could come of risking a quarrel with these men or their soldier guards, men capable of "commandeering" their animals and carrier or anything.

Further on the waters of a lake had risen till the path was covered, and, as they forced their nervous horses to wade out along a path which might have subsided into bottomless depths, they could see goldfish floating near the surface. But soon the road fell down to yet another lakeside, a beautiful lake with an island in the centre and soft reflections swaying in the water, on whose pine-clothed banks lay the village where they were to pass the night. As they approached it, a little old man came out to meet them, riding a pony so small that it was called a "sheep horse." The *mushih* had been able to touch the ground with both his feet while sitting astride it.

Old Elder Chang opened his big mouth and called a toothless welcome—and yet not toothless; he refused to admit that he was toothless; he was not, for there in proof it lay, a real tooth, if an only one, his pride and joy. He was a jovial little man, amused at himself as much as anything, but overjoyed to have someone else to tease, so that Yohan, with his simple grin and good humour, was always doubly welcome. The warmth of his greeting was enough to compensate even for the prospect of stewed mutton and mint for the twenty-second successive day, and Mr. Peace was soon glad that they had had to call here. Old Chang was one of the very first Nosu Christians. He had never developed far, but was like a model child in the Faith. He ushered them to seats around his fire, and, bringing a basketful of small potatoes, tipped half on to the red coals to roast, and idly turned them as his visitors talked.

For him it was a special occasion, and he had called all his old friends together to meet the preachers, who found they were the youngest present. Old Chang was quick to see this and chortled merrily. "What a collection of old grandfathers! Old age and no brains to meet youth and wisdom!" And his simple friends went off in peals of laughter.

"Tell us about the old days," said Mr. Peace presently, glad of an opportunity to hear these old-stagers' experiences.

"The old days?" cackled the old man. "Do you mean before the Manchus defeated us Nosu? I wasn't here then!" and he dissolved again in toothless guffaws and a tidal wave of wrinkles that swept up over his face and submerged his eyes.

"But I can tell you about a foreigner who came here hunting for the tombs of the Nosu kings," he continued. (The grave mounds of the last of the royal line lie not many miles away.) Picking up a blackened potato, he casually examined it. It was soft, so with a half-inch of protruding thumb-nail he scraped the skin off and passed the finished product across to Mr. Peace. Taking the cue, they all fell to, scraping and eating while he went on:

"He was big and fat and covered with black hair. I had never seen anything like him before; with white skin like the *mushih's*. Ha, ha, ha! I bolted. Didn't stop running till I got home, though I was more than forty then!"

"Was he a Roman Catholic priest?" asked Mr. Peace, knowing that some had been through at about that time.

"No!" said the old man. "We've never had them up this way. Except a party that travelled through soon afterwards," he corrected himself.

"Plenty of them over near the River of Gold," said an old fellow in the shadows. "They've been there years and years, but haven't got on very well."

"I've always wanted to ask," chimed in another, addressing Mr. Peace, "how Roman Catholics and Protestants began, and why they are different."

"I always think of it like this," Peace answered, seizing the opportunity, so rare, to instruct his friends. "Roman Catholicism is like a track on the hillside which has veered away from the old position (the church of the Apostles) into a wrong direction because the surface was easier going by the new way, and more straightforward to follow. The Protestant faith is the continuation of the old thin

GORGE IN NOSULAND



ON THE ROAD FROM
KIEHKOW TO KOPU





TWO STURDY BURDEN-BEARERS

track, stony and rough and hard to see over a long stretch of history, but becoming clear again when some who had realized that the Roman road was wrong, broke away across rough country at the Reformation to rejoin the right track. After that it becomes broader and well-worn once more. Many people have been led completely astray by the false path, which is Salvation by Self-effort, but some do find a little side-track from it which leads them back where the old path lies, Salvation by Faith in Christ."

He stopped. The old toothless one was looking as if he would burst unless he could say something. At last he had his chance.

"Did you hear of that priest who was dragged along the road with a rope round his neck, not so long ago?" he asked the general company. "By the Papus it was. They said they were leading a fat pig to market. And when he stumbled and fell they went on pulling till his neck broke. The *mushih* told me that not many months ago."

"Treacherous lot, those Papus," said someone; "you can't get into their country without one of them guaranteeing your safety, and when you are in the friend who stood security for you is quite capable of selling you as a slave, or letting people kill you. Fickle as the wind, they are. They'll pass you from hand to hand till there's no way of finding you. Or hold you for a big ransom."

"Not so long since we were the same in these very mountains," chirped old Chang. "It's only thirty or forty years since the Gospel brought light to us Nosu."

"Yes! When we were forty years old we had no tables or benches or beds," chimed in another old dodderer; "just sat on the ground in a circle and ate from a single big pot in the centre with our fingers!" he said.

"It's the Gospel has changed us," said another. "And we've only learnt Chinese so as to read the Bible. Would have been content with Nosu otherwise!"

At the other side of the fire, Yohan sat sleepily, tired by the long tour and a day in the saddle. He yawned. It infected Mr. Peace.

"Ho! Ho!" sang their host. "You preachers need your opium!" (yawning is one sign of the onset of craving), and, shaking with laughter at his own jest, he rose and shouted for his daughters to hurry with the evening meal.

The tension between the hill folk and the outsiders concerned with road-making and its associated developments had been getting serious. Unable to buy in the markets all they wanted of luxury foods, the strangers from other provinces had sent parties of soldiers to forage in the villages and farms for what they could get. Fowls, eggs, pigs, grain they seized, and an arbitrary and inadequate price was thrown to the owners.

At last a puff of excessive injustice fanned the smouldering tempers of the Nosu into flame. Led by a *pao-chang* who interpreted his duty to include prevention of this robbery by officials more powerful than himself, a band of armed men resisted a party of food-seekers, and a pitched battle ensued. A Nosu youth was killed and several on both sides injured. The *pao-chang* was captured and only released when his father, a white-haired old church elder, guaranteed his future conduct. He still had his recognized duties to fulfil, but always with the expectation of reprisals by the soldiers he had dared to offend, so that day and night he kept his guard beside him.

Soon after Mr. Peace and his hosts had seated themselves for their meal and were continuing their animated conversation, the *pao-chang* and several others carrying arms, silently came in and sat down by the fire. Outside he left two picquets on guard. No one greeted him; he was aggrieved, and preferred to be left to come and go unnoticed. With a whispered explanation, old Mr. Chang went on with what he had been saying.

"When the *mushih* was here," he said, flashing his single tusk, "he told me all about his country. A queer place it must be. They haven't any water-buffaloes, and their cows don't do any work."

"How do they plough their rice-fields, then?" asked his neighbour.

"Their big city is a day's walk across, and yet they haven't a single rice-field anywhere near it," he answered. "Their rich people just eat potatoes and wheat like any of us poor folk."

"Pity those Chinese don't do the same," he added in a whisper.

He glanced over toward the fire, and the others followed his gaze. "Poor fellow," they thought: "his troubles aren't over yet." Maybe the *pao-chang* was thinking the same; his face was drawn with anxiety.

The meal over, the old men returned to the fire while the rest of the household in relays took their turns to eat. They talked with the

pao-chang as if there were no dominant subject in his mind and theirs, but for the most part he remained silent. People from the surrounding homesteads began coming in for the evening service and, under cover of the confusion of their arrival, Mr. Peace observed, the *pao-chang* slipped into a recess and climbed up among some stacked straw in a small loft in the rafters. There was a rustling and then silence. He feared for his life.

During the meeting a shot was heard in the valley and the armed guard became instantly alert, but Mr. Peace went on preaching without interruption. Some were paying attention to his words, he noticed, but everyone had fear in his eyes, even if outwardly disregarding what they knew of the drama going on around them. He found it hard to preach, though he did not expect any alarming development. The whole of their lives had been lived in a world of raiding and violence, and he knew that the peace-loving were usually left untouched unless their turn had come to be the object of assault. No, an unsettled environment had taught him to expect no alarms till they came. The *pao-chang* would live under this fear and tension for weeks, perhaps, without anything happening to him, or until it all blew over.

But running parallel to his thoughts on the subject of his address, for no one's mind was at rest, were others which he could not shake off. These old men had no notion of life elsewhere—in the Western countries, for instance. He himself had spent hours in the *mushih's* company and his eyes had been opened to a gulf of centuries of development between the East and the West. He knew how hard it must be for the *mushihs* to adapt themselves and their thinking to this world which was all that his people knew, still in an era of ignorance, dirt, fear, injustice and sudden death. The world that had already been so bathed in Christian influence for generations was physically and in many ways morally cleaner. He wished the whole of China and his Nosu especially could be saved from the primitive savagery that still persisted. Fear was the background of life for most people—deep down, perhaps, but including those who had had no experience of calamity yet. There must be scores or hundreds sleeping in hiding night by night for fear of possibilities that threatened vaguely. If only officials and people, top-dog and under-dog, knew how to be just and law-abiding in this beloved country of his!

The *pao-chang* was still hidden in the straw when the meeting was disbanded—and when Mr. Peace lay down to sleep on three benches set side by side. When he awoke in the night, and again at daybreak, he heard the rustle of straw in the loft. Thank God, he reflected, this horror, being hunted, had only once come to his family in his lifetime—to Wenling, and she had escaped.

4

Physical fatigue has an undermining effect on morale, and so-called "spiritual" problems are often best solved by timely food and rest, as Mr. Peace had decided for himself long years ago. Toward the end of trips like this, tempers were easily frayed, no matter who it was. *Mushihs* varied. Some became unpleasant, some simply silent, controlling their feelings, and he had known one or two who made no secret of their impatience, but drowned it in cheerful humour directed against themselves. Su Mohsi merely became less full of pranks. Yohan did less for other people; his normal was to see others comfortably settled at night and then to find what corner he could for himself. And in the mornings he was up early, first as a heap of bedding, praying, then a shining brown body putting on his clothes, and lastly hunting for his shoes and descending to the floor. When he travelled, he tended to be humourless, almost old-womanly (though no such derogatory criticism would have occurred to Mr. Peace). If his sandals or sacking socks were muddied, he would waste time washing them in the next brook, or would twist hemp to make string to mend his harness when a quicker makeshift would have done. When he became fatigued, these fussinesses would increase. Upon Mr. Peace, however, a mournfulness descended. Physically and mentally, he would slouch down in his saddle and ride for hours lost in thought.

So now their journey home became a test of endurance. A herd of piebald animals would bring forth a comment from one of them: "Why cows *and* horses speckled in this particular valley and not elsewhere?" and they would go on in silence. Or they would help each other through a slough of mud, or discuss the safety of a disintegrating bridge of tree-trunks and brushwood. But otherwise they rode without talking, one behind the other as before.

In any case, it was not easy going. Three weeks of rain had gorged the rivers and softened the tracks. The roar was audible from far

off, and their horses feared to cross the boiling fury of enclosed waters fighting for an outlet. All along the way there was much talk between travellers passing on the roads as to whether the next river ahead was fordable or not. Only small brooks had bridges, except where the Chinese had built them in Imperial days. When the water was not too deep or strong, Yohan would ride straight off the bank into it, and Mr. Peace would follow, though once they were carried down several yards before the horses found their feet, and their own legs were submerged to the knees. It was the only way of getting from place to place.

But on the last night before Kiehkow, Mr. Peace received a great cheer which compensated for all his fatigue. Travelling by a shorter route than usual, they had to spend a night where there were no Christian homes. As darkness fell they drew in to a little White Nosu dwelling and asked for lodging. Their welcome was spontaneously cordial. And more. For an hour or two the good man and his friends listened willingly to the Gospel.

When bedtime arrived, Mr. Peace could see that there was insufficient space in the living-room for all the men to lie down, and he wondered what solution the householder could have. Eventually someone yawned loudly, and went to find some straw to sleep on in a corner. Then to Mr. Peace and Yohan the old man of the family turned and pointed to a loft, saying, "You two gentlemen sleep up there." They thanked him and climbed the ladder. A pile of beanstalks lay against the wall. They spread them out, arranged their bedding, and before long were asleep.

Mr. Peace soon afterwards awoke. An old woman was standing near him holding a length of burning reed as a torch, and gleaning beanstalks from around himself and Yohan, wherever they were not actually lying on them. She took them to the far corner of the loft, a good armful, but not more. Mr. Peace lay watching surreptitiously. A younger woman and a girl were over there. The three of them lay down together—on what remained of their bed.

He was dumbfounded. He realized that, because of the lack of space below, the pagan householder had allowed them to sleep in the women's loft, such was his respect for the reputation of the Christians. He lay there rejoicing. The church was telling on the countryside after all. Its light was penetrating to corners like this where its message had never before been preached.

He set out again next day with a lighter heart, no longer counting

the miles wearily as they rode on. And the evening would see them home, back with Meili and Jenhán. The road as they approached Kiehkow grew worse and worse. Instead of being able to travel along ridges and valleys, they now had to cross up and down from ridge to valley and up to ridge again, keeping to neither for very far at a time. Up and down, up and down on atrocious slopes, with sometimes a hard core and moist surface, so that they slid uncontrollably, and sometimes ploughing through loose landslides in which the horses' legs sank to their knees till Yohan's colt sat down helplessly and would have wept if he had been able. At one point the road had collapsed on to the terrace below, and they had to call a cottager to bring his mattock and excavate another ledge before they could proceed.

Eventually, however, they reached the fortified village of Achiche and its cobbled path, which took them across an ancient bridge in a picturesque gorge. Once past that point, they were on the home stretch. Nevertheless, the last five miles took them nearly three hours, wading up the gorge, but at length it opened out into the valley of Kiehkow and they began the final climb. The lower village, the waters' meet, the Old Man's house, the Widow's, they rode past; then the sunken cattle track, the school—and both the animals broke into a joyful canter across the terrace to their stables.

5

The luxury of getting and remaining dry, in clean clothes, was one of the most welcome things about reaching home. And to eat the food they were accustomed to. But best of all the pleasure of their families on seeing them. Mr. Peace's cup of joy was full when with his children again, just Meili and Jenhan now, for Jenpin was away at school in the city. And great was their relief to have no meetings to take, apart from simple school prayers, after three weeks during which in fifteen or more separate localities they had shared two, and sometimes three or four, daily. In each place the same questions had been asked about Kiehkow, about the *mushih's* movements, their own children, and so on.

The strain of work and of the problems to be dealt with had been greater than it had felt at the time. Despite all the feasting, they were both thinner than when they started out. It had been hard work and they were tired. Some of the difficulties they met had been too

hard to overcome; what to do about bigamous and polygamous believers in particular, for they had no authority to take disciplinary steps. The leading members of the church were not co-operating enough to make that possible, and if they took the initiative they could not count on support. Peace felt the burden of concern, but could go no further than wishing something could be done about it.

They had seen plenty of other evidence too, alas, of disintegration in one way and another, individuals who had drifted off, churches with weakened convictions, and lack of hope for the future; but much evidence of stability and permanence too. He could not imagine anything shaking the faith or Christian observances of the group at Machuanai, for example. There the old elder was steadily adding to his church and bringing up his family ideally. There was an atmosphere of independence there, independence of help from preachers, and direct reliance upon teaching by the Holy Spirit of God, yet with real appreciation and gratitude for any help the preachers could give them. They were utterly unlike another place that had asked for a visit. There they had been well entertained, but little interest in anything of a spiritual nature had been shown. Robbers were rife in that neighbourhood at the time, and Mr. Peace suspected strongly that the prestige of the preachers had been wanted for what it was worth as a safeguard and warning to the outlaws; not for any spiritual benefit they could be to the church.

He was interested to see how much more extensive than he had imagined were the signs of Christian influence in the country. Even hollyhocks and crimson double dahlias growing in cottage precincts far from any Christian habitation showed that the peasants had had some contact with the church, for it was the *mushihs'* gardens that first grew these new flowers. Music, cleanliness and health were other things associated with the coming of the Gospel to any new place.

But oh, how sadly medicines and a doctor's aid were needed. Tumours, scarring from old burns (acquired through sleeping round open fires, especially by the children), rotting bones, tuberculosis, and epidemics which medical means could check, not to mention the greatest ill, wounds from human violence. In the old days a doctor came up from time to time from the city on a visit to the tribal churches, but had not been for years now, and the nearest hospital was too far away for any but the wealthy to go to. Still, Yohan had taken quinine and santolin with him on this trip and sold it all,

though it was true the country people believed those two would cure everything. But even if much was wasted, a great deal of good was done too. Yes, it had been a good trip, well worth while, and the change of activity and scene had done them themselves a world of good.

6

Mr. Peace left the school in the charge of his assistant for another day or two and took life easily in the company of his little boy and girl. Lazily he wandered with them the next afternoon to call on Yohan and see how he was faring. They found him in the stables treating the *mushih's* horse. An ill-fitting saddle had chafed its back some weeks before and it refused to heal up. Their own saddles were of carved wood covered with raw goat-skin which had been shrunk *in situ*, and were better adapted to the spine.

"These foreign saddles are no good on our horses," Yohan commented. "Their horses must be a different shape. Come and look at this."

Mr. Peace approached. But the sore was tender, and too many people had examined it already. The animal flattened its ears, and Peace stood away.

"Have you heard the latest about those Rogues at Thieves' Inn Flats?" enquired Yohan. He loved a little gossip with a spice of horror in it. Mr. Peace hunched his shoulders and frowned a little, as if something distasteful were being offered him, but Yohan took it as a request for information. He did not consider the presence of Meili and Jenhan, only thirteen and eight years old respectively, but then few would in the Far East. He launched out on a long story as he bathed the wound with some oily preparation.

To increase their power, the Rogues had invited one or two other families to join them, and had embarked on a new campaign of outlawry, to their mutual advantage. It was their form of game-hunting, indulged in chiefly by the younger men. Their leader was an evil fellow in his twenties, one An Yunlo, supported by three others no less bloodthirsty, including his young cousin of nineteen, An Hungwu. They had just been on an expedition to kidnap a girl on whom Yunlo had set his eyes. He already had one wife, but wanted this girl too.

Armed with a plausible tale, one of their retainers had sought lodging one night in the girl's home, and after dark a large band of

Rogues had crept into positions of vantage round the house. At a secret signal from the leader outside, the lodger had risen and opened the big doors, and a dozen men rushed in and made for the women's rooms, where he directed them. But the dogs had begun to bark as the lodger moved, and the family was awake. Their men were brave. Brothers and servants seized whatever weapon lay at hand; daggers or bayonets some had, and one an old sabre, others spears, and two kept rifles handy; and, falling upon the intruders, fought desperately, but without hope. They were outnumbered.

At the first alarm the women and girls had fled to dark corners and clambered to the loft, but the Rogues were at their heels. One by one they were dragged out and inspected by the light of flaming firebrands. The Whites and unwanted Blacks were thrust away and fled screaming to the fields outside. Their men fell one by one or were overpowered and tied up by Yunlo's followers. At last the wretched girl was found, cowering in a big grain tub, grey with fear and trembling as if freezing cold. They dragged her forth and heaved her up on a horse, tying her feet together with a rope beneath its belly, and her hands to the saddle, letting her keep her balance only with the help of the guard deputed to rush her swiftly away.

The rest of the Rogues collected up their band, helping the injured to the horses, and followed with no more delay than they needed to fire the house. These people had resisted. They must pay for it. That was surely fair! But one of the family had found the coiled ram's horn and was sounding the alarm. The hills re-echoed with its loud, monotonous note. Soon the *pao-chang* and his men would be on their trail, and they had had enough fighting for one night. They scattered and made for home. By daylight they would be peaceful men going home "from an errand," and the weeping girl would be unbound, "going home to her dying mother."

The young cousin was not new to this game. More than once he had been with his father or an uncle or cousin to get them another wife. They were not much use as wives at first, but after the first few weeks of weeping they always settled down in the household. There was nothing else they could do. Their faces might be expressionless, wooden, utterly joyless, but then that was to be expected and mattered little so long as they harboured no intention to fly. And they knew better than to do that; they had seen the tall one's mutilations and heard many tales. And, after all, they gained the advantages of wealth and prestige.

So An Hungwu was no stranger to the game. On the contrary, it was time he chose a wife for himself and set about getting her. It was not always as hard to achieve as this night's work had been. This time it had been more costly than usual. Several of their band were badly hurt. And of the girl's household two lay dead, and others by the convulsive light of the flames were dragging themselves, groaning, out of danger. Their sister would never come home again; and it might be years before she heard any news of them.

Yohan told what he had heard with little embellishment, but in Mr. Peace's mind the details stood out plainly. He had heard so many accounts like this. So often the injured came to the *mushih* or to Yohan for treatment. By his side, Meili and Jenhan stood with bursting eyes. How could a child not become older than his or her true age in such a land! And how could Meili know that within the next four years stark terror would plummet like a hawk from the speckless sky and plunge her too into years of gnawing unhappiness?

The horse swung its sleek black head and snapped irritably at a stabbing fly on its flank. Meili took her father's hand. "Come away, *Aba*," she said. Yohan had gone on to some other topic already; they were all much alike to him, and it was not hard for Mr. Peace to bring the conversation to a close. He felt sickened too. Yohan was a White. These things happened chiefly to Blacks: were more personal to him. Wenling had barely escaped the same fate. Taking his girl and boy homeward, he asked about what they had been doing in his absence, making them talk freely, ousting from their minds the story they had heard. But in his own he pondered the nature of his race, the virility, the power, the ancient strain of warrior blood in the outlaws of to-day, starved of an outlet, so intuned to their own destruction. He saw them again as in his youth he had seen them, waiting to be harnessed, not to bloodshed, but to fearless soldiery for God.

CHAPTER TWELVE

BITTERSWEET

"His growing family and the fruits of his Christian witness encouraged and helped him . . ."

I

MEILI was Mr. Peace's only daughter; and he had four sons now. Jenpin was seventeen and doing well at the city school. When he came home for the holidays twice yearly, he showed by the little he said that he was going to be well ahead of his father by the end of his schooldays. Jenhan was the only son in Kiehkow with Meili and their father, and he was a grown-up eight. The other two were at Hopien with their mother still: Jenting, aged three; and a baby under one.

He was proud of his sons with the pride of a Chinese father added to that of a Nosu, and his eyes glowed when he talked of them. But he loved Meili as he could not love the boys. As she grew from a child to maturer girlhood a stronger bond of affection was developing between the two of them. Jenpin was quiet and difficult to approach, like the "Duchess," his grandmother, but Meili was happiest in her father's company, a good companion to him. She was a dear character, alive, friendly, quick, intelligent, enjoying everything in her limited world, and devoid of self-consciousness. When Mr. Peace returned to the routine at Kiehkow after his conference tour and subsequent visit to the home at Hopien, the presence of Meili gave a warm contentedness that softened the impact of troubles pressing upon him in connection with his work.

Among other things, he had assumed responsibility for the local post office, merely a collecting and distributing centre for the valley, at which the courier called on his way through every three or four days, and, though it entailed no work outside his own cottage, it meant the filling up of innumerable forms and reports, and brought to his door a good many strangers to whom he had to attend whether in school hours or out. Someone had to do it, and he was the only one with the ability and willingness. Moreover, the *mushih* and the church benefited most from having a post office near at hand, so it was really a further piece of service in his chosen cause.

Meili and Jenhan were too young to help him with these things, but work became lighter to the tune of their prattle and homework.

And Meili had a knack of sensing what he would like and with a pure naturalness seeing to his personal comfort as if she had heard the stirring of his thoughts before they took shape in his own consciousness. He was fortunate in his children, he often mused, and had every reason to hope great things of them. Even Jenhan was showing up as a decisive character who chose obedience and quiet co-operation as his share in the family life. Perhaps it was the influence of Meili to whom he was very attached, but certainly no weakness or lack of spirit made him like this.

Such now were Mr. Peace's days: bearing a full burden of responsibilities, more than he would have chosen, but in an atmosphere of home and its delights. Meili knitting, Meili spinning wool, Jenhan feeding his piglets or puppies, Meili walking home with him from school, talking with a mature mind even at her tender age, Jenhan chirruping a Nosu tune in childish treble, Meili going with him to call on her grandparents and her young aunt Liya. Life was good, and he was well content.

2

The sound of Meili's voice rising and falling in gentle rhythm came to Mr. Peace's ear as he approached his cottage one afternoon. She was telling a story to Jenhan. He entered quietly, went past them into his inner room, and took down some papers to deal with, but could only finger them idly. She was telling the story of Mêng Huo, the famous chieftain who defied the Emperor Chien Hsin in A.D. 226 and was seven times captured and seven times released. The story was popular with his family because Mêng Huo is claimed as an ancestor by the Nosu, and there is evidence in Chinese history and indeed in the story she was telling from the classic, *The Three Kingdoms*, to support the claim. If it is true, he was one of the earliest to be subdued.

Meili had already passed the point where Marquis Chu Koliang, China's first Prince of strategy and statesmanship, had taken counsel with his generals and agreed with the policy that one of them had formulated:

*"Battle with their minds rather than their strongholds;
Govern their hearts, then control of their bodies will be simple;
Intellectual conquest is important;
Loyalty will follow."*

And she had told how Mêng Huo's three generals, each with fifty thousand men, had been routed in battle.

"Mêng Huo was sitting in his tent when the news of defeat came in," she was saying. "He put on his gold helmet and girdle of lion's skin from which hung two swords, and mounting his chestnut horse led out his own soldiers to meet the enemy. He did not believe in defeat, and fought till the Chinese fled. But their flight was a trick, and an ambush rose about the pursuing chieftain and slew his men, taking him and his retinue captive.

"Then Marquis Chu arranged a great display of wealth and military splendour to impress his prisoners, and received them kindly, saying:

"'Noble captives, your parents, wives and children pine for your return! When you have feasted I will send you home with food for your journey.' But to Mêng Huo he said, 'Why have you rebelled against the Emperor?'

"Mêng replied: 'East and West Szechwan belonged to others, but your master took it and you call him Emperor. My country belongs to my ancestors and people, and without just cause you have seized it. I ask you, who are the rebels?'

"'You are a captive,' the Marquis cried. 'Will you submit?'

"'To be captured was my misfortune,' said Mêng, 'but I will never submit. If you release me I will fight again.'

"Chu Koliang remembered his policy, and after fêting him, set him free."

Jenhan changed his position. "Go on!" he said when Meili paused. And she continued:

"'The enemy want to catch us, not to kill us,' said Mêng's friends. 'Let us barricade ourselves into a fort and leave them to grow tired of the heat and return to their province.'

"So they retired to the stockade beyond the River Lu, and made merry.

"But one of Mêng Huo's men who had been beaten with a hundred strokes for undisciplined behaviour waited till Mêng was in a drunken stupor, and binding him, delivered him to the Marquis.

"'Here again!' said Chu Koliang: 'Will you now surrender?'

"'But not by your might,' replied Mêng Huo. 'My own men brought me. Yet even if I might be willing, my people would not,' he added craftily. 'I will consult them.'

"So Chu Koliang ordered wine, and when they had drunk together, Mêng Huo was sent away.

"Back among his loyal men, he slew the traitors, and, calling his brother, proposed a new scheme to decoy the Marquis into a trap. Setting out with a hundred braves, Mêng's brother travelled to Chu Koliang's camp bearing presents of gold and pearls, elephants' tusks and rhinoceros horn. But Chu Koliang suspected a plot and posted ambushes along the road.

"'Mêng Huo begs you to receive these gifts in thanks for your graciousness,' his brother said. 'In future tribute will be paid to the Emperor.'

"'Where is Mêng Huo?' asked the Marquis.

"'In the mountains collecting more precious things,' replied the brother. Then Chu Koliang gave the warriors a hearty welcome and a feast. They were tall and strong, their eyes black and deep set, with brown hair and beards. Their hair was made up in a tuft. And they wore no shoes.

"Meanwhile, a secret message was taken back to Mêng Huo and with thirty thousand men he came upon the camp, riding at their head with a hundred chosen fighters. But when he arrived, the place was deserted. Only the drugged bodies of his brother's band remained, illumined by a single dying torch. He turned to flee, but lights appeared all round and he was cut off. Yet even so he managed to escape, and reached the river, where a boat lay, manned by men dressed like his own. However, in midstream they fell upon him and bound him.

"'This is your third capture. Will you now submit?' said the Marquis when they met.

"Mêng was silent.

"'Well, then,' said the statesman, 'let us have another contest,' and set him free.

"But all along Mêng's homeward route were Chu Koliang's soldiers jeering and threatening him."

There was another pause while Meili poked the fire. Jenhan was absorbed, lying in silence against the wall, waiting patiently. Mr. Peace knew the story well. It was he who had taught it with its

wealth of detail to Meili. But he was held by the charm of her gentle voice. She resumed:

"Mêng Huo rallied ninety-three clans to stand with him, and advanced riding a red ox and clad in skins, with a vermilion helmet. Around him danced ten thousand savage men. The Marquis came out to view their approach, wearing gorgeous attire and surrounded by a magnificent bodyguard and clouds of flags and banners. Mêng and his men drew near, cursing and threatening, but to their amazement Chu Koliang's army retired to their encampment and blocked the entrances.

"'Mêng Huo's men are mad with excitement,' said the wise Marquis. 'Wait till their frenzy has passed and we shall scatter them easily.'

"A few days later he saw that they were wearied, and, sending his own men out secretly, he left the camp fires and lights burning. Once again the tribesmen were surprised and put to rout, and in the chaos Mêng's men fell to killing each other. But he and his bodyguard escaped. North, south and west of them was fighting, but to the east lay a forest into which they fled. Yet hardly had they entered than they saw a splendid carriage drawn by men, and in it Marquis Chu Koliang coolly seated.

"'Aha, aha!' he cried. 'I have patiently awaited you.'

"Mêng Huo was enraged and screamed out to his men:

"'Three times he has disgraced me, and now again. Who will come with me and cut him in pieces?' Whereupon several rode furiously after him to the attack. But before they could reach the Marquis the ground gave way and they fell into a pit, where all were overpowered and bound.

"The Marquis went away and left them, but an hour later, when Mêng Huo was brought before him, he fumed with anger, saying: 'What answer have you this time?'

"'Once more it was my misfortune,' said the incorrigible Mêng. 'If I am to die, it is with my eyes open, but unsubmitive.'

"'Behead him!' shouted Chu Koliang. But on Mêng's face was no trace of fear. Instead, he said:

"'If you will release me I will attack you more fiercely than before.'

"The Marquis laughed. 'Untie him! Give him a banquet!' he ordered; and to Mêng Huo: 'Why do you not submit. Do I not treat you kindly?'

"A fifth time it happened. Mêng retired to a fastness in the mountains where there was a cave approached by only two paths, easily defended. In the valley below there were fevers in the air and four springs which would kill besieging troops.

*"At one spring dumbness and death came to the drinker;
Sores eating to the bone killed any who touched the second spring;
The third turned any black who came near it, and they died;
And those who drank of the fourth became cold in the throat, and died of
spreading weakness."*

"When Chu Koliang's patrols returned afflicted with disease, the Marquis was dismayed, but Mêng Huo, rejoicing, complacently called dancers to amuse him in his cups and was betrayed by them and brought once more in bonds to his enemy's camp.

"Chu Koliang released him at once, for this was an unfair test, and Mêng returned to his mountains. He set guards at the rivers with cross-bows and poisoned arrows, and called in as an ally Prince Pa, who used tigers and leopards and wolves and naked men to fight for him. Chu Koliang's armies had never met such foes, and in the first encounter were defeated. But the Marquis quietly fanned himself. He had foreseen this danger, and in his equipment had imitation beasts of silk with clanging brass scales, and chemicals to make fire and smoke issue from their mouths. Ten soldiers manned each beast; a thousand waited for Mêng's host to charge. The living animals fled in terror and a slaughter followed.

"There was no need to arrest Mêng Huo and his court this time. They came humbly to the Marquis feigning submission, but the old man was too wise; he had them bound and searched. On every one were sharp knives to kill their arch-enemy. Mêng Huo's heart was not yet won.

"For the sixth time he was released. Yet even when his wounded followers encouraged him he was at his wits' end, until a new ally was discovered. The soldiers of this prince had buoyant armour and shields of rushes coated with varnish in which they could cross rivers, and which no weapon could pierce. They advanced to battle, but the Marquis saw them crossing the river and at once his plan was made. He instructed his troops to retire up a certain valley till they saw a white flag, and then to disperse.

"Mêng Huo's allies pursued them up the ravine, for there was nowhere that the enemy could hide on its bare sides. But they were



GUARDED ENTRANCE TO A NOSU STRONGHOLD



LOOKING DOWN ON KIEHKOW
COMPOUND FROM THE EAST



ARMED NOSU RETAINERS

mistaken. Suddenly flames leapt up all round them; torches were being thrown from the heights above and setting their armour alight. The whole ravine was filled with dancing fleeing flames till all had been consumed. Mêng Huo, coming to his ally's rescue, was surrounded. He hacked his way out, but was caught again with all his family and friends.

"Marquis Chu, when he heard the news of victory, wept that success should have cost so much; and as before spread sumptuous feasts before his prisoners to allay their fears. Later an officer came to Mêng and said:

"I am sent to release you. Here is a horse. You have another opportunity to do battle."

"At this Mêng Huo wept and led his family with half-clothed bodies to the Marquis's tent.

"Does your Excellency submit?" asked Marquis Chu.

"I and my sons and my sons' sons will never forget your graciousness," said Mêng Huo with tears. "Henceforth we will always be loyal."

Meili got up laughing.

"That's the end," she said.

"Some clans regard Chu Koliang and Mêng Huo as gods," called Mr. Peace from the other room, and added: "Have you seen the story like that in the Bible? Look in Second Chronicles, chapter twenty-eight."

3

It must have been about this time that a sudden squall blew up, as if to show him that he must not expect life to be all plain sailing. He was teaching in school one afternoon, General Knowledge on historical subjects, and was asking, "Is the rank of *T'u Szu* a Nosu or a Chinese rank?" when he saw the courier coming across the terrace.

"Nosu!" said one of the class hopefully.

"No!" said Mr. Peace. "It was made by the *Han Chia* (the Chinese) as a reward. For what services?" he enquired, pointing to a boy with eyelids scarred by burns received in babyhood.

There were a few guesses wide of the mark, and then Mr. Peace said: "There are three kinds of hereditary *T'u Szu*. First, those who

submitted and joined the *Han Chia* against their own people. Second, those who helped one dynasty of Chinese to overthrow another dynasty. And, thirdly, those who helped the Manchus to suppress the Mohammedan rebellion. Write those down. I'll be back in a moment: the postman has come."

There was no artificial stringency in Mr. Peace's school. In his absence the boys and girls could talk and help each other without fear of displeasing him, but when he returned silence would fall at once.

He took the letters from the courier and sealed his bag again, signing his book. One letter, from Temopin and in his sister's hand, was unexpected. He held the long envelope up to the light, and, seeing the contents well down in it, tore off its end and extracted the flimsy note.

"My elder Brother,—Greetings," he read, scanning the vertical rows of characters.

"It is not long since you visited our poor house, but I must needs ask you to come again. I am anxious about Tekuan. His behaviour is strange; not as it was two years ago, but still it makes me fear. He spends long hours writing secretly, and seems unconscious of the company of others about him when he is among us. . . .

"That you may be able to come and help me is my hope,

"Wishing you peace,

"Your little sister,

"WENLING."

Like the beasts he had so often seen being loaded in the market, so Mr. Peace now sagged and stood wearily with the letter in his hand, till a dove beat swiftly by on whistling wings and recalled his wandering thoughts. His face looked careworn when he re-entered the class-room and continued the lesson. Were not the troubles in the church enough without others in his own family circle again? At forty he was being turned to for help by half his little world, and blamed unreasonably by the other half. The Manager had been giving Wenling and himself such grounds for hope recently, had become avid to learn all he could of their faith, seemed eager to believe and to "be saved." Yet he could not let go of his reverence for the spirits, a fear amounting practically to worship. What was

happening to him now? Was he tired of his wife and her Christian circle? Was he writing and planning to leave them and return to his old ways?

Mr. Peace pressed his forehead with an unsteady hand. It was a habit by now. And the class waited, knowing only that the coming of the courier had distracted him—with postal business, they surmised.

4

Twenty-five miles along familiar roads again, thoughts buzzing in his mind like the cicadas “grinding their scissors” in the trees beside his trail, but no more effectively. The hours and miles slipped by without impressing themselves upon him, except for one thing which gripped and absorbed his attention, usurping the place of his predominating thoughts.

Not far from Kolo he was overtaken by a train of men and women and youths, some on foot, some mounted, carrying red pennants on staves and leading a gaily-bedecked horse. They were on their way to fetch a bride, and, to his delight, reached her home before he parted from them. Outside the house a crowd of men and girls was waiting armed with sticks and crocks of water, who ranged themselves in two loose lines as the procession approached, leaving an avenue down the centre. Then from the cavalcade two chosen representatives came out and ran the gauntlet of a shower of blows and dowsings till they reached the threshold of the bride’s cottoge. Whereupon followed a scene of loud rejoicings, and wine was brought out to welcome the bridegroom and his friends.

To Mr. Peace, the enlightened and educated Nosu, this was full of interest, though not by any means the first time he had observed it. Here was a vestige of the ancient racial custom of taking a wife by force. While the Rogues of Thieves’ Inn were perpetuating the primitive practice, these law-abiding people were keeping the modified custom that several generations of usage had already popularised. In other branches of the Nosu race, he had heard some say, the bride’s friends returned with her to the bridegroom’s house, and on reaching it a fierce tussle would ensue. Her friends would take her headcloth and try to fling it on to the roof of her new home, while the bridegroom’s party tried to seize it and trample it in the dust. If they succeeded, it would mean that she would be subservient in the home, but if it reached the roof she would rule

her husband and his family! But in Mr. Peace's district he had not heard of any custom such as this in vogue.

Arrived at Temopin, Mr. Peace lost no time in learning about Wenling's fears. An Tekuan was secluded in an attic room, where he had lately been in the habit of retiring for hours together.

"He has been studying the Bible for most of every day and writing notes about what he reads," said Wenling, holding the horse's head as her brother removed his bedding from the saddle. "But his notes began to get so many that I asked him what he was writing," she added, "and he refused to tell me at first."

A servant took the reins and, making them fast to the reining post by the front door, stooped to loosen the girth. Wenling followed Peace into the courtyard.

"After I had asked him several times," she continued, "he said an angel was telling him what to write. They were confidential truths which he could not show me."

She led the way into her room well removed from the Manager's retreat, and found her brother a seat. And while she cooked him a bowl of savoury *mien*¹ over the charcoal fire, she went on with her account.

"When he saw that I was curious, he began to go upstairs to write, refusing food, and forbade any of us to go up there. But I could not help climbing up when he was out of the house for a short while one day. I was anxious, and had to see what was engrossing him so deeply."

She stopped her stirring and looked across at Wenliang:

"*Ko-ko*, Big Brother," she said, her eyes big and troubled, "everything he had written was disconnected nonsense, meaningless, or else passages of Scripture copied out at random."

Mr. Peace grunted sympathetically.

"So you asked me to come," he murmured, completing her story.

"I couldn't face it alone," she answered. "Last time you managed it so quickly."

"No, don't. Not I," said Mr. Peace. The thought of personal credit was painful to him; it jarred on his nature. "It was only the Lord who did it," he protested. "Nothing I did was any good."

And so they talked until he had decided that to make Tekuan suspicious of his motives would be to risk failure of his mission in coming. Therefore he must put him off his guard by appearing to

¹ Dough strings; spaghetti.

seek advice in personal affairs, for often in the past An Tekuan as business man had been a useful friend in matters of a practical nature.

The Manager was surprised to see him when darkness approached and he came downstairs, though an unannounced visit was not so very unusual. But under the circumstances he did his best to be sociable, and spent the evening with them, enquiring after Meili and her brothers. However, it was obvious that his mind was distracted by something alien to the conversation.

It was the same next morning, soon after they had risen and met in the courtyard to wash their faces and close-cropped heads with steaming cloths, and to rinse their mouths and clear their throats with noisy thoroughness. An Tekuan was perfectly friendly, but after the minimum required of a host in entertaining a relative, begged Mr. Peace to excuse him as he had "important matters needing attention," and repaired up the step ladder to his sanctuary. On the rare occasions when he reappeared, Mr. Peace tried to get him into conversation, enquiring about the legal conditions governing the right-of-way across private property, or one and another of the problems with which he was confronted at Kiehkow, and trying to turn the conversation on to his brother-in-law's affairs. But he could get no change from him. Time, meanwhile, was pressing, and he could not afford to be away for many days, so, driven to a more direct approach, the next morning he mounted the steps to Tekuan's sanctum and, coughing gently, entered.

"How is your Bible study getting on, Tekuan?" he asked point-blank, and immediately rebuked himself for the two days he had wasted. A smile spread over the Manager's face: "Getting on wonderfully," he replied, and launched into a series of confidences about his experiences with the angel, and the guidance and instructions he received. There was nothing fearful about his visitor this time, An said; he was clothed in white and spoke agreeably. No, quite the opposite of the trouble with the demons. That was all over. The Manager was patently pleased with his progress in the Christian faith, and discoursed to his brother-in-law most affably, almost with condescension. Treating with angels was apparently a spiritual height the latter had not attained to.

Encouraged to boldness, Mr. Peace went further.

"May I see what you have been learning?" he enquired, and, without giving him an opportunity to refuse, stretched out his hand

and picked up one of Tekuan's notebooks of thin Chinese paper. He opened it at one of the most recently filled pages. It was a jumble of meaningless phrases and extracts from the Bible, lists of names, fragments of narratives, nothing of consequence or mutual relevance. An was disturbed, but restrained his impatience.

"What does this mean?" asked Mr. Peace, but received evasive answers with a subtle cleverness he did not expect.

Then, afraid lest he should be given no further chance of talking with him, Mr. Peace began to point out the impossibility of such disconnected nonsense originating from God. He taught his non-plussed listener that this angel of light must be an emissary of Satan who, having failed in a terrifying guise, was trying a subtler one to turn him from serious seeking after God. Meanwhile, he was glancing steadily through the pile of notes. All were alike. But An was growing restless, and at last, without discussion of Mr. Peace's words, suggested that they return to the others in the house below.

Wenling and her brother were downcast. Rather than help matters, Mr. Peace's line of action had alienated Tekuan from them both. The Manager suspected the purpose of this visit and a plot between them. Now Peace too was debarred from the upstairs room, and An spent all the day writing alone in silence. When he came down he was as silent on the subject as the tomb, and soon convinced Mr. Peace that his presence was superfluous and he might as well return to his work.

That night as he knelt on his bed praying as he had done each day about this fresh crumbling of their hopes, he remembered belatedly the turning-point in the last crisis of this nature. It was God who had achieved it without a doubt—but He had waited till Wenling and he had prayed with practical faith, believing in success. That was the difference this time. He had prayed and then depended on his own tact and diplomacy. So when An Tekuan excused himself and went upstairs, shutting the trap-door behind him, Peace drew his sister aside and expounded his new outlook. With penitence, they prayed together, ashamed that so many days had passed before bringing the matter so definitely to God by prayer. All day they prayed. As long as An was upstairs, they prayed, claiming God's promises to hear and answer. And the next day the same.

By now a week had passed, and Mr. Peace could stay no longer away from his school and children. An had withdrawn soon after rising that morning, and Peace and Wenling were together as

before. A mere fraction of his usual time in seclusion had gone by when the door of the guest-room where they were praying opened, and the Manager stood gazing in at them. When they stood up he looked sheepishly at Wenling and said, "Are you praying for me?" and, without waiting for an answer, turned and went slowly down the steps and out to his farmyard.

But after breakfast at mid-morning he was back at his work upstairs. Again he came upon them praying, and with embarrassment went away. And once more in the afternoon. This time he did not go away, but stood waiting.

"What is troubling you?" asked Mr. Peace.

"I can't write," he said. "Thoughts won't come. I pick up my brush, wet it in the ink, lift it to write, and my mind is blank; only senseless rubbish occurs to me. This is the third day like this."

5

Then it was that Mr. Peace's inspiration came drifting from the blue, out of the spaces of uncertainty, taking clear-cut shape, convincing him of its rightness.

"Come for a walk!" he suggested.

To walk to a destination in order to do something definite, a job of work, or to visit someone was a commonplace. To stroll gently and aimlessly together, or, better still, in a party of several friends, with silk gowns open, sleeves folded neatly back, expensive shoes showing beneath flowered silk trousers, and with a cigarette in a long holder, this too was known to the Manager from his life in a Chinese city. But in Mr. Peace's mind was the kind of walk he had seen the *mushih*s take, energetic, for exercise, and to cover ground and come back tired and a new man. He did not indulge in the habit himself. He had found it hard to enjoy when he had been coerced into accompanying the *mushih*. But now he was intent on tiring An Tekuan, if anything the stronger of the two. The pure mountain winds would blow all nonsense from his mind, and before they returned he must renounce the Devil and all his works.

Down through the bowl of the ancestral lands he took him, out through the defile into the valley enclosed, and up to the wind-swept ridges of the hills beyond. The sun declining over the western peaks served but to quicken his pace. Rain clouds banking and breaking off to race toward them with black and white outriders

failed to discourage him. Thunder-claps and cloudbursts, drenching the mountains that stood in their way, left him unmoved and passed him by. The sight was stupendous. Shafts of light pierced through the storm-racked sky turning the rain to silver and bringing the forests to life.

He led the Manager to a rock and they sat down to watch and to rest their feet.

"I feel as if I were waking up," said Tekuan after a time.

"Thank the Lord!" said Mr. Peace soliloquizing, and to An Tekuan, "But waking up isn't enough, you've got to be born again."

They talked, and the sun sank toward the Snow Mountains of Shama, too far away to see, but still they talked.

Wenling was anxious and sent men with torches to help them home; and she busied herself with preparing a meal. Wenliang had to return to Kiehkow. She would make some special dishes with her own hands for him to-night, mushrooms and *erh-tzu*¹ from the special store, and fish from the river near Great Pine Tree.

A banging on the great doors—they were shut at fall of darkness—and a clatter of drawn bolts, and the men were home. She came out to meet them. Tekuan was in front.

"Wenling," he said, "I'm saved!"

She did not understand him at once.

"The Devil has left me," he said, "and the Lord Jesus has come instead. I'm born again."

They went up to their rooms, laughing at their weariness and sopping clothes, and Tekuan told her all that had come about.

The meal was ready to be served, a feast of rejoicing.

"Not yet!" cried the master of the house. "I have some good work to do."

He climbed up to his attic, and, fingering his notebooks with disgust and yet with glee, gathered them up, books, pen, and all. Downstairs again, he solemnly set fire to paper after paper till all was gone, and smashed the ink slab on the stone-flagged yard. But the light that sparkled in their eyes was not from that.

"If joy on earth can be so painful, so intense," thought Mr. Peace, "what must the joy in Heaven be like just now?"

¹ An edible fungus, considered a great delicacy.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WEATHERING STORMS

" . . . to weather the storms of trouble and opposition in the church . . . "

I

THE storm had passed and life returned to normal at Temopin and Kiehkow, a normal on a higher plane, as if they had climbed to a higher ridge and could see over more ranges to a wider horizon. Back at Kiehkow Mr. Peace took up his work with new enthusiasm. The school was doing well. Distant families were sending their children, and there were both boys and girls now living on the church premises throughout term time. And, with two young men helping him, he was freer for his duties connected with the church and post office.

For the next three years no major event occurred to disturb the peace of his life, but at the same time it was far from easy. More than ever he was being looked to as the main personality in the church. The older men were getting too old to be of much use, and, worse still, a vein of envy and intrigue had appeared amongst them like a canker at work, eating into the foundations of their society, a contagion affecting one after another of the believers. The first love of the church had cooled, and a staler devotion through duty and custom of many who were Christians in all sincerity was an ideal nidus for disaffection to thrive in.

Old Mr. An the father-in-law was made of good stuff. But for all his virtues he was a crusty customer. He had always been agreeably disposed towards Mr. Peace since the earliest days when he chose him to be his daughter's husband, and Tingying had always spoken well of her man. That they had seen sadly little of each other and their early affection had resolved itself over the years into a matter-of-fact friendly companionship was the unhappy result of their unavoidable separation. But Tingying was contented, and that spoke well for the Old Man's matchmaking.

On Mr. Peace's part, since the death of his own father he had treated Old Mr. An with greater respect and feeling, but this the old man began to interpret as a tribute to his personality and power. His

megalomania, though mild, was none the less unreasonable, and becoming troublesome. It was as if his Christian progress was becalmed—had been for some time, in fact. Having developed to a certain point he had drifted into complacency, and, finding himself passed over for this reason by the church in their need of spiritual leadership and advisers, he was forced to draw attention to himself by a play of interest and ability in church affairs. Thereby he won a following and was consoled.

It is unlikely that he had any subversive motives in the early days when Peace became his son-in-law, but, anyhow, the young man was not the kind to follow passively the lead of anyone without gifts or inspiration. Instead, it was he who led, unconsciously, by the possession of a personal impetus, Divinely energized, which was just what the church was needing. The Old Man's attitude therefore suffered an insidious change as the years went by, adapting itself to practical conditions. As his motives deteriorated, he remained on excellent terms with his son-in-law, in the hope of influencing if he could not lead him, until that too proved futile, and then a quiet hostility began.

The eldest son of the family, Toma, was at home during most of this time, and, sad to say, for in many ways he was a valuable man, absorbed his father's spirit. The other two made no pretence of being Christian. One left home and joined the Army. The other became a schoolmaster in the country.

As for Liya, the younger daughter, she too was at home. She should have been married by now, but, in spite of a fine physique and attractive appearance and character, no one wanted her. The scourge of the family, as of many throughout China, had hit her more severely than the others, and no one wanted to marry a girl with trachoma, which might leave her blind before she had finished bearing her children. She had "tender" eyes, like her Biblical counterpart, not red and repulsive, but misted, with drooping lids that gave her a languid appearance, and a liability to frequent attacks of inflammation. Even prolonged treatment in hospital had failed to cure her. It was her sorrow, against which she fought in secret day and night. Meili, her niece, was drawn in sympathy toward her, but as the feeling in her home increased, of alienation from Meili's father and the opinions he represented in the church, it extended to his family and quenched any warmth of friendship that Meili might have aroused.

The rift in his family weighed on Mr. Peace's spirit and coloured his outlook on most things in life. But like a ship buffeted by rough weather, he kept on his course undeterred. His problems, though shared with faithful Yohan and with Su Mohsi and young Li in the case of church affairs, were not easy to solve. His passage through them was uncomfortable, he suffered at the lash of every wave that struck him, but could not be intimidated.

It was easier when the *mushih* was present to help, but he had gone away and for four or five years the nearest missionary help was at Kopu. With no *mushih* there was no court of appeal. This left Mr. Peace more alone than ever. He was the thinker of the few church workers, the evangelists or preachers, and the sharp point of their united opinion—the opinion that met with the opposition of others. Never having been elected as leader of the church, he was vulnerable to the challenge of anyone choosing to question his authority. But someone must lead, and there were no others.

Their difficulties were many. The arrangement of conferences fell to these men. Every year at Christmas time young people from all the churches came over mountain trails to Kiehkow, and for two, three or four weeks met for teaching several times a day, learning to read Chinese and Nosu, learning hymns to carry back and teach to their scattered home churches, and memorizing Scripture till they could recite it in their sleep. This was one of the most vital of their activities, comparable in importance with the church schools and Bible schools in rearing a new generation capable of carrying on the church in days to come. Immediately afterwards came a conference of "elders," a term loosely applied to the senior men who led the Christians in their respective villages. For a week they learned to read their Chinese Bibles, were given some teaching on doctrine, and had discussions on questions of church order and management.

The gathering of these people in Kiehkow meant no little organization and preparation. For this reason, the leading Christian householders would meet to arrange suitable dates and details of catering, heating, water-carrying and numberless minor matters. It was usually agreed for each family to provide one basketful of coal, and one of those present would undertake to see to its collection, while others provided servants, water butts or straw. The *mushih's* contribution was by custom to supply salt and red peppers in large quantities.

In this connection the ways of Old Man An and his family

became inscrutable. If they did not make discussion and organization so difficult that the rest despaired, they would be all smiles and agreement and fail to carry out their undertakings. Compromise and eleventh-hour makeshifts were forced upon Mr. Peace and his busy friends. But year by year the conferences were held. Yet that was not the end. When the elders were in council, uninvited people would press in and express their opinions, holding the floor even when told to leave because they were not full church members.

And then there was another open sore, the use of church property. For centuries the racial sacrificing and worship had been done on the mountains and in clearings in the forest, so that the idea of treating a House of God with reverence was alien to them, and to implant these new and strange notions was difficult. The *mushih* had often spoken about this, but his guidance was not always followed, and it was not for him to lay down the law. The chapel was therefore used by all and sundry when they needed floorspace to make felt mats or winnow grain.

Springing from this cause, a subtle misunderstanding took root which involved not only the occasional use of the buildings, but also the grounds outside. Previously it had been conceded that the open plots of land might be cultivated by the preachers to supplement their paltry stipends or because they gave their services without other remuneration. Now, however, a new argument arose. "The ground is church property," cried its protagonists, "and we are church members; therefore we have a right to share the soil and plant our own seed in it."

To cope with these and similar recurring disputes had become a large and unavoidable part of Mr. Peace's work. And the strain of compromising between good judgment and expediency told more and more upon him. His nervous mannerisms increased—his sighing, his fingerings, his self-effacement. It seemed to him that the spiritual life of the church was dissipating, leaving only dregs. The Gospel posters in tatters on the evangelists' guest-room walls were symbols of the same to him, though in reality the shortage due to war conditions could be blamed.

Not far down the valley below Mr. Peace's cottage was another homestead, the house and outbuildings of the old widow called Erh Sao. She was a vivacious, wizened little old lady, with eyelids

so shrunken by trachoma as to make her eyes look minute and wrinkled; and encircling the dark iris was a ring of white which gave them an extraordinary resemblance to a bird's eyes closely set each side of a powerful beak. And this impression was accentuated by a habit of constantly screwing them up with an owl-like blink. Her family was small: a daughter-in-law, tall and angular with a long bony face like a horse, and a grandson of eighteen with his wife and baby. Normally, she was a cheerful little neighbour, kind to the children, friendly to the preachers, and competent in managing her farm and dependent Whites. But Erh Sao had one failing which was a grievous thorn in the flesh to Mr. Peace and Yohan.

In the early days it had been a large portion of her land, always called barren, which had been bought for church purposes. She had sold it outright, and had no more claim upon it, but was loth to recognize the fact. It still lay beside what she had retained, the soil was the same, the trees the same, the banks and ditches as she had known them in her youth. Now, Erh Sao was a Christian, but all her Whites were not, and to them there was a strong incentive to undermine the terraces belonging to the church, and to edge the path slowly off hers and on to church land. Encroachment on a neighbour's land is practised as a matter of course not only in Nosu country. It is every man's job to keep a check on his own boundaries, and if they shrink, that is his affair. The law courts are kept busy with contentions over this matter.

Erh Sao was a simple but sincere old soul. She probably would not have indulged in these devices herself, but she was a Black, which means that she could not readily tolerate correction and discipline, especially from those without strong authority. When Yohan or Mr. Peace came down to her house or drew her aside after church to make a generous hint or to refer more directly to her retainers' encroachments, she would toss her fine head and flash the little eyes with stubborn petulance, refusing to recognize her underlings' misdeeds. If she knew them for a fact, she winked at them and took no steps to stop it.

Then in the *mushih's* absence her men became more brazen. The boy who cut the grass for Yohan's animals every day came home one evening with the news of a new fall of earth where a bank had been undercut severely. Yohan sent across to Mr. Peace. Would he please come and call for him in the morning if he could spare an hour or so? A message like that meant business, probably unpleasant.

Peace wandered over first thing next day, and hunted for his friend. He was in the stable regions, making rope with his stepson, a loosely jointed, unkempt youth with a thick, drooping, moist lower lip, and flabby, hanging hands, whose usual occupation was sitting indolently by the fire.

Yohan greeted Mr. Peace with toothless amiability and led him away, telling him about the reports of fresh encroachments.

"How about having a look round the boundaries and then going and seeing Hsimi Kuchia about it again?" he said, using the Nosu name of the old lady's lands, by which she was known.

Mr. Peace looked pained, and automatically put up a slender hand to press his furrowed brow anxiously.

"*Ai-ya!*" he groaned. "I suppose we must."

"She'll have to stop those workmen of hers before they get quite out of hand, so we might as well see her about it now as later on," he continued, after a long pause for consideration.

And, suiting the action to the word, they went up through Yohan's flaxfield above his house and dropped down to the terraced fields on the eastern side. There was no wall or fence separating Erh Sao's land from the church's, but a vertical drop of two to ten feet as her field fell away from the upper one. The upper field and the bank belonged to the church, but a little surreptitious excavation and a fall of rain could bring it down inch by inch and foot by foot and add it to the lower field. They climbed down on to Erh Sao's land and toured the perimeter of the church property. The stable boy's report was true: fresh falls had taken place, and elsewhere they could see mattock marks, sometimes high in the bank, streaked gashes made with a chipped cutting edge. Along the southern boundary stood a mud wall on the terrace brink, yet even here, with shameless pertinacity, more undercutting had been carried out, endangering the wall.

As they walked and inspected, going south and turning to the west, they discussed the best means of dealing with this thorny situation. To insert a footwork of stone to all the banks would be the best device, but too expensive to be undertaken. Thorn bushes planted all along would be quick-growing, but would have to wait till the spring before it could be done. And heaping small stones and broken tiles at the foot of every bank to thwart the diggers would mean depositing them on Erh Sao's soil. Yet if she would but rate her Whites sternly and sincerely there would be no need for any of

these measures, which only rich landowners could afford. But, alas! she had no sense of the meaning and value of the church, the body of believers as the Body of Christ on earth, and therefore of the premises as His property and not that of other people to be deprived of it if they gave her a chance.

This was the kind of duty Mr. Peace detested, but once he had decided to tackle it, his determination to do so resolutely increased. As they inspected, he noted mentally the different things to bring before the old lady: saplings eaten bare by her goats, who had no right to forage on church land; a path trodden hard by her servants taking a short cut, with the intention, he strongly suspected, of eventually claiming right-of-way; a pit dug under a bank to get clay for making coal-cakes and thereby threatening the stability of a big tree high above; as well as methodical encroachments everywhere.

They turned a corner, pointing out fresh marks of mischief to each other, and nearly ran into the "Duchess," paddling down the muddy cattle track, carrying her cloth shoes in one hand and holding up her voluminous skirts with the other. She was trying to disguise her immediate surprise and embarrassment by a friendly if dignified greeting of her son-in-law and Yohan when she realized what they were doing and her expression changed. She looked away and proceeded sternly down the path.

3

The reception Mr. Peace and Yohan met with when they reached Erh Sao's house was warmer than they expected. A ferocious dog appeared from nowhere, charged down on them without warning barks, and would have ripped up Yohan's leg if he had not lashed out with his stick. As it was, his linen sock was laid open in a right-angled tear. Erh Sao kept only this one dog, a grey, wolfish brute with one wall eye and half its face grossly disfigured by an old wound running obliquely downward from its ear. It needed no companions to help it keep guard. The shouts of Peace and Yohan brought a rush of servants, who called it off and held its head till they were safely past.

The little old lady's lands were not extensive, but as her own family was small she had a preponderance of Whites in her house and clustered farm buildings to do her work. At the moment only

the women were at home, greeting the visitors or peering from dark doorways. And one other, a wasted cripple woman with greying hair who had been a beggar, befriended by Erh Sao when no others would any longer tolerate her in their homes because of her inveterate stealing. In her girlhood she had been ill for many months and lay curled up in pain, unable to move. Then gradually the pain had vanished and her condition improved, but too late for her to straighten out her legs or back, and now she was only able to squat with hips and knees acutely bent. But she had learnt to get about in this position, using a wooden block in each hand as extra aids to propulsion, and every Sunday she was at church, the last to enter when the bell was rung, no longer a curiosity to those who had known her for so many years. Her tinny voice called greetings to Mr. Peace as he went past and smiled in her direction, bowing fussily as he was lately apt to do.

Erh Sao herself came out with her daughter-in-law and beamed a welcome, jabbering in high-pitched tones a mixture of Nosu and Chinese words which even Mr. Peace could only understand with difficulty. The Nosu was all right, it was her natural tongue, but she had learnt to speak some Chinese too, with an accent so appalling and a construction so original that even her close friends were amused by it. She hustled them indoors and stood blinking and smiling while benches and refreshments were being brought. Chaffingly she pointed to Mr. Peace's cap and asked if he had made it. He had given up the turban and taken to a little knitted cap with a fluffy ball on top, like the ones that Yohan and so many others chose to wear nowadays. He grinned, broadly displaying his brown mottled teeth, irregularly placed, and shuffled with appreciative embarrassment. Both Mr. Peace and Erh Sao enjoyed with subtle understanding a joke at each other's expense. Yohan laughed too, gap-toothed and wagging his little beard, but Yohan might not have seen the joke.

In the lack of eggs and fruit, oatmeal and sugar-water were produced, and as they sat and ate they talked cheerfully together, beating away the flies between each mouthful. Erh Sao had insisted that Mr. Peace sit in her chair, a real bamboo chair, weak and rickety, but the only chair in the valley. He was honoured and grateful, and loathed the words he must bring himself to say. He felt so small and unimportant in his fading blue gown of homespun, and would have greatly preferred to be just the humble friend of the old lady



A WELL-DRESSED WHITE NOSU WOMAN



KIEHKOW MARKET WHERE NOSU,
MIAO AND CHINESE MINGLE

instead of her reprover. But with Erh Sao so friendly it looked as if their difficult interview would go smoothly.

On the other side of the fireplace Erh Sao sat down on the bench beside Yohan. Probably she did not know that Chinese women would not sit so close to a man, but it was no loss to Nosu society that such prudery had not penetrated to them here. She kicked at the dog which had entered growling and leering at them, and told the daughter-in-law to "shoo" it from the room, but was unconscious of the scavenging hens pecking about the floor.

Mr. Peace's hand stole up to his forehead. He coughed hesitatingly, and an awkward grin spread over his face. Anybody not knowing him might have expected him to begin his little speech, but that was not his way; he preferred to work up to it gently and circuitously. He talked awhile and presently began to probe for an opening.

"Who were those well-fed Whites who held the dog when we came in?" he asked. "I didn't recognize them."

Erh Sao mentioned their names with a laugh.

"They are very different now," she said, "since having the *mushih's* medicine."

"What?" said Yohan. "Are those the two women who had that fearful disease eating away their noses and throats? They were just skin and bone a few months back."

"Yes, they're the ones, all right," said Erh Sao. "They are good for some work now for the first time in a year or more. Wonderful medicine that was."

"Are they working in the fields again?" asked Mr. Peace, seizing his chance to lead the conversation in the right direction.

"Their men can't manage alone," said the old lady, "so I've made them go out and help again the last week or so."

"Ground's soft now," mused Mr. Peace aloud.

"Been some landslides lower down the valley, I hear," Yohan added, taking his cue.

"I think we shall have to strengthen the banks on the east side of the church grounds," continued Mr. Peace. "Did you see there has been a fall of ground there?" he asked Erh Sao.

Her little eyes narrowed and her look hardened.

"It's the rain!" she protested, understanding.

"But there are mattock cuts in several places," replied Mr. Peace, coming out into the open and continuing with a quick effort to

disarm her. "It can't be those two women, though; they must be very grateful for their cure!"

No good. Erh Sao's quick temper rose. Jumping up excitedly, she unbalanced the bench, and Yohan on the other end clutched wildly about to save himself from falling.

"Are you still nagging about this?" she shrieked, disregarding Yohan. "Haven't I told you you're imagining it?" and began to rave against them both illogically, hopping about in her agitation, scattering the hens in a flurry of squawks and feathers. Neither Peace nor Yohan spoke. They knew their old friend, and Mr. Peace at least was known for his tact and diplomacy. He preferred a policy of silence and well-chosen words in any discussion or clash of views. Presently, as she grew breathless, Peace said:

"The mattock that did it had a chip out of its edge about an inch from one side," and let his eyes stray to a corner of the room. He had seen the very implement a moment before. His remark banished from her mind the fresh chain of objections she had marshalled while she ranted. There was no answer to this observation, and she hesitated, with the others waiting silently. The rhythmic hum of a hornet moulding a nest of mud was the only sound until she spoke again.

"Anyway, what are you getting at?" she demanded.

"What shall we do?" Mr. Peace asked quietly. "Shall we plant hedges or heap stones along the boundaries, or will you stop your men from doing it?"

He rose to his feet. He was a peaceable man. He hated these interviews and felt more ill at ease sitting, with her standing over him. Yet while she drew her scraggy body up more erectly, he drooped, seeking a way out of the quarrel, and moved over to where the light fell on her face rather than on his. And listening to her reply, his two hands stole up and his fingers interlocked over the vault of his stubbly head, his elbows dangling dejectedly. This mannerism, too, was growing on him as if to ease the tension in his brain and at present to absorb some of the blows of Erh Sao's two-edged verbosity.

Yohan was making conciliatory remarks and almost endangering the success of their mission. He was becoming more yielding as the years passed, and assuming more and more a defeatist spirit, just as now he was thinking: "She's hopeless. She won't give in."

But Mr. Peace was not weak. He would finish his task, whatever

it cost him, and his courage was soon rewarded; she began to climb down. Peace continued doggedly.

"Hedges and stones are not enough, though, if your men do not want to respect the boundaries," he said. "Couldn't you show them that you are as much a member of the church as we are?"

Erh Sao sat down again. "It would be easier if I had some men left in my family," she said a little wistfully. "These servants don't treat me as they would a man. But don't think they do as they like!" she added unnecessarily, for they knew her reputation. "And she," the old lady said with emphasis, indicating her daughter-in-law, "puts them up to it."

"When is your grandson coming home?" asked Mr. Peace, judging the time ripe to lead the conversation back into smoother waters. They had done all they could this time. Erh Sao was a good soul at heart, and a real Christian, if undeveloped. They must be content to influence her by gentle degrees. To-day it looked a little more hopeful.

Yohan rose to go, and this time it was Erh Sao who tipped up at the other end of the bench. The repetition of the mishap broke through her ruffled mood and reduced her to a cackle of laughter as she led them out through the yard. Her house faced down the valley with no wall to block the view. The lower reaches were dark with jumbled shadows of cliffs and crevices, breathing trouble, but high up on the left Mt. Ararat in sunshine watched calmly as the two men bid farewell, calling "*Lieh ma hon!* Don't come further!" to their hostess as she made to come a little way along the path with them. But the daughter-in-law hung back, offended, her horse-like face looking longer than ever.

4

After passing the preachers, the "Duchess" had stumped on down the hill indignantly.

"Those busybodies are up to something again," she cried as soon as out of earshot, flinging her words over her shoulder to her daughters-in-law behind. "Why can't they mind their own business! It's not their land; it's the church's," she added unreasonably.

Poor Peace and Yohan. It was this lack of understanding of their intentions and integrity that they had to struggle against all the time. As teacher and preachers, they were recognized but not appointed

by the church members, and their duties were not clearly defined. In a task like this there was no one else to take the initiative or decisive steps. Therefore to them it was their plain duty, but to the unthinking "Duchess" they were taking too much upon themselves. She ranted to her companions all the way down to their home, unaffected by their tactful efforts to change the subject, and turned into the courtyard still with an indignant voice.

Old Mrs. An was not always so outspoken. She usually left dissension to her menfolk, The Old Man and An Toma their son. But this morning she had gone to call on Chiopa's widow daughter who was paying a visit home from beyond Chaotung, and had found her rather too sophisticated and superior toward her remoter country relatives and old friends. The "Duchess" was disgruntled. The impertinence, treating her so casually! So Mr. Peace and Yohan were coming in for more than their share of invective. The "Duchess" was a member of the family by marriage, of course, and not of the same nature as her husband and his children. She was more stable, more tolerant, a large and queenly woman, usually silent, but not unfriendly by temperament. By choice and expediency, though, she was loyal to her husband's family, so that while counselling moderation, she was no friend of the opposite camp.

Old Man An and his son emerged from within.

"*Sa-tzu?*" he asked harshly. "What's up?"

The "Duchess" called out in Nosu toward the kitchen regions: "Water to wash our feet. Quickly!" and, turning, began to relate her meeting with Mr. Peace and Yohan, how they had the appearance of prying about as if they owned the church. As she spoke she began to wonder why she was making so much of so little, and, forgetting about Chiopa's daughter, was feeling uncertain of herself. But the spark she had struck was enough to start her family on another tirade against the present leaders of the church, their characters, their methods, their viewpoints. She sat down, washed her feet, and, without drying them, slipped on her shoes. A servant girl took the muddy water and, swilling it through the doorway into the farmyard, poured out more for the daughters-in-law on the verandah outside.

The men had nothing new to say, no particular reason why they should flare up now except that it was becoming a habit with them to think of Peace and Yohan as fools to be denounced. The Old Man had drifted a long way in the time that Mr. Peace had known

him, and was followed by men without convictions or understanding, and by others wanting the backing and protection of his powerful influence. But he was growing old and infirm. His eldest son, Toma, managed the lands and their Whites, while he himself sat at home enjoying the attention of everyone, and watched his prize sows wallowing in the yard, growing from day to day more valuable.

An Toma was tall and strong, but getting stout. He wore a broad, close-clipped moustache that drew attention to the dissatisfied line of his mouth. His smile and his eyes were unsteady, giving an impression of shiftiness of character and an uneasy conscience, and he had a frequent and unaccountable embarrassment of manner which might be taken as anger, shyness, or a sense of guilt. Compared with the Old Man he was weak, and in a disagreement with his rivals would insist on enough of his own clique being present to sway any discussion, priming them beforehand with his views. Yet it seemed that he was at the same time a true Christian, and could not be wholly blamed. It was not his fault that he had inherited this cross-grained nature any more than to Mr. Peace's credit that he had his parents' virtues of contentment and peaceableness.

But a far greater ill had developed in the Old Man's family circle. Owing to the scarcity of eligible daughters among the Christians, he had looked elsewhere for wives for his sons. His second son had married a fine girl named Sala, from a pagan home. She was slighter in build than her husband's family, with sharper features, a still keener intelligence, and clear, straight eyes, as unlike Toma's as could be, and was more balanced and friendly than they. But she was fond of her new relatives, especially Liya, and careful not to antagonize them in their controversial moods.

Liya and she were drawn to each other by mutual sympathy, for, like the former's sorrow over her eyes and unwanted state, Sala was childless and expecting to be forsaken by her absent soldier husband. Thus it was not long before she came to believe in Christ with her new friend. But her coming was far from an unmixed blessing. She had a half-brother, Shenteh, who joined the Rogues at Thieves' Inn Flats and thereby involved the family in a complicated confusion of Christian and godless connections. Whenever the Rogues came near Kiehkow in search of prey, Shenteh now came to see his sister and brought his friends with him, An Yunlo, An Hungwu, and Lin Wanli, another notorious outlaw and murderer.

STRONG TOWER

A difficult decision was forced upon Old Mr. An. He could refuse to have dealings with them and thereby cause unpardonable offence, bringing the full fury of the Rogues upon his home, or he could choose compromise with all its unpredictable implications. He hesitated and was lost. Now when they chose to visit him he was bound to feast them and give them lodging, even when knowing that they were contemplating assault on some victim unknown. And sometimes after the deed they would call in on their way home, for a rest. They never made any mention of their purposes, they were always "visiting relatives," but they and their retainers would hang about the valley and go up to the school to stare at the school-girls, and the Old Man's family did not stop them.

Soon afterwards a teacher was wanted at the Thieves' Inn, and Old Mr. An was persuaded to allow his third son to go there as tutor to the Rogues' children. He was inextricably entangled now, and adequate reasons had emerged for Toma's guilty look and sense of isolation from the uncompromising church.

To Mr. Peace these degradations came as shocks to the essential fabric of his hopes. How could young Christians stand if the oldest members of the church could fail so utterly? Even Chiopa his faithful old friend was affected by this downward trend. From early days he had been related to lawless men, but since his conversion had stood firmly apart from them. Now threats of personal violence reached him, and he put his trust in a new strong tower which he built of quarried stone. And armed men were allowed to find lodging in his house. Who hurt Chiopa now hurt his fighting friends and must answer for it. Had God forsaken His Nosu church? In Mr. Peace's soul the disappointment gnawed incessantly.

5

Even so, life was not all trials. Along with them came many redeeming features, and not least encouragements from more than one of the country churches, and in Kiehkow itself.

Mr. Peace dismissed the postal courier one day, and turned to find one of the oldest believers, a tall man known as Pitch who had been blind for years and was desperately poor, standing nearby with the boy who led him.

"Mr. Peace," he said, "can I have a word with you?"

Peace patted his arm in lieu of the smile he could not see. "What is it?" he asked.

"I want to know if you would mind if I started preaching the Gospel," he said to Mr. Peace's surprise.

"Why, no!" he answered. "That's just what every Christian should do as he gets the chance. But why do you ask?"

"It's like this," old Pitch explained, his sightless eyes turning here and there inconsequently. "My little grandson was ill and like to die. Everything I tried was no good. And then I cried to God, 'If You heal him I will go from house to house telling people about You.' So I brought him to the *mushih* and bought some of his medicine and the boy recovered. And now I've remembered my promise."

Mr. Peace's heart rose joyfully as he listened. Here was life in the church, the real thing. He questioned Pitch, what he would say when he visited the cottages near his own, suggesting improvements on the old man's ideas, and sending him off cheerfully to carry out his promise.

News from Chaotung was good too. Jenpin was doing well at school and would soon be finished and able to come and teach at Kiehkow. This that he had dreamt of at Jenpin's birth twenty years ago was beginning to be fulfilled. And Meili and her three younger brothers would follow, each giving their contribution in Christ's service. From Chaotung, too, had come word of requests for missionaries to go to the Independent Nosu, so there were stirrings in that direction also.

At Temopin An Tekuan was going on well. His admiration of his brother-in-law was unbounded and his affection for his wife had increased immeasurably since his conversion. One of his first requests had been to be allowed now to contribute to the funds of the Nosu church, and he offered larger sums than any in the records. But Mr. Peace had foreseen danger there. If his generosity came to be known, he would be in danger of assault by those whose outlook was: "Why give his surplus money to the church? We can make livelier use of it!" So he recommended moderate gifts through the ordinary channels and as much as he liked in secret. With them church buildings were repaired that would have been left crumbling. And as for his strong tower, never yet erected, he had used the materials so carefully prepared to build a chapel, not even for the Nosu, but for the Miao, the pauper tribe, saying that in time of danger he and his family would trust in the Lord. These things brought buoyancy into the life that might otherwise have pressed

upon Mr. Peace too sorely. They revived his self-confidence, reminded him of past days and achievements, and when he thought of them he was a different man.

And how he loved to see Meili with her school friends sitting in the sunshine knitting their own clothes from home-spun and home-dyed wool, coarse but very durable. They used walnut stain for brown and the bark of a forest tree for mustard yellow, and needles shaped from bamboo by their brothers. She was developing so well. He loved her company in anything that came their way; inspecting his fruit and flowers, watching the building of a mud wall, thumping the clay between broad planks held together by stout bars of ash wood, discussing the holes left behind when the bars were withdrawn, or just sitting at home on the doorsill of their cottage, he idly tracing in the dust outside while she patched clothes for the boys or worked at an embroidery. She was just sixteen.

But there were others who enjoyed her too. They talked about her at the Thieves' Inn when they returned from visits to Kiehkow: Sala's half-brother and his friends. They were all married, but that made no difference. An Hungwu was tired of his wife after only a few months. Meili was better than most girls he had seen, brighter, more alive, and educated. And she had a gracefulness of figure that coarse hanging gowns of local cloth could not disguise. She pleased him. He wanted her for himself. The power of the church and the missionaries was an uncertain factor to be reckoned with, however. Maybe it would be best to follow the approved customs at first, and ask for her formally. He found a friend to serve as middleman and write to her father.

Mr. Peace could not believe it as he read. He removed his heavy spectacles and rubbed his eyes. And read again. His Meili, his pure Meili, wanted by those men. The thought, like an evil odour rising from the page, smote him with physical revulsion. He gripped his head and pressed with quivering hands. His anguished eyes stared blankly at the offensive words. This deadly thing, this unclean, filthy thing, must never reach Meili's ears. He must prevaricate, must put them off, bid them wait till she was older and ask again.

They could not take her by force. They would not dare. They knew the power of the foreign missionaries in days gone by. Perhaps they would think it still held, though foreigners were not now all powerful as they had been. Meili was too good for such a

life, too pure to go into that family of fiends. She was exceptional. Helping in the *mushih's* home with his children had given her refinements that others did not have. She would never be able to endure it. It would be sacrilege.

"O God, I gave her to Thee!" he cried. "Thou couldst not share her with them!"

Slowly he folded the letter up and hid it away. He must recover. Only then could he find words for a reply.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN
BRIEF INTERLUDE

" . . . and the fellowship of leading Christians and missionaries elsewhere in the province did much to carry him through . . ."

I

IT was the summer again. Japan had pressed the ill-equipped armies of China back to the western mountains, and for reasons best known to herself came no further. They were at the Yangtze gorges below Chungking, and the strategic motor road linking Yunnan and Szechwan provinces had been pushed through in haste by the Chinese to bring in supplies. It passed through Hehchang, only ten miles from Hopien, where Mrs. Peace still lived.

In Europe a war of unheard-of intensity was being waged. The news of Nazi barbarism reached to the Nosu Mountains and amazed all who heard. They gaped incredulously, but did not comprehend. Tanks, mechanized warfare, they could not visualize. Most of them had never seen a car or anything with wheels. Poland, Holland, Belgium, France. Mr. Peace studied a map. Could not the Western nations, crowned with such prestige, stand up before it? England alone. He thought of the English friends he had had. They were in it. The Battle of Britain. London being demolished. They had shown him pictures of London, the bridge that opened up for ships to pass through, the trains that run underground. He had never even seen a surface train.

In China, too, bombs were still falling on defenceless towns. Kweiyang had had her share, the capital of his province. A large area in the centre was wiped out, he had heard, but was being rebuilt. He had only once been to Kweiyang, but that was in the early days. Since then he had not travelled far at all. But now an invitation had arrived, asking him to represent the Kiehkow district church at a conference of leaders in that city. The expenses would not fall entirely on him; the larger part would be met by wealthier churches' contributions.

Apart from the importance of his district being represented, Mr. Peace leapt at the opportunity to meet with others in a similar position in relation to their churches, and to seek advice. Under conditions of war, few missionaries were coming out to China to

replace those returning home, and, in consequence, many churches were deprived of missionary help, and carrying on alone. What might have been expected to harm them was having a salutary effect upon many of the senior Christians, on whose shoulders fell new responsibilities. But there were other churches like this at Kiehkow, scarcely ready to be left without skilled help. To their leaders, consultation, comparison of problems, pooling of experience, and spiritual fellowship would be invaluable. The fact of co-operation with other churches would give a sense of stability and counteract any tendency to feel cut off, forsaken.

In the old days it would have meant weeks of travel by horseback for Mr. Peace, but now with motor trucks running near his home it should take him only a few days. So he made preparations. Lately he had been doing less teaching in the school, as his two young assistants could be left in charge. Jenpin was not yet back from Chaotung, but Yohan would be able to keep an eye on Meili and Jenhan. The Rogues had been put off successfully on pleas of youth and schooling not yet finished, so Meili should be quite safe. Her father felt no qualms about leaving her, and Jenhan was all right, a home-loving, hard-working boy, showing signs of being really clever. Church services would be carried on by Yohan with Chiopa's help, and perhaps Chengming, Yohan's son, would get over from the Bible school at Kopu to lend a hand one Sunday.

So Mr. Peace was free to go, glad of the chance to see the world, though timorous of embarking on so long a journey by an unfamiliar mode of transport. And he had the highest hopes of finding light on his perplexities and the support of the provincial church in realizing his ambitions for the Nosu Christians. The first stage of his journey was to Hopien, where he unearthed his better clothes, an old silk gown or two, and respectable shoes, and a rice-bowl hat of classic Chinese type with knotted cord button on its crown. Tingying was pleased for him to have the distinction of going up to the capital, and saw to it that he was well provided with good bedding and provisions for the road.

Considering the peculiar conditions of his life, Mr. Peace realized anew, he could not have had a stronger person to leave in charge of his property during all the time, year in, year out, that he was away from home. The war was affecting everyone more and more even in the remotest country districts, and the mountain tribes were not immune. Taxation was increasing and every hamlet had to

provide its quota of young men to serve in the Army, by force if not by free-will. And conditions were such that unscrupulous men were thriving on money illicitly gained. It was here that Mrs. Peace's sharp and skilful tongue did good work, keeping the troublesome at a distance.

All things considered, he had much to be thankful for. The sight of his own green fields and the murmur of the river in the distance soaked into him with a warmth of satisfaction. A holiday mood was upon him. He was going to travel by motor truck, a hair-raising experience, but exhilarating to look forward to. Already he could almost feel the miles melting away beneath him, see the houses, the hills and valleys flashing past.

2

Two of his Whites saw him to the market town, a faithful old man who had served his father, and his son. They left him at an inn on the main street of Hehchang, and returned home with his horse. Mr. Peace had often passed through, but had never stayed here. The noise and commotion beat painfully on his ears. It was a thoroughly Chinese town.

He found a seat at a little table in the tea-shop at the front of his inn, and watched the crowds on the narrow street, and the passing traffic. Mountainous motor vehicles rolled by, grossly overladen, bearing huge bales of cotton southward to Yunnan. Fast military trucks, weighed low on their springs by crates of ammunition, and guarded by grim soldiers, tore past with strident horns clearing the way before them. Commercial trucks piled high with all manner of goods and festooned with more, with wicker chairs or baskets of fowls and what not dangling from them; scores of them coming and going, cutting incredibly through narrow spaces between other waiting vehicles drawn up on each side of the road. But, most amazing and dismaying, the passengers travelling on them, high up in the baggage, swinging to and fro, perched on the tail boards or clinging to the roof of the driver's cab.

"I'll never get there," he wailed to himself, "I shall be thrown off. I shall never get home again. No one will know what has happened to me."

There was no ticket office, for there were no public buses on this route as yet. Every man for himself, they said. Get a place and make your own arrangements with the driver. That prospect alone was

BRIEF INTERLUDE

terrifying. These drivers filled the streets, the eating-houses, the tea-shops. Money was nothing to them. It flowed out of their pockets on the slightest whim. And whenever their trucks were going to move it flowed in again. It was not a question of bargaining; the truck men could get any figure they asked. There was nothing for it but to pay a huge sum in advance. Their dialects Mr. Peace could not understand, nor they his when he made to enquire about going in the morning. They laughed and made ribald comments on his appearance, going off with arms around each others' leather-jerkined shoulders. Or else they stared through him stonily and spat on the floor without answering, and lit a cigarette from the stub of the last one between their stained lips.

The crowds thronging the streets, dodging the traffic or lounging on the narrow pavements where such existed were a motley museum of types. Nosu he saw in abundance, country ones such as himself, in for the day and going home again as he wished now that he could too. But mostly Chinese in any kind of clothing they chose to wear; uniforms, jerseys, shirts dangling out of their trousers, blue gowns, yellow cotton breeches of cavalry cut flapping open at the ankles instead of gripping below the knee; trilbys, turbans, skull caps, tout caps and bare heads. Every shade of rich and poor men, of beggars and thieves, was there. This was China of the Chinese, a nation in a state of metamorphosis, old conventions thrown to the winds, new ones unformed. Here was personified the spirit of makeshift, of ingenuity, of will to conquer, a carelessness of hardship and an ability to live in the present.

A procession of young men went by, roped together wrist to wrist and some leg to leg, under an armed guard of soldiers. No, not convicts, the boy who poured out his tea informed him, but conscripts, liable to desert. For a moment Mr. Peace feared for his own safety, and then laughed at the fatuity: his eyes, his age, his stoop; no soldier would look twice at him.

Night found him in a cubicle above the tea-shop, breathless from fumes of tobacco and wine and engine exhausts, tormented by bed bugs from the bed curtains and boards. (Lice and fleas are found in Nosu homes, but bugs are seldom met with.) Beneath him gambling drivers stirred their *mahjong* pieces noisily at frequent intervals throughout the night, and others shouted in unison with a crescendo of excitement as they flung out their hands in a "stone, paper, scissors" game of chance. He slept fitfully, waking often. Not far

up the street an uproar broke out, thrashings and yells in which the voice of some termagant woman was most loudly raised. How unlike his mountain homes! There cold anger gave expression to ruthless brutality, but here such a babel of voices was heard. He remembered the sound of a squalling child being thrashed earlier in the evening with an unending swish, swish, swish. This too was China, not Nosuland.

With earliest light he rose, roped up his belongings in two tight bundles, and carried them downstairs, bent on being ready in good time. The tea-shop was strewn with sleeping forms, exhausted gamblers lying on benches and table tops, and he hunted for water to wash his face and rinse out his mouth, but without success. He called out, "*Yao-shih!*" the term used for inn attendants, but dared not repeat it when growls of protest came from the men around him. Grudgingly, the inn-keeper opened the door to let him out, and promised to keep an eye on his bundles for him while he located the truck on which he had been promised a place.

Few signs of life were evident in the street, but when he reached the vehicle he found that the driver for no ascertainable reason was ready and threatening to start without him. On any other day the same man would have been as likely to linger for several hours before making a move, but possibly on this occasion he wanted to get away before his debts could be collected.

Rushing back to his inn, Mr. Peace seized his bundles and staggered out on to the road. By then a few tousle-headed early risers were appearing. Three rushed at him and seized his baggage. "Carry your goods, mister," they cried, tearing them from his grasp. Protests were no good. One man could have carried everything. He would have to pay three or miss his bus.

Already the truck was loaded high and every safe place stuffed with luggage and its owners, but up went Mr. Peace, clutching and clambering, a foot on the rear wheel, chest and then knee on the wooden side, a heave from a friendly man aloft, and a scramble over other people's things to a chorus of "Careful there!" and "No room here!" Panting he sat on the sharp edge of a crate to get his breath, expecting the truck to move at once. The driver and his mate were pumping and working at a tall cylinder with rusty piping issuing from it, a charcoal burner. If he had known it, Mr. Peace might have avoided this kind of machine and found a speedier vehicle burning alcohol or fifth-grade oil, but he yet had many things to learn.

The grinding and cranking went on interminably, and Mr. Peace, hot from his chase to the inn for his possessions and back to the truck again, was now feeling chilled in the crisp morning air, and bought a steaming *paotzu*, a meat dumpling, from a coaxing vendor.

Presently, "No good!" shouted the driver. "All get down, get down all of you, and push!"

"When the engine gets started you can climb up again," chimed in the mechanic.

Afraid of being left behind, Mr. Peace kept near the wheel while the stronger men went behind to heave. But as the truck gathered speed and with a splutter and belch of black exhaust fumes started up, it was all he could do to keep near it. Without waiting for the word to remount, the passengers began swarming up again, and Mr. Peace, struggling in the mob, found himself pushed up by others wanting the stepping places he had used. This time he was some distance from his previous perch, and separated from his bundles. He sat down on a bedding roll in a safe central place and watched his own things being tossed and turned mercilessly as someone arranged them for himself.

And then they were away. The speed seemed terrible. The cold air flew by them, tearing at their clothes and headgear, the houses and trees streaked past with dizzying confusion. Not for some time did he get used to the motion, and learn to look farther off, at the scenery ahead of them. Alas, the season was over or he would have had as glorious a display of azaleas, rhododendrons and wild fruit blossom as he could have imagined. But much remained for him to see, from miracles of engineering that took him through a hundred miles of peaks, to pastoral scenes along the roadside, and the sordid poverty of hamlets they passed through.

For a truck in good condition, it was a short day's journey to Pichieh the next town, and there he could expect a welcome and accommodation from friendly Christians. But there was a war on, and everything that would move on wheels was still in use, so not until the third day did Mr. Peace's charcoal truck arrive. Punctures, engine trouble, oversleeping held them up. By the first night they had only reached Pachaiping, the Plain of the Eight Forts, and had to shake down in a wayside hut. The drivers were angry, tired after the previous night and a day of wrestling with tyre levers. They cursed loudly and swore to make an early start next morning, so that the passengers were astir by cock's crow and ready to go without

having had anything to eat. The drivers, however, went off casually for breakfast, but as they had said they would be back in a moment, no one dared to go down the hill to buy food at the nearest stall.

It had rained the previous evening, and Mr. Peace's things were soaked; they had been turned upside down in the truck so that water drained in by the flaps, and it was cold comfort to be told by a sophisticated business man: "Don't you know that if you want a thing looked after properly, see to it yourself?" But he found some corncakes intact enough to stave off the pangs of hunger. Somehow, travelling alone, jogging slowly along on his own horse was preferable to this. The closeness of other people's bodies was so alien to him, of strangers smelling of perfumes from cheap hair-grease or soap, and talking on topics repugnant to him.

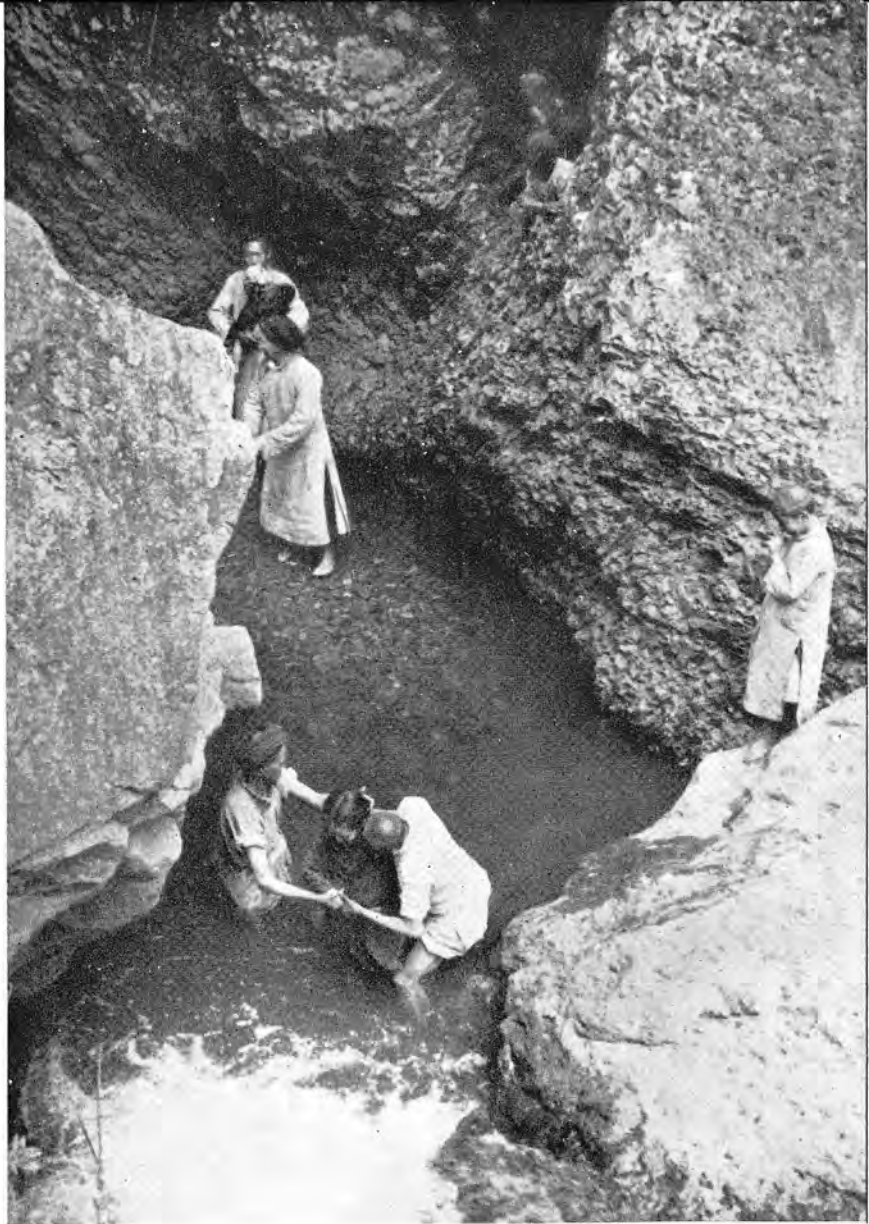
On the third day they came to a hold-up in the traffic. Normally, few trucks were seen together on the road except in towns and at night stopping-places, but here there must have been six or eight, including a military vehicle with two Americans armed with short carbines, and at the front a group of excited people talking loudly together. One of Mr. Peace's fellow travellers called out to the passengers on top of the truck ahead to enquire the cause of delay.

"*Ch'e-tzu ch'iang-lai!*" one called back. "A truck has been attacked by robbers!"

"*Ai-ya! Ai-ya!*" the newcomers cried in a chorus of dismay. "What happened?"

"A gang of those dirty Lolos have ambushed a truck just down at the foot of the hill. They shot the driver, and the truck overturned, and now they have carried off everything that was on it. No one dare go down there."

A wave of indignation and expletives swept through the listeners. On Mr. Peace's right an Army officer in close-fitting peaked cap and open tunic grabbed at his buttons and did them up frantically, a futile act of exasperation, as if to shout, "What's being *done* about it?" But from his lips came a torrent of seething venom and unprintable obscenity. "These dogs of barbarians!" he shrieked. "These vile *Ih-jen*, despicable Lolos! *Tu kai mieh, kai mieh!*" he went on, "They ought all to be annihilated, exterminated," and, not realizing that he was addressing one of the same race, he turned for approval upon Mr. Peace, shrinking at his side. To Mr. Peace it was bad enough to hear people speak of his tribe as "*Ih-jen*" instead



CHRISTIAN BAPTISM IN NOSULAND



A SCENE IN KWEIYANG, PROVINCIAL CAPITAL OF KWEICHOW

of "*Ih-chia*," for the former carries a stigma of contempt or at any rate of ignorant condescension, like "Chinaman" instead of "a Chinese." But "Lolo" is like "nigger" or "dago" or "Chink," a scathing term.

Up at the front of the column there was a movement. The military car was pulling out and starting down the road. They watched it till it reached the scene of the tragedy. Apparently the Americans were alone down there, but they carried their carbines at the ready. They looked at the truck lying empty and appeared to be searching round it. Then one of them climbed up on the wreckage and waved, "Come on!"

Slowly the line of waiting vehicles started up and proceeded on their way. But they did not stop at the bottom. One by one they scraped past the obstruction and sped as quickly as they could from the scene of violence. Lying scattered round were the bodies of passengers who had resisted or been killed in the crash, and emerging from hiding were one or two who had chosen the wiser course.

The city of Pichieh was still two hours' journey away.

3

Could anything in Scripture be truer than the statement that those who leave family and lands for Christ's sake find everything repaid a hundredfold? Mr. Peace knew it in a limited way by travelling in his own countryside. The homes and children of the Christians were his, their old fathers and mothers treated him as a son, complete strangers were like old friends when the closest of bonds was discovered between them, their belongings were for him to use. So now at Pichieh. The church folk welcomed him with open arms. The German Sisters of Friedenshort always made everyone feel their coming was a special kindness, and with Mr. Peace they made no exception.

And now he met others, including a young missionary, who were going to Kweiyang for the conference, and would be company for him on the road. And, better still, the onerous task of finding transport to take him there was being attended to by them; he had but to put himself confidently in their hands.

Again the journey took longer than it need. Breakdowns seemed as inevitable as the road they travelled by, and hours were spent in baking sunshine and depressing drizzle while "repairs" were carried out with myopic ingenuity by the mechanics, shift-work with bits of wire and wood and cigarette tin that carried them on till it went

wrong again and meant another stop. But it was all they could do while spare parts were unprocurable.

The slowness of their progress was often painfully apparent. With a blare of horns, they would overtake a convoy of carts drawn by dishevelled ponies but flying a Government pennant, and leave it miles behind. And later they would sit stolidly on the bank and watch the same animals dragging slowly past them while their machine was being tinkered into action. Or a regiment of soldiers on trek, stripped to the waist and resting by the roadside, would look up at the passing truck and go on hunting for vermin in their clothes. And later the same men would go by again, bronzed and sweating, some strong and cheerful, some bleak and expressionless, herded along by armed N.C.Os. Few of the common soldiers they saw had weapons—they were issued at the front—but seasoned troops carried them and made life precarious in the villages where they were billeted.

"It's not only in my mountains that life can be crude and raw," thought Mr. Peace. Those lines of sickly "soldiers" who had never held a rifle, dragging themselves over the mountains when they should have been in bed, with swollen feet, swollen legs, swollen bellies, and others so emaciated that the skin hung loosely on their staring bones, brought him to the verge of nausea. Only the dying were carried on rude stretchers, swinging cruelly up and down as the bearers marched. What lengths a war would drive men to!

To Mr. Peace the timelessness of the driver and his mate were not so great a trial as to the young *mushih* travelling with him. The minutes lost in smoking while the drivers thought out what to do, annoyed him intensely. On one occasion they sat down to a meal and waited for each other to finish before starting a job on which only one could work while the other lazed around. When it had delayed them till too late to go on with the journey, and the thirty passengers had to share accommodation for perhaps twenty in the village where they had broken down, the *mushih's* patience came to an end and he told the driver what was in his mind. Mr. Peace understood. He had known foreigners for many years, admired their alertness and ability to get things done, and had a shrewd idea of what it must feel like for them to be the victims of such casualness. But he agreed wholeheartedly with the aged Chinese pastor in their company when he quietly said, trusting to his close friendship with the young man:

"We Chinese do not get as much done as you Western friends. We say to-morrow is as good as to-day; what we don't do now we can leave till later. And after all, why get agitated? If we don't get there to-day, we will to-morrow or the next day. That is why we start in good time. Is there any real advantage in waiting till the last minute and then rushing anxiously?"

With the lid of his cup, he brushed the floating leaves from his piping tea and sipped noisily.

"Life moves here at a slower pace than in the West," he continued when they waited in silence. "The difference is perhaps one between sloth and restlessness. Isn't that right? You friends from abroad *must* be reading or writing or doing something. Yet the way you will be able to help us best is by getting to know us, and that is by sitting with us by the hour, and not only the hour but half the day or even all day. Isn't that so, Mr. Peace? Talking sometimes, probably about nothing that matters, sometimes stretching your legs, but mostly sitting, sipping tea, cracking nuts or seeds, watching us prod the fire, puff at a pipe, or stir the dust with a leathery toe, according to our walk in life."

He laughed softly at his eloquence and audacity. Though, why not treat the missionaries as equals? They said they wanted to be now.

"That's how you'll get to know us," he concluded; "and after a long time you'll hear us say things you've always wanted to know. And you'll find travelling under these conditions easier."

It was second nature to Mr. Peace himself; the Nosu share this Oriental composure, and the man who is serene is most admired. But less work gets done. Yet that is possibly even better than impatient restlessness under a guise of achieving things. The young *mushih* took it well: he was glad of such open speaking. In a way it was a compliment, for usually the Chinese would keep these things to themselves for fear of giving offence, and not even help with a simple error of pronunciation such as might easily be corrected. Yet they did not seem to mind the frank foreign way of helping them with English, prompting them till they got it right.

A young student on their truck was like that, overjoyed to find an Englishman chained to him for hours on end, and made the most of it, talking and asking questions in his most flowery textbook English, based on essays of the last century. Mr. Peace himself was seldom slow to seize an opportunity to brush up the little English that he knew.

"The trials of the mission field!" thought the object of attention, and smiled inwardly.

But at least it passed the time till they reached their destination.

4

The city, electric lights, saloon cars, radio; chimes from London, voices from the States, music and propaganda from Tokio. Mr. Peace arrived in the whirl of it and was glad of a day or two to take it all in before the conference began. The balance of life was different here. The standard of living of servants was almost that of well-to-do tenants in his home county. He dreamt it all; yet his silk gown was real. It had a greenish tinge unnoticed before he set out, but was of exquisite figured silk that still compared well with the new clothing of the other delegates. It brought his dream true.

And then the conference itself, better than he had dared to hope for, so that by the end he felt ready to face anything that Kiehkow could offer him in its most trying moments. So many people seemed pleased to see him there, to his surprise.

"Of Kiehkow!" they would say, gripping him by the hand in Western style. "How are you, Mr. Peace? I've always wanted to know more about your church there. Come and sit down. How are things going?"

It showed that people were interested. He found a few who actually prayed regularly, some daily, for the Nosu and for him personally, though they had never met. So Kiehkow was not as isolated as he had imagined. And when he saw someone using a telephone, talking to another person miles away, he felt that Meili and Jenhan were only just round the corner.

It was invigorating, too, to talk with men from other far-off places, to pray with those at grips with problems as grim as his own, and to hear addresses by some whose books and magazine articles he had read, and who had made it their life work to study and expound the teaching of Scripture on just such practical problems of personal and church life. After their conference sessions, at meal-times or in the garden, these well-known figures would chat with him on equal terms, as friendly as could be, and gave him every opportunity to air the matters that had been weighing on his mind. And with the missionary superintendent of the province he discussed all his questions, and was contented that the best possible would be done to help him. Of course a missionary would be sent to

Kiehkow when there was one to send, but at present there was not.

It opened his eyes to the part Kiehkow and his Nosu church was playing in the wider economy of the church of Christ in the whole of China and the world. "We being many are one body in Christ," he treasured in his thoughts, turning it like a jewel in his palm to catch the glint of colour from every facet. Nor was the appreciation one-sided. To his alarm, they asked him to conduct a Sunday service for the conference. The suggestion paralysed him for a moment, and then with a wrinkling smile he slowly removed his old satin Chinese cap and scratched his stubbly head. The request could not be more than a courtesy which he must answer suitably, by declining.

But they meant it!

"No, no, really, truly, I couldn't do it in such a company," he pleaded, alarmed again. He was tending more and more of recent years to shroud his ability in that feeling of inferiority, and unless he rallied soon would grow too old to break out again.

But he revelled for a week, for ten days, in "the fellowship of the saints." And in leisure periods laid up a store of delights to carry back to Kiehkow with him, gown lengths for his family, token gifts for close friends, a fountain-pen and ink for Jenpin when he left school and came home, pamphlets and posters, Bibles and hymn-books, pencils and simple medicines for the church. And at last, all too soon, the end and good-bye to them all.

It was no good hoping for a simpler journey home; there were only the same open trucks to ride in, so when the day came, up he climbed. Shaken and hungry, cramped by overcrowding, cold in the morning and scorched at noon, trundling and stopping, dashing downhill with engine cut out and brake drums smoking, they went on, and in three days reached Pichieh again.

He hated this kind of travel. Rather the sure-footed horse at home on its stony trail, travelling steadily, than this tempting of the jaws of death. The tales he had heard tell of accidents, and the wrecked vehicles he had seen made this second journey worse than the first.

At Pichieh there was excitement. A squat little Army car had arrived and been driven by its occupants up the steps leading to the church and mission premises; up the steps and right to the compound door! Two foreign officers were lodging with the sisters and going on to Weining next day. They would be passing through Héhchang. Would they be so kind as to take a "dear Christian tribesman" with them? "Why, shure! As many as you like of 'em,

so long as they won't eat us. Same tribe as staged that big hold-up, huh? Sounds as if they need a bit Christianizing. Not the same district? That's better. Quite a big race, hundreds of thousands round here alone? You don't say!"

So early next morning Mr. Peace was wedged into the back seat of the jeep with his bundles each side, and the miles sped away behind him, casting up the dust of their feet on his back and neck and head as they flew by. The speed amazed him, yet he felt securer than on the groaning truck. And he was back among his mountains, feeling the lightness of the air with marked relief, and marvelling again that a road could be taken through such a turmoil of crests and peaks and valleys. At noon they fed him on Army rations, tinned foods made hot by being stood a while on the engine casing when they stopped to rest, and dropped him at Hehchang soon afterwards; a journey of hours instead of days. He would be able to get home by nightfall.

He hunted in the market-place and found a countryman about to return to his home near Hopien, and hired him to carry his belongings. No one would believe it, Pichieh to Hopien in one day. But it would be a fact even if he arrived in the dark. Thirty *li*, ten miles, and he would be there. Just three hours' walk.

Along the drab lanes of the market town, recently promoted to the status of a county borough with a magistrate of its own, they went, and out on to the district road. Recent decrees had enforced the cutting of roads about six feet wide linking all *hsiang-chang's* residences, the headquarters of each district official. They had been made with economy as the local, unofficial watchword, and were already crumbling away, washed out by rains and swollen streams. But otherwise they made travelling easier, and a well-trod path followed the weedy roadway along the river valley.

Mr. Peace empty-handed could just keep pace with the burdened farmer and plodded mechanically behind him. The silence of the country struck him. Just as in the inn at Hehchang that night the onslaught of noise had oppressed him so forcibly, now it seemed that a door had closed behind him, shutting out the sounds of the civilized world. The silence of the mountains was better. And noticeable too was the scarcity of living things: nothing to be seen but a solitary kite wheeling indulgently far above his head. He was still ruminating happily on his lot when the tall pines of his own lands came into view, and he was home again.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

TERROR BY NIGHT

" . . . the bitterest blow of all . . . "

I

THE green fields and forests faded and turned brown beneath the high summer sun and fierce washing of the autumn rains. Their duller tints formed a soft background to the scattered and banked bushes of St. John's wort bursting into bloom. Everywhere its flat cups of broad-petalled gold held the most exquisite bouquets of frail filaments, a natural filigree, and shone in the gentler light. In the buckwheat fields a drabness was replacing pink and red as the blossom turned to seed. Natural beauty still stirred a sympathetic chord in Mr. Peace's soul. Back at Kiehkow, as the weeks went by, he nursed his French marigolds and chrysanthemums and cosmos with quiet enjoyment as if they had been plants of special value. They were the best he could have. They fitted in with the calm outlook which the conference in Kweiyang had given him. Since his return he had looked more upon his part in the problems of the church as that of a servant of God, and less as a harassed individual. As troubles arose he referred them to his Higher Authority and acted on the instructions he received, committing the outcome to Him instead of struggling alone. There was a new composure in his whole attitude to life.

But it was not that things had become any easier. He was involved less in the running of the school, but at Hopien he was needed increasingly. His brother's son was having frequent epileptic attacks that made it hard for the father to leave him and get on with his work. Tingying too was not well and gave cause for anxiety. She was less able to look after the lands, and Mr. Peace's presence was now more necessary there than in Kiehkow. Consequently, he left his family in school and went home again. But Yohan also needed his help in the management of church affairs, and every few weeks Mr. Peace rode over to consult with him and spend a Sunday with his children.

On one of these visits Yohan looked troubled. When Yohan was troubled he showed it less by a furrowed brow than by humourless

solemnity. Instead of grinning frequently and freely like a schoolboy, as was his nature, Yohan kept a straight face like ordinary people. This meant that something was the matter. He led Mr. Peace into an open field where there were no walls with ears to overhear them, and told him of strange happenings during the last week or two.

Down near the foot of the valley on the farther side, the home of a farmer named Chao had been raided at night and robbed of everything of value. The farmer himself was wounded by a blow from a cutlass, but before being struck had recognized his assailant as one of the bad men from the upper village. He had gone as soon as he was able to the *hsiang-chang* and accused the man, a courageous (or foolhardy) act which might well bring retaliation on his head, and the accused, under stress of "questioning," had confessed and named each of his associates in the crime. But when they were taken to Hehchang before the county magistrate, all had flatly denied the charges and alleged that their confession had been merely to get out of the clutches of men who were applying third degree methods of interrogation, and with surprisingly little delay they had all returned home, fully exonerated.

Here was the rub. An Toma and a nephew of his had gone to the feast celebrating their release. Moreover, ominous reports were circulating that it was largely the assistance of these two men which had secured the freedom of the robbers. If so, it was insurance against their own homes ever being molested; that was plain. But the church could do nothing. To bring the matter out into the open for the sake of honour did not enter the preachers' heads, they had no experience of such a foreign notion which would have been too radical and provocative a suggestion to be accepted, anyway. Yet how terrible a state for church members to be in; for it looked as if it were true. And some time afterwards, when An's nephew was asked in all innocence if he had ever been robbed, he coloured (taken by surprise), the muscles of his face grew taut, and his eyes looked uneasy and apprehensive as he thought for a moment and replied, jerking his head toward the four fierce dogs in his yard:

"They know a good watchdog when they see one!"

But robbers of that sort have their ways with dogs; he was not being straight. Here were relatively rich men and poor villains living within a few hundred yards of each others' homes. It was not unnatural for the latter to covet the possessions of the rest or surprising, for that matter, if immature Christians adopted the

customary way of securing peace and immunity instead of choosing godliness and a risk of assault.

Be that as it may, this incident had an unsettling effect upon Mr. Peace. His wife's family was going from bad to worse, and the shame upon the church he felt as a personal disgrace. He grieved as Paul did over the Corinthian Christians. And began to wonder what the Ans' attitude would be if fresh requests were made for Meili to go to the Thieves' Inn. They were deep in compromises with the Rogues, but must surely stand by their kith and kin. He had not to wait long before knowing.

2

Winter was coming on, grey skies and biting winds breaking into the autumn peace. The bare hillsides felt closer, occluding the skyline, and sometimes gave Mr. Peace a feeling of constriction, of being trapped. It was a strange sensation of insecurity, of threat, of danger pressing in upon him. As the vague shadows of the heights fell across his path, so shadows of oppression stole across his mind unless he guarded himself purposely against them with contemplation of the lessons he had learned at the conference.

He was living at Hopien, but torn between there and Kiehkow. Because of Tingying's ill health, he did not care to worry her with his restlessness of spirit till one night she herself said to him uneasily, not knowing what his attitude would be:

"Wenliang, I am anxious about Meili to-night. You haven't been up to Kiehkow for some time. Would it be good to go and see how the children are?"

Tingying anxious too! But she had named the object of her anxiety; that was more than he had managed to do. It made him realize that his own unrest was also on Meili's account. He tried to sleep that night, but could not, nor could Tingying. They tossed and turned, and rose more often than usual to poke the fire and cover it again with coal mush, and decided that in the morning he would go to Kiehkow to set their minds at rest. A servant would bring back a message to reassure Tingying, and Mr. Peace would go on if all was well to pay a brief call at Temopin.

At Kiehkow Yohan had just returned from a trip to a country church. Because he was the only responsible senior at the Kiehkow church and school, now that there was no *mushih* living there, it

could not be allowed to mean neglect of smaller dependent groups of Christians. The two young schoolmasters, unsatisfactory as they had lately been, kept an eye on things, and Chiopa was just a little way up the valley. But when he reached home this time he found more than forty armed men in possession of his house. They were in the church guest-room, in his own bedroom, cooking on his stove and using his kitchen-ware. For all his simplicity, Yohan was certainly not a timid man. The fact that his road would lead him through or into robber-infested country never deterred him from his duty of visiting the churches, and now he was fearless in challenging these men. Though robbers and murderers by reputation, paradoxically in this countryside they could be known by name and sight and live openly without fear of interruption by law or the populace. When he entered his house, Yohan at once recognized these intruders as the Rogues of Thieves' Inn Flats with their leaders.

"So you've come, An Hungwu, An Shenteh, Lin Wanli!" he said, naming each of them in grim parody of the Chinese custom of welcome. "This isn't an inn, you know," he added with brave bluntness of speech, and looked round the gang of men crowded into his close quarters.

Their expressions were not natural; they were hard, graven in moral-less flesh and bone. Their clothing was bizarre, based on the conventional jacket and trousers of blue cotton, but supplemented by jerseys, coats, felt capes, waistcoats, puttees, stockings, tout caps, turbans, anything. And in their belts or sashes they carried bayonets or daggers or Army service revolvers. Their rifles were stacked in the loft overhead under guard by one of their number.

"Never mind," said An Shenteh, looking for a moment very like his half-sister Sala, the "Duchess's" daughter-in-law; "we are only here for one night; you have nothing to fear."

Powerless to move them, Yohan coldly declined their invitation to share the fire and went out to stable his horse and make himself a bed in the back regions. If they came and settled like this on the church premises they could mean no harm in this neighbourhood; probably they had a raid planned on some homestead in a neighbouring valley. But when darkness fell he did not ring the bell for evening prayers which was customary for all on the premises, the school and the church workers' families. Better that the schoolgirls should keep indoors and that he himself should be free to watch the movements of the Rogues. However An Hungwu came to him

before long and asked: "Why no evening prayers to-day?" and over his shoulder the other two leaders urged, "*K'uai i-tien tsu li-pai!* Get a move on and have prayers!"

"We want to listen," one of them added disingenuously.

Yohan was not to be moved. But at that moment one of the gang came out with the bell which he had found, and handed it to Lin Wanli with a laugh in which they all joined.

"*Li-pai! Li-pai!*" cried Lin, ringing the bell with vigour, "Evening prayers!" and led the way across the terrace to the schoolroom, followed by his band.

On each side of the playground doors opened, shafts of yellow light fell across the gravel, and unsuspecting schoolgirls and boys filed out, wondering that prayers should be so late. Yohan found his books, his Bible and hymn-book, and went with them. There was nothing for it but to go through with prayers, cutting them short, and leaving the Rogues to have their stare at the older girls if they must. How horrible, this helplessness in the hands of such villains when they chose to be unpleasant! If only something could be done; but there was nothing. Even a *mushih's* presence with his prestige was not enough to deter them altogether.

It must have been at this moment that Tingying spoke to Mr. Peace in Hopien, and the tension of their anxiety increased. But it was late, after nine o'clock already, and Meili did not like to leave the cottage and find her way up the dark lane, though every step was in the church grounds, so she and Jenhan stayed in. They had no notion of danger.

After prayers one of the Rogues said to Yohan:

"Why didn't everyone come to prayers to-night?"

It should have been enough to warn him that they were looking for someone in particular, and he knew of their interest in Meili, but he was a countryman and understood only what he heard without seeing deeper meanings. Or if the thought of Meili entered his mind he dismissed it. She was in no danger; they were negotiating through middlemen for her. He gave the obvious answer, "It was too late, of course; they had probably gone to bed."

The next morning An Shenteh and An Hungwu sauntered out of Yohan's house saying they had a letter to post, and made for the Peaces' cottage. In Mr. Peace's absence, the simple duties of the little Post Office were managed by Meili and Jenhan though he was only twelve. At the door the two men called out,

"Letters for the post! Anyone at home?"

There was a letter-box, but it was never used; letters were too few. They were received and dealt with at once by hand.

Hearing men's voices and suspecting them of belonging to the Rogues who, as friends of her uncle and aunt, should be entertained, Meili called softly to Jenhan and sent him out with instructions to take the letter and put them off. It was not that she had any idea that they might want to see her, to make sure that she was there; she acted as she did because it was unsuitable for a girl of seventeen to go out alone and talk with strange men.

Jenhan went to the door and took the letter from them.

"Sorry," he said, as she had primed him, "my father is not at home, so the house is unswept and not fit for receiving guests." (A figure of speech only.) "And we have nothing with which to entertain you."

They could not reveal the purpose of their call, so the two men left. It did not matter much, they were pretty certain, and could find out from An Toma, who had invited them to the morning meal. They turned down the lane toward the Old Man's house.

The whole troop of Rogues was ready for the road when they returned, a motley crowd, undrilled and undisciplined, but held together by the fact that they served the hereditary masters who led them. With Lin Wanli and An Hungwu riding ahead, they took the route to Kolo. Only An Shenteh stayed behind. He had a quarrel to settle, and had arranged to sleep in Kichkow that night. Yohan's house was left vacant.

3

In the evening Mr. Peace arrived, cold and tired from his long journey. As he sat over the fire in his centre room, thawing out and restoring himself with hot tea and oatmeal porridge, Yohan looked in and found a seat beside him.

"Good thing you've come," he said without preliminaries, "but what has brought you? I thought you said you weren't coming for another fortnight?"

"I had to come," answered Meili's father. "Both my wife and I felt so anxious about our girl here. Last night we couldn't sleep. Has anything happened?"

Yohan told him about the visit of the Rogues and their departure. Mr. Peace listened anxiously.

"Thank God I've come," he murmured. "This is surely the Lord's leading."

They discussed the situation together, and as they talked it became clear to them that An Hungwu had wanted to see Meili. Perhaps she was in danger, though that was hard to believe. Besides, the Rogues had gone off on some other business. But without a doubt the time had come to tell Meili of her part in the incident, and to hide her at night lest they come to take her without waiting for formal consent.

Poor Meili. She listened solemnly and without fear. Vaguely, impersonally, she had heard and thought over stories of this sort of thing coming to other girls, but she had always known herself too young to be in danger. Was she a woman now, that grown men should want to take her? It sank in slowly, numbly, and her face grew pale. Inside her long loose sleeves her hands tightened and felt moist.

"What shall we do, Father?" she asked.

She was out of her depth, getting frightened. There was a moment when no one spoke, wondering what to say. A rifle shot cracked the silence. Somewhere across the valley it must have been. They jumped. "What's that?" cried one of them involuntarily. Their conversation had made them unready for the sound. But as they looked at one another and no further firing was heard, they remembered that this was their normal environment. Shots in the night must mean nothing to them unless directed at them. In the morning they would hear an explanation. This was the world they always lived in. As likely as not it was unconnected with the Rogues' interest in Meili.

They were not wrong. In the morning a man was carried up to the compound by his relatives for treatment, but he was mortally wounded. Yohan could only send him away with aspirin to relieve his pain. An Shenteh had come to settle his quarrel, and lost his temper. The matter was ended. No one would dare to report it to the officials. It would be impossible to get a conviction against one of the Rogues. Acquittal might be costly, but they would get it and come back to settle accounts.

"Don't be frightened," said Mr. Peace at last to Meili; "there is probably nothing in it, but we had better be careful. To-morrow I will arrange with your Aunt Liya to let you sleep down in their home. No one would touch you there. And we will not agree to your being married yet."

This solution set his mind at rest. After all, they had nothing definite by which to suspect that this visit of the gang was concerned with Meili. That they should plan to kidnap the granddaughter of the family with whom they were on such good terms was almost unthinkable. And if that had been their intention, even the Rogues would respect the Old Man's house. Meili would be safe there. The scare seemed to melt away, and he fell asleep that night planning to go on to Temopin as soon as he had completed this arrangement for her. Yohan's son, Chengming, and a schoolboy were going via Temopin to get money from the bank at Weining. He would have companions all the way.

4

A message brought Liya up to the cottage first thing in the morning, while Mr. Peace was preparing to start.

"Yes, certainly. I don't see the need, but if you like, all right!"

So that was fixed. At dusk each night Meili would go down there. Meanwhile, there was no danger in her staying at home in the day time. It was December the fourth and bitterly cold. The school had broken up until the warmer weather came. But Mr. Peace's visit to Temopin must be fitted in somehow, so, muffled up well, he mounted his horse and set out.

For Meili the day passed uneventfully, till the sun sank into grey cloud over the western hills, warming it to a deep maroon with at best a reddish tinge, and was prematurely quenched in its sombre bulk. Now some of her fear of the previous night returned. She was hunted and must hide. The darkness held danger for her even in Kiehkow which she had known since she was a toddler, even in the little cottage which was more home than the home at Hopien. She gathered up a few small things to take with her, and set off down the cattle track toward the great walnut tree she could see a quarter of a mile below.

It was meagre comfort to flee from those men by going to the home where they had been feasted as friends, and where Sala, sister of yesterday's murderer, would be present to entertain her. Yet it was her mother's home, and there was nowhere more secure. She entered the courtyard and made her way to the women's rooms.

"I've come," she said to her aunt, looking for a welcome, for encouragement in her plight. But her reception was formal, if not frigid. Sala was kinder, but her presence was unsettling, and perhaps

it was Meili's response that was at fault in Sala's case. In the circumstances it could be pardoned, and Sala did not mind, but Meili felt ill at ease. She answered their questions and talked as if this were just another of her not infrequent calls, hoping that one of them would admit that she was expected and could share their sleeping quarters. She was disappointed. Could it be that they did not want her? Were afraid of offending the men? Would prefer her to go back, alone with Jenhan and their two little brothers? She rose.

"It is getting late," she said. "It is dark already. I'd better hurry."

"Are you going?" asked Liya, but she made no effort to detain her, even rose to go with her to the door. Nor did they offer to see her home.

Meili felt panic strike at her heart. Almost she burst into tears and implored them to keep her, but she was Nosu, a Black, she was proud, and brave. They could say now that she took herself away and she could not deny it. She turned her back on the cruel house, on her old friend the walnut tree, and the hard-hearted people who were her own flesh and blood. Running and walking, she hurried up the long unfriendly path, feeling that hands were groping for her in the darkness, fearing that she might be pounced on at any moment.

Panting, she reached home and shut the door behind her, bolting it firmly to give her courage. A lesser matter might have dissolved her in a storm of tears and shaking sobs, but not this, it was too frightful. Her eyes were dry and her mind clear. As soon as she had regained her breath she called the servant girl, a White Nosu, younger than herself.

"Bring cornstalks," she said, "as many as you can carry, and come with me."

She waited for the girl to return from the back of the house laden with stalks. The maize crop had been good, and they were long strong ones, five or six feet high, and over an inch thick at the root. Then, gathering up the felt mat and *pukai*, a Chinese quilt, from her bed, she led the way out into the darkness.

A winter wind was whistling. She had been hot, but was shivering. The orchard was the place she had chosen without debating alternatives. There was a wall separating it from the yard outside the cottage. It was near enough to the boys, but gave her freedom to move if her fears came true. With the servant's help, she stacked the cornstalks against the wall, leaving a space at the foot. This makeshift shelter would protect them from frost and snow, and hide them

from any who looked into the garden. Inside she spread the felt as a mattress, and crawled in with her young companion.

It was all she could do. Now that she was there she felt ashamed. It was not as if the Rogues were coming after her; in fact, they had gone right away. There was only the possibility of their trying to kidnap her. But the attitude of Liya had been disturbing. She must have thought the risks were real or she would not have minded her young niece sleeping there. She preferred to keep on the good side of those evil men and let the girl find some other place of refuge.

"Oh, for a tower!" thought Meili: "Somewhere where I could get inside and stay secure for ever."

"The Name of the Lord is a Strong Tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe," came an answering memory from Scripture.

Meili wept. She had forgotten to pray. Getting carefully up lest she dislodge the cornstalks, she knelt in a huddle under her *pukai* and cried. Beside her the servant girl lay mystified, wondering.

"*Chu-o!* Lord Jesus!" cried Meili in her heart, "Be kind to me, take care of me."

She prayed till she felt calm again, and lay down. Maybe there was no need for this fear and these precautions, but she had better be careful till her father came home. Across the wall she heard Jenhan bolt the door as she had bidden him, with the big bar of wood that stretched from post to post. Now she was alone outside, could not get in if she wanted to. And with her was this girl who could take orders, but had little sense of initiative, who might in her simpleness give her away by letting out a sound.

The moon, crimson and magnified, heaved herself slowly above the horizon and fading shrank into the cloud-mottled sky. It was the sixteenth of the lunar month. Shadows of the orchard boughs fell in broken patterns on the wall and little lean-to, like Peking ironwork, beautifully wrought.

5

Meili slept, but her sleep was light. Always her ears were open for sounds in the night. A branch scraping on the tiled roof, a pig grunting and changing its position in the shack beyond, roused her to full wakefulness, but she slept again.

And then, O God, footsteps! Without a doubt, footsteps, not singly, but from many pairs of feet, stealthily, cautiously, from all sides, coming down the lane, crossing the field below her, turning

into the open courtyard. Cold terror seized her and froze her to the ground. The servant girl was asleep. Better leave her lest she make a sound. Would they suspect this harmless pile of cornstalks?

The Rogues plan was simple; they had only a young girl and some children to deal with. It was: silence till they were in position surrounding the house, with outposts at a distance to give alarm or to intercept Meili if she should try to escape. Then quick action and away over the hills to Thieves' Inn Flats. Once there, nothing could get her back. It was well after midnight, so they had moonlight for the deed, moonlight for retreat with their prize, but darkness for pursuers if any tried later to follow.

Suddenly the stillness was broken by the din of crashing woodwork. Rifle butts, shoulders and feet pounded at the door and in a trice the bar was broken and the door fell battered off its hinges. The men surged in, separating to every corner of the cottage. Above the racket Jenhan's clear treble challenged them. He was the man of the house; his little brothers were wailing with fear. They had been sleeping round the red coal fire and were still only half awake, terrified by these armed men knocking them aside to search the room behind. Jenhan was seized and held with his arms behind his back while someone lit a torch from the glowing coals. The bright light fell across a tall man's face and Jenhan called out in surprise.

"An Shenteh! What are you doing here at midnight? Would you rob us? And Lin Wanli, you too?"

He saw the outlaws searching high and low, turning up the bedding and looking under the bed. Then he knew. If they had come to rob they would be bundling up the *pukais* to take with them. No, it was Meili they wanted. He struggled to get free. Like a snake in the grass, he writhed and slithered about their legs and feet, but his arms were gripped by a savage giant. If only he could warn Meili! What if she were still asleep? When they had searched the house, they would search the garden. But outside there were men too, the cottage was surrounded. A dozen inside and thirty more on guard. What hope had anyone to get away?

Now they were up in the attic ransacking the stores. A villain came down laughing and showing a bag-full of silver he had found. That was all that they stole. Meili was not there. Thwarted, they decided to give up. There was no news from the watchers outside. Their quarry must have gone elsewhere to sleep. So they let Jenhan go; and free, in his excitement he had only the one thought. He was

only twelve. Out of the door he dashed, straight for the garden orchard. And seeing his set, purposeful face, they knew he was not just escaping, and followed. But the orchard was empty.

6

Meili raised herself upon an elbow. In this way she could hear better. Beside her the blackness of the mud wall was broken by a small disc of light. It was a hole left by a connecting rod used in the building of the wall. Through it she peered, holding her breath lest she be heard by the men just the other side. She could see them gathering before the doorway, ten, twenty of them, filling the little court, could hear their whispers and the soft jingle and clash of their weapons being turned in readiness for use. Then pandemonium and the wreckage of her cottage door. Her thoughts moved fast. In such moonlight how could she run? Yet to stay here was like lying in a trap. Now was the time if any to make a dash, while most of the men were employed, and before the others expected an escape. Oh, for help! Now, if there was anyone thinking of God's children in China, now was the time their prayers were needed. Now would one sentence for the Nosu find a use, even if unknown to the pray-er. She took hold of her companion, who was starting up in alarm, and whispered loudly under cover of the noise, "Quiet! We've got to run."

She peeped out. There was no one in the garden itself. North and east were the little lanes guarded by ruffians, to the west was the cottage. On the southern side was a wall standing on the edge of a high steep bank, a drop of ten feet to the ploughed field below. Most of the assault party had entered the house.

"Come!" she said, taking the servant girl's hand, and raced for the wall. The crisp air stung her to action. She was too flushed with excitement to feel cold. Between a pear and a walnut tree the prickly *sahmu* leaf thatching of the wall had crumbled away, reducing its height by a foot. With an agility that surprised her at the time and amazed those who examined her line of flight, she scaled the wall, and, without looking down, jumped into space. The ground was hard and rough, her foot twisted over and buckled beneath her, and she fell heavily. The servant following fell on her in a heap. But in a moment they were up again and running for dear life across the field.

No picquet had been set just here; it was an impossible place for a

young girl to escape. But up the field a man turned at the sound of their fall and saw nothing in the shadow of the wall and trees. They were halfway across the field when he caught sight of them and raised a cry.

Now nothing could save them but speed on their unshod feet. At the time Meili felt nothing in her injured ankle, but for two months afterwards had persistent pain. They fled without turning to look, down to the cattle track by Erh Sao's house and on, round to the back of her grandfather's house. At the window of Liya's room Meili called out frantically,

"K'ai men-o! K'ai men-o! Open the door! Quickly, open the door!"

Voices were raised inside and a light appeared.

"What is it? Who's there?" they asked through the wooden bars.

"It's I. It's Meili. They've come. They're after me. Oh, quick, quick, open the doors!"

Round the corner there was a clatter of door bolts being drawn, and Meili tore to it. Her uncle, An Toma, filled the doorway, holding a flaring torch of dry bamboo. It dazzled him, he blocked her way. He moved aside, and she was in.

Behind them the picquet had given chase. The sound of his feet padding after them at first grew louder, but their own rushing filled their ears. As for him, he was in a quandary. He had been set to guard the bottom of a lane, and it was too soon for these two figures to have escaped from the house. They must be frightened servants of no consequence. Yes, one was a White, clad in undyed cloth. He halted and hurried back to his post, cursing his dilemma.

In the Old Man's courtyard, family and servants, men and women, gathered shivering round Meili as she gasped her story.

"The horn!" someone prompted. "Blow the horn. Call the *pao-chang's* guard!"

They ran for the horn, but it was not in its usual place. High and low they hunted, but it could not be found. A White was despatched to borrow one and to blow it. But there was a long delay. At last its deep mellow sound boomed out over the valley, up to Chiopa's, across the eastern gully to the farms over there, echoing down to the lower village near the gorge. And slowly the militia, the "keepers of the peace," crawled out of bed, picked up their rifles and made for the source of the summons. In an hour they had gathered on the high field across the brook that cut its way past Old Mr. An's farm—and the Rogues were miles off over the collar of the Kiehkow hills, knocking up a friend and asking lodging till daylight.

HORS DE COMBAT

" . . . which wellnigh ended his usefulness."

I

MR. PEACE'S journey had been much like any other. As he reached the crest of the mountain above Kiehkow, he reined in his horse and looked back over the valley. A brief wave of indecision came over him, tempting him to return, but Chengming had plodded on ahead and he could not leave him without an explanation. The move to catch up again decided his further course, and he settled down to his day-long travel.

His road was the Kolo road as far as the Kolo Valley, but cut across its foot instead of going up to the market, and entered the long Kopu ravine. Some distance up this section of the way they caught up with a solitary man going in the same direction. Mr. Peace was leading now, and as the path was narrow and he could not pass without forcing the traveller up the bank, he slowed down behind and entered into conversation.

Going through Kopu. Oh, yes. Carrying a big cask. Oil. Oh, yes. Who could be wanting so much? The district office. Of course.

So they talked, one behind the other.

Anything happening at the market today? Not much doing. Any robbers there? A gang from the Thieves' Inn making their presence felt, but they were just preparing to go.

Mr. Peace was all ears. "Where were they going to?" he asked.

"They hadn't finished their meal yet, but I heard them talk as if they would go up to Kiehkow," he answered.

Mr. Peace fell silent, lost in resurgent fears. What did this mean? *Ai-ya!* If only there were peace and quiet. It never lasted many months at a time before disintegrating once more in trouble and anxiety. Meili should be all right with her relatives, but his efforts to find her a husband must be redoubled. Perhaps she could go away to school, but where could he find the money? And where could she go?

This tangle of friendship between the Ans and the bad men of the district was distressing. He believed that each of them was a good

Christian at heart: the Old Man, too old now to count for much; the "Duchess," so reserved as to be an enigma; Toma and Liya, both of them often as keen as anyone else in the church. They had become involved and were getting more tightly enmeshed as they went along. He hoped that was the worst that could be said. The rest of the church was comparatively healthy, steady in attendance at Sunday services and in maintaining good Christian conduct, even if signs of more vigorous life were few. And what worlds of difference between them and the pagans around.

He rode on in this mood of dull despondency till with the gathering dusk they came to the gates of his sister's home. There was something unique about this place. The building was better than most in the countryside, but that was not the secret. A tranquillity rested upon it. The servants were unlike ordinary rustics; they were unobtrusive, moving about silently, with a purpose, and respectful, clean. The guest-room furniture was expansive and there were no insects in it. But it was An Tekuan himself that made the atmosphere. Quiet and shy, he preferred to take a minor share in entertaining, but the warmth of his welcome and the openness of his expression made up for his few words and put his friends at ease.

It was good to share his troubles with this man and Wenling, and Mr. Peace was laughing with them before he had been long beside their cosy fire.

2

The messenger whom Meili sent off first thing next morning reached Temopin when they were at their evening meal. He stood beside the fire with face blue and hands outstretched to seek the warmth. His grey cloak was heavy with frozen mists that thawed and clung like crystal beads to the hairy felt. In Mr. Peace's hands the chopsticks were motionless as he waited for the man to speak, and the sweat stood out on his forehead as he heard the tale.

"They came back after midnight last night," the man was saying, "and broke into your house. Meili got away, but only just."

"What! What did you say?" His voice rose almost to a scream as he leapt to his feet. "But why was she at home? Why wasn't she with her aunt? I left her safe, and you say they nearly caught her!"

He sank down again and covered his head with his hands and rocked in agonizing torment of soul. The others too were stunned and speechless, watching him with aching eyes. For minutes no one

spoke. They could not while in there with him. But An Tekuan at length withdrew, taking the messenger with him, and let him give a full account of all that had taken place, before dismissing him to find food and rest from his journey.

The meal lay steaming before them, but Mr. Peace, giddy and nauseated, pushed it from him. His skin was ashen and clammy. He let the Manager assist him to his bed, but could not sleep. His throbbing head lay hard on the straw-stuffed bolster, and twice he got up and was violently sick. Medicine had no effect. He could not pray, though often he knelt, in obedience to Wenling and her husband, who tried to comfort him and came in ten times through the night to see what they could do. God was so far away; he was forsaken. Mountainous waves and billows were rolling over him and he could not be saved, could not be comforted. This was the end, here was the climax to his tribulations, he could not bear it any longer. Let him die. Let him shrink away for ever, into a coffin in the hillside, far from the storms of life.

His Meili. He saw the scene so clearly, the look in the outlaw's eye, and his sensual, lustful lips. He saw his Meili, the hunted, the captive lashed to a horse's back, the unwilling concubine of a demon clothed in flesh and blood. It was too much. That she had escaped, was safe and well, was like a lie told to deceive him. The stars had fallen and all was dark.

Years ago these three had been brought together in circumstances akin to this. Wenling and Wenliang and An Tekuan. But now the opium addict, the drunkard and gambler had become a saint. He was more than a brother to the stricken man. Seeing that Mr. Peace was too distressed to take their comfort and advice, exhorting him to trust the Lord and cast it all on Him, Tekuan led his wife away and together in their room they prayed as he himself had been prayed for in days gone by.

Returning after a while, he sat on the bed and talked gently, leading the poor man's thoughts on to other things, and going again. Three times he did this, praying with Wenling in the intervals, noting a calmness growing in Wenliang's mind. The fourth time he went in Mr. Peace was fast asleep.

The return to Kiehkow took all too long, but there is a limit to the speed at which a horse can go twenty-five or thirty miles in a

day. A steady walk increased to a trot at times was all that the mountain tracks would allow. With cries of good cheer from his sister and friend, Mr. Peace set off from Temopin, over the shoulder of hill, past the stone chapel and Miao huts, and down through the woods and fields. One by one the well-known landmarks were reached and left behind; the valley of roaring waters, the gullies sunk in alluvial soil, the Pass of the Strong Winds, the precarious shingle slopes, the ruins of the vanquished Nosu's home, the waters' meet below Kolo, and the old stone shrine. A climb of a thousand two hundred feet, and Kiehkow lay spread out once more in wintry setting beneath him. Most beautiful Kiehkow, where "every prospect pleases, and only man is vile."

When telling the story to the *mushih* who came to live in Kiehkow three years later, Mr. Peace gave no details of his reunion with Meili. He was a little embarrassed after telling minutely the effect upon himself of the unexpected news. He had been carried away by the memory of those harrowing hours and his gratitude to An Tekuan. It was as much to show how triumphant was the sequel to An Tekuan's story as to be included in Meili's adventure. He was sitting in the *mushih's* study telling it sentence by sentence while the *mushih* took it down. And at the end his eyes shone as he answered a request.

"Tell your Christian friends at home? If that would make them pray for Meili, *mushih*, do whatever you like."

For Meili has been in hiding ever since, and is in danger still.

Back in his cottage home he heard it all over again from Meili herself, how his plans for her safety had miscarried, and her prayers for protection had been answered. And then his relatives had come up to see him. Everything possible had been done, of course, they told him. The "Duchess" and Liya had gone up with Meili and the *pao-chang's* guard to inspect the damage and decide a course of action; but too late. The moment of danger was already over and the Rogues had flown.

Not far over the hills behind, they had been taken in by a relative of An Shenteh, and a sheep had been killed to fête them for a day, such was their scorn of the arm of law. While they were there a representative came from the *pao-chang* to enquire what they meant by their behaviour and to demand the return of stolen property.

Their attitude was casual, even to feigning ignorance of the affair at first, but later they admitted to paying a visit, but not to taking anything.

Legally the case was clear. Nothing could be brought against the gang unless Mr. Peace accused them personally before the county court, and to do so was pointless unless he were richer than they. It would merely bring bitter animosity and vengeance in return.

Only one course lay open, to hide Meili away until such a time as she could be married to a Christian man. Mr. Peace sent for his wife and discussed with her this painful theme. Hopien was no further from the Thieves' Inn and no more secure. She must go further away and yet be with friends who could be trusted to protect her. Sadly they sat down and wrote to An Tekuan. It was a big thing to ask, that she might stay indefinitely with them, and might mean danger coming to their home. But the answer came at once. Not the request, but their reluctance and apologies might give offence. Bring her without delay. And remember, if this meant more frequent visits from Mr. Peace himself, the greater would be their joy.

4

That was the end. There was nothing more to do. Meili had gone and the cottage was drab and empty. Even the three boys were not enough to fill the place that Meili had occupied in his life there. Since the days when she first came up from Hopien riding on a coolie's back she had been a symbol of contentment, the converse of the trials and disappointments in his work. And she had gone, brave but weeping, into exile.

In the depth of winter, Mr. Peace had known of cases of frost-bite. He had seen the dead white senseless areas of flesh on men who had been injured when alone and unable to get from the mountains into shelter. It was like that within him now. There was a numbness, a death of some part of himself, unseen but unmistakable. When his mother died he had been dazed; life with no mother was unthinkable after all she had meant to him. And when his father followed, the very foundations of life were shaken, its stability seemed threatened. But these were natural and vaguely anticipated, young as he was. When the impetus of expansion in his church was lost on the reefs of Nosu insularity and individualism, and the

backwash of reaction sucked true believers under with the rest, then he had known grief, the aching of a noble heart longing for the highest.

"The church of the ages knows that costing love more often than physical martyrdom, is the price of 'blood and tears' that she must pay for the world. It is no new story; in every age her tenderest hearts must be put to her hardest work."

But the beastliness of this new blow made it unbearable, and Mr. Peace, the finely moulded bell, muffled before, battered before, was cracked now. The retiring humble man was broken and timid. His habits of self-effacement were accentuated, his mannerisms became more marked—the hand across his forehead, both hands gripping his close-clipped pate as if in self-protection, and his nervous cough and restless fingers, were unrestrained. Noises at night demanded investigation; his sensitiveness to sounds became abnormal, and once or twice when louder ones were heard he fled in agitation from the house. The oversight of church and school was more than he could face. Defeated, he gave in.

Jenpin, his eldest son, was just back from school, home from the city as Mr. Peace himself had come years ago, full of vigour and ambition, on the threshold of life. Jenpin was now a man, not tall but strongly built, with big bones and a large head and face. His skin was dark, his eyes and eyebrows black, with raven hair sweeping up from a tall brow. His words were few, but when he spoke a flow of polished Chinese came forth between flashing white teeth.¹ Jenpin was intelligent, and better educated than his father. What better than that he should share his yoke? Mr. Peace put him in charge of the school, with Chengming to assist, and went to Hopien in search of quiet.

But it did not occur to him that if Jenpin was content to settle in this backward place and to lead a rustic life, it would be more than he should expect, and a great tribute to his son. In Jenpin he could see one of his earliest dreams fulfilled, and thought of little else.

¹ Some of the streams in these Nosu mountains contain an excess of fluorine, and the teeth of people who consistently drink their water show early signs of poisoning. Opaque whiteness gives place to mottled brown. Yohan's son Chengming's were like that already. In later life the bones of the most hapless victims fuse together.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BACK TO THE FRAY

"But his spiritual resilience brought him once more into the fray . . ."

I

TIME is a healer, and although a scar and deep-seated ache may remain to remind of former injuries, the healthy individual can learn to disregard them so that life may proceed unhampered. In Mr. Peace a resilience was revealed that demonstrated his spiritual health and maturity. Before very long he was wishing he still had a hand in the affairs of the church and school, and returned to Kiehkow to see how things were shaping. He was hailed on all sides and left no option as to whether he would take up work again or not, so he plunged at once into his full share, glad enough to do it.

During his absence Yohan had carried on largely alone, hard hit without a companion, but faithfully continuing his pastoral duties. Jenhan too had shouldered much of the postal work, sharing the burden with Jenpin in spite of his school work, and deserved to be relieved.

But the chief thing that compelled Mr. Peace to stay was that he saw he must be near Jenpin. After years in the city the young man was finding it hard to settle in this country place. Already he had found excuses more than once to go away, leaving the school to Chengming, and the allegedly necessary matters of business had delayed him unduly. He was liable to be detained by unforeseen events and stay on a few more days. It was gaining for him a reputation for fickleness, and his father was keen to exert a stabilizing influence if he could, by being in Kiehkow with him.

As Mr. Peace saw it, Jenpin should be content, whereas he was bored. His interests were anywhere but at hand. He wore the clothing of a scholar or minor official, a jacket with breast pockets and conspicuous buttons, and cheap leather shoes (lacking polish), a sign of the town goer and young modern, scorning the plain dress of a country-man. And on his face was a perpetual look of discontent. To his father a good education, a good position helping the church, and a wife and cottage, seemed all he ought to seek, though

it was true that he had no salary or remuneration beyond what came in small fees from his schoolboys and girls.

Nor was he happy with his wife, though Mr. Peace could not see why. She was a buxom girl from a good family of Blacks. But she was dull; large, doughy, and spotted, with the remains of a smirk always fading stalely from her face. She seemed to have a sulky air of consciousness about her that she was inferior to her relatives-in-law.

After his absence it was invigorating to Mr. Peace to get back to the old round of teaching, preaching and advising, to take up his garden again, and to gossip with Yohan in their spare hours as they used to do. And the affection of some of his old friends was quite moving, of wizened little Erh Sao and serious old Chiopa, not to speak of the poor Christians of humbler status who many of them owed so much to him and were genuinely delighted to see him back. All things considered, apart from the tragic trouble over poor Meili, life was not too bad. It jogged on pleasantly from day to day, and if there had been a *mushih* to work with, would have left little to desire. But there was no prospect of missionary help apart from those at Kopu. There were still not enough to go round.

And then one day the postal courier came in, a towering, lanky individual with piercing eyes and tufted beard and clothes in ragged ruins from travelling all and every day of his existence, in all weathers. He held a slender staff in his right hand, and on his back he carried the green mail bag of the Chinese Post Office. Day after day he covered the same road. Hehchang to Kiehkow through Chuwai market, Kiehkow to Kopu through Kolo market, and thence to Weining by Temopin, and back, taking a week for each round.

To-day he brought two letters for Mr. Peace, one in an official-looking envelope with an imposing seal down its left side, and one from Hopien, from Tingying. Mr. Peace looked at Tingying's first. Apart from personal tit-bits, it dealt with a serious matter to which the more impressive letter would probably also refer. A posse of soldiers had come with a gang of workmen, and without so much as "by your leave" had felled and carried off *two hundred* of the finest trees on the Peaces' lands.

The news was incredible, exasperating, a *fait accompli* which he could not have prevented. He quickly tore open the other letter and scanned its contents. It was formally and politely worded, asking

for his timber for the use of the country in time of war, and stating the sum of money that would be paid him for it.

So his return to duty had been the signal for the fight to begin again. Mr. Peace mopped his brow. This was iniquitous. The sum they offered was not half of the true value of his trees. He knew the system:

To their higher authorities:

"To grant by such and such department	\$ so much
By purchase of timber for specified buildings	\$ half as much
By wages of coolies, etc.	\$ the rest"

But in reality it would be thus:

"To grant	\$ so much
By purchase of timber, and other expenses	\$ some of it
By gold linings to private pockets.	\$ the rest"

The Chinese proverb that extortioners are worse than tigers passed through his mind. How true it was. This was blatant robbery.

2

After the first burst of indignation, Mr. Peace calmed down. It was an insult, another drop in the bucket of oppression and robbery by the men with the whip hand, but there was nothing he could do. It would have to be borne like every other injustice.

In fact, on further consideration it looked as if Tingying's letter might contain the more important news. The last sentence or two perplexed him. Briefly she mentioned some disquieting symptoms which had confined her to the house and showed no sign of clearing up. Only she and her Whites were at Hopien. His brother lived nearby, but he had lost his wife, and crippled as he was, had his hands full with his ailing son and his farm. He could not give her much help. So Mr. Peace decided to go down, taking medicines, to do what he could for her.

But first he must sit down and answer the infamous letter. He could not start for Hopien till the morning. His line of action was decided, but to put it into writing was less easy. He found his ink slab and brush, and chose a sheet of paper headed with the church's

name. Seated on a narrow bench beside a low table, he adjusted his glasses carefully several times, as if that would help, and prepared to write, first a rough copy and then the real thing.

Slowly and laboriously he began his letter, nibbling uncertainly with full dark lips at the bamboo shaft of his pen, hesitating over the choice of words, trying to recall the style that he should use in letters to superiors. At school he had known exactly, but he had been so long in the country with no reason for keeping it up that it came back to him unreadily, and then had to be adapted to modern forms. Again and again he crossed out what he had written, obscuring each character with circular strokes of the brush; the opening phrases, stereotyped by custom and etiquette, a line or two more, and then, almost with a chuckle, his *pièce de résistance*:

“ . . . and of course I could not presume to accept payment for this timber intended for the benefit of the nation. Please enter it as a gift. . . . ”

The deed was done. This felt better than being swindled or defeated at court if he should have challenged the issue. It fitted his mood of quiet and contentment. And it was typical of him to take this line; he was incapable of being anything but a gentleman. He copied it out with painful care and sealed it in red with his name, sticking down the envelope with flour paste, and registering the letter, though there was no need—it made it look more important—deposited it in the mail bag for the courier to collect on his return.

And now to find a horse for to-morrow's journey. His own he had returned to Hopien, as he had no stable in Kiehkow and did not like always to be using Yohan's. Chengming had two animals just now; it would have to be one of those, seeing Yohan was out on his. He turned towards the stables, passing the school where groups of boys and girls sitting in the sunshine rose to their feet as he went by and murmured his name respectfully.

Chengming was a pleasant young man, humble, with a vocation, and a practical turn of mind. He was tall and well proportioned, but not strong, dressed in semi-Western style with long trousers and coat or jersey. He had been through the Bible school at Kopu and was now a recognized worker in the church, though at present in full-time employ with the school. He had found out that he was capable of most that he put his hand to, and was always keen to

learn something new, be it saddle-making, sewing, building, doctoring, knitting, preaching, cobbling, farming, archery, anything. His cross-bow and arrows hung by his cottage door, used chiefly to drive hawks from his brood of chicks.

But his wife was a very different type. She was sitting on their doorstep feeding her infant as Mr. Peace approached. Seeing him she turned modestly and pulled at her gown, not because she was modest, her grin betrayed that, but because it was the right thing to do, for the Nosu are unlike the Chinese, who think nothing of feeding their babies in public. But this young over-nourished woman was unusual. She was the large, heavy-cruiser kind, and liked to wear jerseys made by herself with broad circles in bright colours limited in width and arrangement only by the amount of wool available, emphasizing her aggressive rotundity. She was not often heard making her presence felt, but behind a thin camouflage of smiles she managed her way through life with subtle obstinacy. She was always too busy to do the things asked of her, always just going to roast the oats, to boil the pig food or to feed the baby.

Mr. Peace stepped shyly past her and found Chengming shoeing his latest acquisition in the stable yard.

"Borrow a horse? Why, yes, if you don't mind the little one. But what's the matter? Hopien? Then we'll ride as far as Chuwai market together."

Mr. Peace hitched up his roomy sleeves and lent a hand with the shoeing. He was gentler and more timid than he used to be, and this sort of thing was not his *forte*, but he was still game to tackle almost anything if need be.

3

One look at Tingying and he knew the worst. She had grown rapidly worse since writing to him and now was very ill. Her laboured breathing and leaden blue lips and fingers, her troublesome cough without strength to make it effective, and the audible rattle in her heaving chest, left him in no doubt of the issue. A tightness gripped him deep within, but sorrow could not help. He must let the family in Kiehkow know, and prepare Meili for the news.

Normally, he would leave letters with the ferryman, who would keep them till the courier passed by, and hand them over as he punted his boat slowly across the sluggish stream. But that would

take too long; a servant must be sent. He did what he could to ease Tingying's distress, and sat beside her, writing.

Then for the next two days, while his letters were on their way, he was busy caring for her, making palatable snacks to tempt her, knowing it was too late to restore her, and trying to learn all he could about her affairs. But she was too breathless to say much. For years she had managed the farm alone, silent on business schemes which he knew of roughly, but left to her. All he could gather was that there were certain debts to be settled; she could give no details, the effort was too great.

Hour after hour he sat waiting by her, keeping the flies away from her closed eyes, gazing round the room at odds and ends that he would always connect with her, watching a line of ants that bustled interminably up and down the wall, butting nose-on into each other as they clung to a well-tried path through the mud-wash, and going on purposefully, oblivious of all else. He watched drowsily, hoping for her brother to come, with Liya and the "Duchess" perhaps, and for Jenpin, to say good-bye to his mother. But before the first arrived he saw the end was near. Hot-eyed, he comforted her, reading from her Bible and praying with her, a lonely watch but for the faithful White women hovering in the background to help.

He was tired out, living in a dream, his heart and eyes too heavy to weep, too numb to share the others' mourning. He even took part in the burial service, speaking mechanically. Tingying and he had lived a strange life, separated so much, unavoidably, yet fond of each other still. And she was no more.

Then he became conscious that Meili was there, brought by Wenling, but was untroubled by the risk she took. Meili's presence was an anodyne, a balm with no equal at this moment. She sensed it and kept near him, speaking few words, but feeling the strong ties of comradeship and affection like lines of magnetic force between them.

It was soon over. Life became no easier as it went along. The in-laws had departed already, and he wanted to go too. He had said good-bye to Meili and to Wenling, who had gone another way for safety's sake, and himself went back to Kiehkow with his sons. His lands could be left for a time, though not for long, in the care of his Whites and his brother. He could not bear to stay in Hopien.

It might have been expected that their mutual grief would bring the Old Man's family closer to Mr. Peace to make up for his loss, but it was not so. The fault could not be laid at any door, but somehow with the snapping of the link that joined them their relations became more distant, hard as it would have been for any others to detect.

In his sorrow, Jenpin too became strangely sullen and morose. His character his father found hard to understand. Jenhan was different, solemnized by grief but full of understanding and consideration. Apart from this bereavement, Jenhan was natural, enjoying life. Yet in his school work Jenpin was at ease. Whether it was revolt against Mr. Peace's ambitions for him that disturbed him, he could probably not have said. The part of schoolmaster he played with solemn formality in school hours, and excelled in the kind of speeches and exhortations to patriotism and virtue encouraged by the Government. Only when he took prayers did he find it hard to speak as he knew he should. Something was lacking in him, something all the obvious Christians possessed.

Out of school, at basket-ball, that mask fell off. Automatically he ceased to play a part and lapsed into youthfulness, enjoying every moment as he played or refereed, his deep bass voice mingling with the high-pitched shouts of the boys and the resonant tenor of Chengming. But he was not really satisfied.

The school was well attended, by children from heathen homes as well as Christian, and some were from two and three days' journey off. It was a necessary part of the church's work, and in Mr. Peace's time had sent out many educated youths and girls. Perhaps for this very reason it was the object of rivalry and criticism in which Old Mr. An's family featured conspicuously.

Behind it all may have been resentment that Toma's eldest son, as well qualified as Jenpin, had not been employed on the staff, but, as he made no claim to being a Christian, it was not surprising if the church leaders objected. On the surface, however, it was the running of the school that was called in question, in particular the inclusion of industrial subjects in the syllabus instead of pure scholarship. It became the cause of friction and division which were to test this indigenous church, starved of full missionary help, to its very core.

The trouble came to a head suddenly one Sunday. The church service was held always at the nominal time of "after the morning meal," as most families had only two meals a day, and no one owned a clock. In practice, it meant about one o'clock, when the meal was over and the day's routine finished, the pig weed and horse fodder cut and ready. As one and another thought of it, they would wander up the valley from the lower village and outlying farms, to gather in the grounds outside the school and chapel.

There they would sit, some for an hour or two, others not so long, chatting and dozing, squatting on the doorsteps in the sun, watching a passing plane, or grouped round the fire in Yohan's room or the school till enough had come to justify the ringing of the bell, the little hand-bell with a makeshift tongue. The men and boys would enter first and take their seats on the left half of the schoolroom—the chapel was too big, and kept for conferences—and the women and girls would follow, sitting on the right.

They were a motley congregation, chiefly Whites, with a few Miao, perhaps a Chinese or two, and the outstanding Black Nosu, Chiopa, An Toma, Erh Sao, the Widow, and their families and others. The Whites were chiefly freemen with their wives and children. White servants seldom came; their masters kept them at work, and only after dark were they free to do as they pleased. But the Old Man's Whites were different. His family was more enlightened, it would seem, for his servants had some education and were free to come to church if they wanted to. Erh Sao's never came, but clattering up at the tail of the women's crowd would always be the beggar woman she had befriended, moving with her hands on wooden blocks, squatting on her heels as she shuffled along. And blind Peter would come in led by a boy or tapping his way slowly with a stick, when someone would jump up and take him by the hand.

The service was over on this particular Sunday and the people had come out, women first and then the men. As usual, they stood in groups gossiping with those they had not seen before the meeting, the girls admiring the embroidery on some baby's new cloak, or a patient or two hoping to catch Chengming's eye and buy some medicine.

In the middle of this concourse, still subdued after the service of worship, voices were raised, and loudest of all An Toma's, as if to draw the attention of everyone to the rightness of his argument.

Before church they had been discussing some point about the school, and now they had returned to it again. Answering him back angrily with face flushed and control almost lost was Jenpin, while Cheng-ming stood by pallid with emotion, but keeping a check on his tongue. Helpless to intervene, yet agitated in his concern to stop the fracas, stood Mr. Peace, unable to make his pacifying remarks penetrate the uproar, so that he fell silent. At times like this he never feared to speak, but often he believed his contribution to be useless and so was dumb.

It looked as if at any moment they would come to blows, and the menfolk of An Toma's family, his servants and supporters, were grouping themselves near him when in a paroxysm of rage he turned and ordered them all home, to return with spears and knives to teach these young rats a lesson. Here was a crisis such as the Kiehkow church had never known, and who could tell how it would end? The blood of the Nosu was up and might stop at nothing. They were Christians and Christianized in manner of life and thinking, but around them the primitive world was as close as ever, and this was surely no worse than plain loss of temper in a "Christian" land. It was a shameful lapse. But, even more, it was a dark contrasting shadow which shows up in relief the amazing advance that has already become the normal.

5

It was not far down to their homes, and the men were soon back, a swashbuckling crowd prepared to go a long way to show that the Old Man's family and its opinions were something to be reckoned with. All consideration of Christian principles seemed to have been thrown to the winds. But the birds had flown. Jenpin and Cheng-ming, seeing that things had already gone too far, considered wisdom the better part of valour and went post-haste to seek protection with the *pao-chang*, the representative of law such as it was. And everyone else, except for some curious schoolboys who could come to no harm, had made themselves scarce, filing off in little lines of threes and fours over the fields and down the cattle tracks, wondering what the upshot would be.

With no enemy to assault, the rabble had to be content with their sabre-rattling, and soon disbanded. As each young schoolmaster lived in his father's home, with Mr. Peace and Yohan with whom

there was no quarrel at the moment, their property was also safe and could not be ransacked.

It was already late when they had gone and Mr. Peace was left alone. He was distressed—nay, more, he was ashamed. The church was humbled to the depths, and the shame he felt to fall on him. All his world would know. The unconverted *pao-chang* had had to give asylum to save Christian from the sin of Christian.

He could not go home, could not face anyone and hear light gossip on the subject. He went up through the copse behind the chapel, under the great oak trees to Chiopa's field. The rotting trunk of a massive tree lay where it had fallen years before. It was a spirit tree, feared and worshipped, that had been felled when the news of God's love in Christ had come and cast out fear. How long ago! Yet how little advance in the realm of spiritual things. The tree was a link with the past before the Gospel came, and this incident of the spears was evidence of the old nature not extinct. But the tree was nearly finished; a flick of a finger and the wood crumbled in dust. Please God this disgrace was the last convulsive fling by the Devil in this place.

He parted some thin undergrowth and stepped out on to the field. Three scraggy black pigs were ploughing erratically with their horny snouts for potatoes missed at harvesting. They raised their heads and panicked foolishly away with shrill squeals. Somebody's servant was jogging down the sunken path with a huge load of dry bracken on his back. And beyond, the hedge-lined track went up the hill, leading his gaze past the *sahmu* copse where the line of trees spread over to the left to Chiopa's house. He saw with discomfort the strong towers of Chiopa's and two other homes higher up the hill. Poor Chiopa, why not trust the Lord now as you used to do? And higher still the skyline rose past the woods where the women and girls lay in hiding from the Reds, right to the summits above. And there his gaze was held.

A loose white cap of cloud clung to the cone-shaped peak, behind and around it. But it was alive, tossing and struggling like a wild beast caught in a voluminous white net. And as he watched, it broke. Over the ridge it streamed, at first like a huge fluffed collar, then out of hand, like a gigantic waterfall let loose, growing as it fell, pouring down the hillside, filling the clefts, dividing at the ridges, streaming away in all directions, rolling and rolling, a flood with no end to it, surging, lifting, disintegrating and falling, billows and

banks of it, maddened and raging, here in flight, there in pursuit, broken on the tree clumps, charging down the gullies, sweeping down upon him in ever denser clammy gusts.

The declining sun was hidden and the valley full of cloud, and Mr. Peace was standing enthralled by the sight though he had seen it many times before. How like his life this was; sunshine and a blue sky, an untroubled landscape and quiet domestic scene—and then a holocaust of trouble smothering him in clinging damp depression, plunging him into tumultuous, fog-bound thoughts, blotting out all clarity and reason.

He drooped in misery, a man weighed down physically by an insupportable burden of mind. He grasped his head with both his hands, and, desperate, seeing no light or hope for his people, his fingers crooked and clawed at his stubbly greying head, passing back and forth irrationally.

Crossing the line of vision of his downcast eyes, a beetle rolled its ball of dung painstakingly past his feet and into the long grass. It broke the spell of his dejection and made him turn, back through the wood to his cottage. And coming past the school he saw the massive bulk of Mt. Ararat looming through the mists. However disturbed or shaken he might feel, the twin-peaked mountain never changed, it always stood unmoved, calm and comforting, watching benignly the vicissitudes of human life below it in the valley, and breathing reassurance.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

HARD PRESSED

" . . . in which he continues to take a lead."

I

IN the market town Mr. Peace was in favour. He had been an easy bird to pluck, had even co-operated in lining people's pockets at his own expense. The underlings who profited from his reaction to their scheme may have had something to do with the next development, but apart from that, his letter had brought him into the limelight of officialdom as a lover of peace willing to work in with the Government.

The county government needed help. It was not easy for a Chinese from a distant province, a magistrate accustomed to "civilized" people, an Army officer more at home in a military college, to understand or cope with these "wild men" of the hills. He needed advisers and sought them, especially Nosu. Enquiries were made about Mr. Peace, and in course of time a deputation waited on him bearing a lacquered tablet measuring four feet by three, on which lay deeply engraved and picked out in gold leaf, four Chinese characters extolling his patriotic spirit and generosity. And with it an invitation to the town to meet the magistrate and join the advisory council.

Mr. Peace was astonished. When the tablet was hanging above his door to be seen and admired by all who came to call (but scorned by him himself for its fiction), and the deputation had gone, he thought the matter over, flattered and made fearful together by the invitation. There was much to be said for accepting and having a hand in the governing of the county, but in what unforeseen complications might it not involve him? Here surely was a chance of controlling the outlaws that abounded in the mountains, of bringing law and order. It was worth a trial. Robbery had been increasing lately in all parts of the district, and something must be done. He would represent the church, the element that looked most for peace and quietness, and make it clear to the comfortable town-dwellers that no one in the country was safe.

He thought of the sheep in that flock up the valley. They had been the Widow's, but had been stolen and now grazed with a bad man's cattle. Everyone knew it and pointed them out to each other, but she had no redress. The law was too expensive, to steal them back too risky, and to fight she could not, so there they stayed. Within limits, anyone could do as he liked if he could stand up for himself. Many an early morning Mr. Peace had seen cattle being led down the track that ran obliquely from the crest of hills between Kolo and Kiehkow, the haul of a night's raid. No law-abiding and convention-loving person would be out with them at that time on the highway.

And from further afield came other tales. Yohan used to bring them in when he came home from a pastoral visit to outlying churches. The northern area was the worst. It was farthest from the motor road and law. Yohan came back from one of these trips before Mr. Peace had written his letter of acceptance, and his stories clinched the matter.

2

Yohan could smell tea a mile off. He came down the path to the cottage beaming already with pleasure, and at the corner called Mr. Peace's name. Peace was up and at the door in a trice. He had been hoping Yohan would be back, wanted to ask his opinion. Sometimes his slow gliding walk with down-turned face and rounded shoulders gave the false impression that he could not move briskly, but on occasion Mr. Peace could display a surprising nimbleness. He stood in the doorway with folded hands and smile-wreathed face, welcoming his friends. There was something about his appearance nowadays that was peculiar to him. When he smiled, the new emotion failed to obliterate the faintly pathetic and wistful lines that seamed the skin about his eyes and mouth. It was as if the two expressions were superimposed, the one seen through the other.

The tea was stewing on the fire. It had been there since the morning. That was how they liked it. But to celebrate Yohan's return Mr. Peace unearthed from a little box in his room a cake of Fêng Pêmo's tea. The converted sorcerer-priest had a method of his own for making the common tea, which grew not far from his home, acquire a smoothness and flavour that market tea lacked. Mr. Peace crumbled it into the steaming pot and let it stew a while,

then, tipping a little into a cup, swilled it round and threw it out on the mud floor in a corner. He filled the cup and passed it casually but with both hands to Yohan. They were old friends, not formal but polite. His own cup next, and the two of them sipped noisily, drawing a draught of air over the surface to mix with and cool the tea that entered their mouths. Stray leaves and sticks they spat out dryly from the tips of their tongues, and splashed the dregs out of their cups on to the floor behind their benches. This was contentment.

"Did you find any tiles?" asked Mr. Peace presently.

Yohan had been deputed to order a batch of tiles for the church buildings if he could find someone baking them. The kilns were not always working, and were few and far between.

"No good!" he answered. "Old Cha near Chuwai wants the money in advance, and I know he has orders for tens of thousands that he hasn't started on yet. He's squandered their money already." And Yohan raised his right hand and elbow expressively.

"How about the man near your place?"

Yohan's old home was twenty miles due north of Kiehkow.

"High price and fissured tiles. I didn't stay to bargain. They'd all leak. But the *tui-chang*¹ at Kantien promised to write as soon as he had seen his foreman. I took some apples as a 'mouth-opener' to make sure he'd let me in. The *mushih*'s trees bore well this year."

"Nearly got robbed below Kanhokou," he went on, grinning, so that his tongue looked strangely red and moist through the gaps between his teeth. "Came round a corner and found a man sitting on the grass. They had only just left him and gone off with all he was carrying, and the coat off his back. A moment earlier and I would have bumped into them—and lost my old horse!" he added chuckling.

It had not happened, so could be treated as a joke. But then he grew serious.

"You know old Mr. Lo?" he asked rhetorically. "His nephew was kidnapped while I was in their village, and held to ransom."

Mr. Peace said nothing, simply stared. This was a painful topic for him and roused low fires of feeling that glowed hotly in his heart. He would do anything to stop this scourge. Yohan took a sip.

"He was sitting by the fire with some friends in the next house but one from where I was," he said, drying his moustache with his

¹ Leader of an armed band.

hand, "and a stranger came in and squatted opposite him. The stranger talked a lot about himself—all lies, it turned out—and asked them who they were."

It was not unusual for a passer-by to drop in to get warm, or for a general introduction to take place.

"He got up for a moment and went to the door, but came back. A minute later a dozen armed men sprang in, the stranger pointed with his pipe, Lo's nephew was roped up, and before his friends could move they were off on horses down the hill."

"What are they asking?" enquired Mr. Peace.

"Ten thousand dollars, three horses, worth nearly as much each, and a good many other things."

Young Lo was an only son, and Black Nosu sons are very precious because so scarce. Moreover, he was well educated, the promise of his family. The sum was found, and ten days later he was home again. Better than having him killed, which was what would have happened.

What doubt there had been had now vanished. Mr. Peace wrote in reply agreeing to serve on the council. Something must be done. And possibly it would secure for himself and his friends the blessings of justice, fair taxes and assessments.

3

So Mr. Peace was an adviser on the county council and almost at once regretted it. His opinion was asked from time to time, but he sat for hours listening to others and being exhorted as if it were he and his fellow-councillors who could control the outlaws if they wanted to. But worse still, his visits to the town to attend business meetings were taken up largely in feasting and gossip. The feasts he loathed. The food was good, better than he had tasted since his youth; but the wine!—it flowed, disgustingly. Locally made, from maize and sorghum, it was easy to get and drunk immoderately. He shrank from the sight of the toastmaster standing before them urging them to drink, and drinking himself from the little shallow cups, with the wine pouring down at each side of his mouth, streaming down his chin to the table and the floor. He gave the impression of drinking a lot while little stayed in his mouth, filling and refilling as he coaxed and cajoled.

Mr. Peace was conspicuous, the last man to wish it, the only abstainer, embarrassed and silent. He saw the money flowing away

while so much could have been done with it. Yet was he to flee it because the job he had embarked on was distasteful? Was he to keep out of their company altogether and deprive the local council of all Christian influence? He could not decide.

Then the outlaws went too far. They raided the town itself, killing and looting on the main street, so that something had to be done to restore prestige. "Let the Lolos oppress each other, but when they attack us . . . steps must be taken." Troops were sent out. Action at last. They went to the bandits' lairs, but their own whereabouts were always known. When the marching troops approached men and weapons and valuables were nowhere to be found. And when they had gone life returned to normal. An occasional pitched battle with losses on both sides, and severe reprisals with some gruesome heads set up on poles at market sites to warn the rest, and the troops withdrew. But while the local representatives of law were relatives of the guilty, nothing effective would be done; and extensive intermarriage would make that nearly always so.

It appeared to him that every hope that came into Mr. Peace's credulous, ambitious heart was doomed to disappointment. Yet he kept going on. His faith in God seemed unshakable, and the small encouragements that came his way he grasped and clung to, making the most of them. Jenhan was one of these. And at this time the thorniest church members showed up so well in preparing and supporting a conference that, despite all, his hopes rose. The briar wood was good if its thorns were not. And then he himself tripped and fell.

Without a wife, his home affairs were impossible to manage unless he forsook Kiehkow. But Jenpin and the church could not be left. He sought a wife, and finding no one in the church to marry a middle-aged widower with grown children, looked outside, and married one who turned out to be reverent and attentive to all teaching and admonishments, but "incapable" of believing. His experience with Wenling and Tekuan had proved a snare.

But no one blamed him, least of all the "Duchess" and her family. They saw no slight on Tingying's memory. A man must have his wife, if only as a shield against slander. This was the customary thing to do and just what they expected. And as for marrying outside the church, what hope was there of finding anyone among four hundred baptized Christians, men and women, of whom a mere fifty were Black Nosu, if as many? He could no more be married to

a White than a king could to a commoner. His race would not allow it. But his conscience was uneasy and damped what joy might come his way.

Then one evening his prevailing dejection was broken into as a dreary stretch of desert would be by a poppy opening up, a splash of colour in the colourless. He was alone with Jenhan, now fourteen, and without premeditation asked:

"Jenhan, what do you want to do when your schooling is finished?"

And without a pause Jenhan had answered, looking up, "To be a preacher," and added thoughtfully, "but not on money from outside, because that would make me lazy; or paid by the church, because that is too uncertain and it makes people so patronizing, as if they owned you or did it for 'charity.' I want to earn my own living and teach and preach in the country."

He could not know how wisely he had spoken, or how his guileless words went to the depths of his father's being and in a flash rekindled the fires that had burned and smouldered and all but gone out over nearly thirty years.

4

Following the incident of the spears, no general rift between the two families resulted. Toward Mr. Peace, the "Duchess" and her son and daughter were amicably inclined, for they had suffered another bitter grief in the death of Old Mr. An, and Mr. Peace had risen to the occasion with disarming sympathy and help. And Toma's nephew, who shared his views, had asked for Mr. Peace to come and see his wife since she had fallen ill of a painful disease. There was little he could do because of the taboos which prevented him from knowing much about the nature of the illness. But his sage advice had made the young man grateful.

With Jenpin and Chengming it was another matter; the quarrel lived on. The two young men felt hostility directed toward them and noticed that people of opposition views looked through them rather than recognize and greet them as they used to do. It troubled them and handicapped their work. They saw in small delinquencies among the boys an organized attempt to disrupt the school by subversive means. There may have been something in it, for one small boy no longer in the school revealed that he had been told to hang

about the windows and distract those inside, and stole the wooden handle from the bell to annoy the masters.

But the repercussions of this feeling were yet to be more serious. And upon Mr. Peace blows were to go on falling thick and fast at closer intervals. The bad men of the valley assumed from what they saw that liberties could be taken and some folk would approve, while the chances of trouble were small.

At dead of night a smashing of woodwork woke Mr. Peace and Jenpin and the boys in panic from their sleep. They fled out through the back way as the front door fell in, and hid while all their bedding, clothes and money were removed, the only things of value they had. Jenpin had a thousand silver dollars laid by for some special purpose, and lost it all. They knew too much to tackle the invaders, had seen too many patients who had stayed or had obstructed them. And the only comfort in this new distress was that Meili, knowing how it felt, came over secretly to cheer them up, and stayed a night. The *pao-chang* was no more helpful than after Meili's scare.

Only a few weeks had passed and Yohan was away, leaving Chengming and his wife and babe alone in their house, when suddenly the silence of the night was broken by the rending of the building's flimsy walls, by the crash of blow upon blow of a heavy axe. There were two doors that would have barred their way, so the robbers chose to go straight through the wall of timber panelling. In terror made worse by the suddenness of their awakening and uncertainty of their surroundings, the victims fled into the stable yard and hid as Mr. Peace's family had done, waiting while all their possessions were plundered.

There was nothing they could do. A search would almost certainly have shown their goods stowed in the robbers' homes a few hundred yards away, but who would undertake it? And now the unwashed men of the lawless clique passed them by with a fixed stare at the road ahead, showing not even the furtive glance and half-nod they had always given.

This insecurity was unsettling. Mr. Peace and Yohan had a feeling that these robberies were largely due to the public cattle road passing through the grounds. Anyone could wander where they

liked and see into their homes. It had been a nuisance from the earliest days, with scores of head of cattle of all kinds passing night and morning across the school playground, defiling the path, eating the hedges, and running into the school rooms, the goats and pigs breaking through fences into the gardens and playing havoc with the vegetables. They liked the green clover. When the grass all round was dry, the clover, brought by the *mushihs* to the valley, was always fresh.

Another track ran past the premises and could be used without inconvenience if the church path were closed, so Mr. Peace and Yohan talked it over together. There were no rights-of-way; the path belonged to the church, the church of the whole district (not only of Kiehkow), to whom the two leaders were responsible. To close the path would inevitably lead to local opposition, and until this time no one had dared to face it. But now the last straw had been added to their load of troubles in serving the Christian community. They hired a man to build a wall closing the little lane.

Workmen were hard to get in Kiehkow. The social system of each man having his own Whites who did all his work left few independent labourers to be hired, and most of them were ruffians. One was a Chinese. By choice, he made his living by robbing other people rather than work. He was a member of the same local gang, but pleasanter than the rest. A simple, burly fellow, known to the missionaries by the nickname "Mincer Joe." Just now he was unpopular throughout the countryside because of his recent activities, including at least one murder. Yohan had been treating a bullet wound through his arm, and found him willing to help with a day or two's labour in lieu of payment. He had to lie low in any case, for if he ventured out of his home valley he might be caught.

So Mincer Joe began. A few big stones at the base and a pounding of clay on top. The framework of planks between which he beat the earth was roughly two feet high. The cattle had gone by before he started, and no one of consequence appeared till he was on his second tier.

Mr. Peace was in his cottage, with the orchard intervening. He listened to the thud, thud of the pounding as he sat. And then an angry woman's voice and a battering at the planks. He went out to see what it was. Liya, his sister-in-law, was there, livid with rage, tearing at the wall. He showed himself and asked her to stop. She shouted at him with a fluency of fury such as he had not known her

to possess, and went on at the wall. An hour of the man's work was undone, and still she kicked and tore.

"Why *should* the wall be built? Why shouldn't they come that way? No further round outside? Maybe, but not the same. Her brother had not been consulted. No, nothing would ever get done if he had to agree first. Was that what was meant?" She turned and strode down the hill.

"Quick, mend it up," said Mr. Peace, "and keep on at it whatever they may do."

He knew she would be back before long with reinforcements, and was not wrong. The struggle began again. It hurt him as the quarrel after church had hurt, but he believed it right to hold out. Time and again the wall fell down, and each time when his relatives had gone he made Mincer Joe start again until at last he won.

It should have been done years ago, before it came to this. If only there were more structure to the church, men to whom he could have appealed instead of taking these painful things upon himself. But still they drifted on, unwilling to lead or be led. Poor Nosu. Or was it just these few clans in his own countryside? He wished he could retire again, go back to Hopien and leave it all. How else could he keep going? But that was what so many voluntary workers had done, the reason why the church of his ambitions was already so bloodless and weak.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

ALARMS AND EXCURSIONS

"His trials, however, are as much as he can bear . . ."

I

MR. PEACE was not always gloomy. Far from it. He was a cheery man who found enjoyment in many simple things that others missed. If he had gone the easy way he would have lived at home, a perfect landlord with benign and generous interest in his neighbours. In his home he would have found all the happiness he could want. But as it was he chose the harder path and felt its bitterness more keenly than other men.

His moods of melancholy were like some slimy blue-green monster that rose from sombre depths and threatened now and then to engulf him. Sometimes he would feel despondent for days on end, but normally he smiled his way agreeably through life, bound up in home and family and work, and kept the disappointment of his hopes to himself. Only to the *mushih*, when there was one, and to Yohan and old Mohsi did he speak, with eagerness and disappointment mixed, about the wider vision of the church that he had had.

About this time he heard some cheering news. A *mushih* and his family were coming to Kiehkow, and with them the first single lady missionary that the church had ever had to work amongst them. They were coming for a year, too short by far, but better than not at all.

If he counted his blessings, they were many. He was living with his sons, four sons, when so many had but one or none at all. Jenpin was a worry, fearful all the time that his enemies would resort again to physical violence, but Jenhan, cheerful and untroubled, made his life a joy since that evening when he opened up his heart. He watched them grow, Jenhan and the younger ones at school. And in his leisure nursed his garden, seeing his fruit trees blossom and hang heavily with fruit, gossiping with Yohan in the sun. Overhead the drone of passing planes, more frequent as the Allied effort against Japan increased, reminded him of all he had been spared of war and desolation. His lot had been much lighter than that borne by thousands.

Yet all the time a cloud hung over him which he struggled to dispel with scant success. Tingying's debts. She had been ambitious in her business schemes, planning to improve the farm, and by the profits to repay her loans, but had died too soon to see the matter through. And, hunt as he might, Mr. Peace could find no records of her deals. He had to keep it quiet, lest people learn that he was in this plight and have him at their mercy, and, apeing his true creditors, pester him until he became their prey.

He pinched and scraped and sold and mortgaged to raise funds, travelling here, there and everywhere to interview buyers and creditors and friends who were helping him out. It was a millstone round his neck and he would not rest till it was removed. His wife's plans might yet repay the outlay she had made, but he was not waiting till that day. No debts for him.

Since his old home was burnt down, he had not built again in lavish style. Mud walls to above his head were continued up with rough woodwork from his own lands, loosely put together to await a better time, postponed indefinitely while his money had to go to pay off debts. So even when the missionaries arrived he was away more than he would have been, helping his second wife, and improving the house for her by gradual stages.

2

And then one day when he was there at Hopien the heavens opened, bringing a surprise and joy he had not dared to wish for. He had written to Meili, as he often did, telling her his movements and his plans, had told her he would be at home in Hopien for several days, and thought no more about it.

Now Meili had turned up. Her cousin, Wenling's son, was going back to school at Pichieh, and had to come that way. When Meili heard the news, she pleaded to be taken as far as her old home. Her exile had begun to pall. It was nearly three years now since she had fled that awful night from unknown horrors, and she had only been home twice.

They could not dissuade her. It was worth the risk, she said; she would go mad if she could never move outside their house or see her home when all the time it was so near. So she had come. It was not safe for them to travel by the ordinary road, and they had followed little paths across the hills where she would not be known.

Meili. He felt so rich. He had, of course, been often to Temopin to see her, but that was so palpably a visit to the maiden in exile.

Here she was, home, and no one knew. She would be safe for three or four days if she stayed indoors. After that the risk would be too great. It was long enough for word to reach the Thieves' Inn and a band of Rogues to come, if anyone should betray her.

Meili was a girl of twenty now, quiet and dignified, and, like her father, slight of build with gentle movements, inconspicuous. A big black turban crowned her head. Beneath it her dark eyes were framed by aristocratic nose and high cheek bones. Her mouth was sad, but full of character. And the loose garments of heavy cotton, cut in pre-Revolution style of Chinese dress according to local custom, clothed a lithe body and could not hide the graceful freedom of her walk on tiny cloth-shod feet.

The world was bright with colour and the hedgerows stocked with flowers, orchids and square-tipped daisies and deep azure bugloss running wild. Beyond the farmyard stood a tree with reddening leaves, lit up by the sun's rays piercing through and through them till they shone like a myriad rubies. And over all, blue skies, and snow white clouds propped up in space by the distant hills.

But it was soon over, and their horses stood pawing the cobbles, impatient to start. They could not go the way that she had come, in case she had been seen, but the only other way was through Kiehkow. That she was not expected made it fairly safe, so they took the Kiehkow road, praying for protection on the way.

The maize and millet crops were ripening in the fields, long millet tails in lurid reds and purples splashed among the green. And in the shady banks where the ground was moist, dainty bells of deep amethyst hung delicately from wiry stems. Wild plum was yellowing, and in the woods bursting red berries hung across the path, the ripe ones juicy and translucent, begging to be picked. Friendly children gathered them to offer to travellers to quench their thirst.

Over the hills they rode, through shaggy woods and down in sunken gullies where the banks were lined with moss, and spindle-berry drooped its pink and orange points above their heads. Then out into a wild deserted place above the river where robberies were common. Nature was all so friendly. It made vile men the more hideous and terrifying. They laughed about the bushes draped with spiders' webs so thickly as to look as if white cloths had been hung out to dry, and breathed more freely when they left the place behind.

Not half a mile beyond, they met and passed a man whom Mr. Peace knew by sight, a very rich young man, with several

servants bearing baskets on their backs. Later on they heard that at the spot they had just passed this man was ambushed by five robbers who had lain in wait, and was stripped of all he had. They must have been in hiding behind the rocks and bushes as Meili passed, but knew of bigger game and could not change their plans.

Another dangerous place still lay ahead, a danger not of robbery, but worse. They had to pass through the market of Chuwai, where men from further north might well be met, men who might spread the news, or even the Rogues themselves. They rode on, and as they rode they prayed, not knowing how they could escape detection if the men were there, except that often the best way to hide is by putting on a brazen front that deceives by its unexpectedness. But that was not God's way.

Over in the west the sky grew dark, dense clouds swept up toward them, and thunder rolled. And then the rain came down, big drops at first that fell in ones and twos, and as they neared Chuwai the sluice gates opened and it poured, sheets of rain that drove the villagers to cover, that drenched their old thatched roofs and leaked through on to them. They huddled round their fires and called to others to come in from where they crouched outside, while Meili and her father ducked their heads and pulled their broad-brimmed rain hats forward to protect them.

Rainstorms in these mountains are fantastic, washing away the roads and bridges, filling the rivers till they overflow, and at night the dull rumble of landslides can be heard, and stately pine trees are laid low among the shrubs. The coal-mine at Kiehkow fell in on this occasion, and had to be retunnelled. And they themselves were soaked. Rivulets of water ran down between their clothing and their skin. But they were safe. The roads were empty and the market was behind them.

In two or three more hours they reached Kiehkow and in the twilight crept into the cottage. They made the boys keep quiet. No one must know till they were on their way to Temopin next morning. It took them all the night to dry their clothes over the fire, taking it in turns to sleep, but they enjoyed it. Meili had been to both her homes.

Word may have reached the Rogues at Thieves' Inn Flats that Meili had been seen. If so it probably fitted in with similar reports

that had reached them of her previous visits. Their attentions at Kiehkow became more frequent. They began to come in parties of ten, twenty, thirty or more, led by An Shenteh and An Yunlo. They said it was to call on relatives, and it was with Toma that they sometimes stayed. But it was more than that. They wandered in the fields below the chapel. They came to buy medicines from the *mushih*, and hung around the school staring at the girls, sizing them up, and standing in their way as they crossed from classes to their rooms.

Yohan showed up well. He stopped them and reproved them fearlessly, being careful not to rouse them. Simple as he was, he had a calm and philosophical attitude to danger, no more than "duty first." But the situation was tense. A spark, and ugly things might happen. The elder girls on whom the villains might have designs went home. A brother would come in with a led horse and servants fully armed, with double bandoliers, and after they had bidden good-bye to Kiehkow friends they would be escorted home to wait for peaceful days. The other girls, mostly too young to be kidnapped, lived in fear all the same, and every night slept in a different place, in hiding near the school. By day the school went on.

On one of these visitations when fear and indignation rivalled one another in everybody's minds, asking, "Why should these things have to be endured? Where is the authority that should control them?" Chengming saw two Rogues coming toward the school-room while he was teaching the senior boys and girls.

His spirit rose. He knew what the men would do—just stand in the doorway and stare, passing comments on the appearance of the bigger girls within a few yards of them. He could not stand it that these pure Christian friends of his should be insulted in this way. He shut the door and put his foot against it, and when they pushed, he held it closed.

The Rogues were furious, one more so than the other. He fumed and cursed and vowed to show him that the Rogues could not be trifled with, but the other restrained him. "Not now," he said, and led him away.

And so it went on day by day, no one knowing what was in the air. Whenever Rogues appeared Yohan's loose-lipped stepson, now a servant to the *mushih*, gibbered inarticulately with fright. But Yohan and the *mushih* had to go away for three weeks in the country holding conferences. Work could not be held up by what was almost a normal state of affairs. Their families and the school

must be entrusted to God or nothing would get done outside Kiehkow itself.

Chengming went about his work pale and apprehensive but defiant, but Jenpin was frankly afraid. It would not have been surprising if Jenpin had packed up and fled. Far from being any longer his father's hope for the Nosu church, he was a broken reed, and would not be content until he was once again in the comforts of a city. It hurt Mr. Peace and filled him with shame. He believed that sons should still do as their fathers wish when they are grown, and that his of all men should be stalwart supporters of the church and its institutions. So did Yohan, expecting Chengming to obey him in every little thing, and shrugging his shoulders helplessly when his son went his own way.

But Mr. Peace shared Jenpin's nervous apprehension now. A sound at night, snapping twigs or rustling leaves, whispering wind or call of night bird, rattle of tiles by roaming cat or stamping of impatient animals in the shed, and they were up on their elbows listening. But they never went to investigate. Within the last few weeks a woman had been deeply gashed in several places, and her husband was dying with his brain laid bare because they had done that.

Always it was nothing worthy of alarm. But it was exhausting. Faces at the window made them start, but usually it was honest cottagers whose approach on bare feet to post a letter had been silent. Yet once or twice it was the Rogues, to do the same.

Jenpin's moroseness was intensified. Like a scowling animal, he went about darkly, in a long brown coat knitted in cable stitch by himself, with a close-fitting skull cap of the same coarse wool, avoiding everyone's company. Rather than mix with others, he would wander alone to deserted spots overlooking the valley and stand gazing out, lost in thoughts of freedom from this place of fear. Filial piety would not hold him to a life from which his heart was far removed.

His mood was infectious. Mr. Peace was anxious, imagining things that might happen; that Jenhan would be kidnapped as a hostage till Meili was handed over, that he himself or Jenpin or Chengming might be injured. When the Rogues were around his agitation was intense, and when they went away for an uncertain length of time his exhaustion was pathetic. He wrung his hands, he nursed his head with them, his fingers eloquent of the perplexity

and distress that showed in his lined forehead and shining eyes. He was feeling his age and began to talk of retiring, at forty-six. It seemed cruel to remind him that probably for twenty or thirty more years he would be there to work for God, to see his dreams come true and his son's sons following in his footsteps.

Yohan's attitude, alas! was in keeping with Mr. Peace's—defeatist—so that he was no encouragement, saying more and more of everything, "*Mo fa!* It can't be done," until the *mushih* chaffed him, threatening to use his protest as a name and call him openly, "An Mofa." But without question life was hard.

Those were the days when Mr. Peace went often to the *mushih's* study and sat talking of old times, turning to see that doors and windows were closed before he leant forward and in a hoarse whisper told about his and Meili's adventures, and the oppressions of the present time. And there the news of fresh openings for the Gospel across the river in Independent Nosuland stirred his soul, and he talked and talked about his people, their customs, their writings and their faults. And plans were made to start work on his dictionary. He came to realize how he and all his friends were absorbed with "the church" rather than her Head, and spoke of "entering the church" instead of using the better, more accurate terms from the Bible, of "being saved" or "born again." Insidiously, it had helped them to acquire a secular outlook on these things in place of a spiritual, and in consequence the burden of their trials weighed heavily on themselves instead of being referred to Him.

4

In the midst of all this trouble at Kiehkow, another cause of anxiety, short-lived, flared up at Hopien. One day an urgent message came calling for Mr. Peace's help, and off he rode, as he had done so often down that road. It was another sign of the times that he kept his own horse at Kiehkow whenever he was there.

Led to his brother's home by agitated Whites, he listened to a story he could not but believe. This was the sort of thing that was happening so much. His brother, as he knew, had been having difficulties with the owner of the land adjoining his farm, over a matter of boundaries, the usual bone of contention. They had failed to come to any agreement by peaceful means, so the neighbour had resorted to the old device of false accusations to have his opponent removed while he did as he pleased.

Some soldiers came one morning with papers setting out a tax, of which Mr. Peace's brother had never heard, and demanded payment forthwith. He had refused to pay unless the forms were stamped with the recognized seal in the proper way, and a receipt given. They had gone away, but returned the next day.

Standing on a hillock among some trees beyond the Peaces' land, they had announced their arrival by firing two rounds from their rifles, the bullets passing through the door of the brother's house and embedding themselves in the farther wall. Thereupon the soldiers rushed down upon the home and seized the crippled man, shouting accusations of evading taxes and, to his surprise and alarm, of harbouring robbers in a cave behind his dwelling. His protests were of no use, they trussed him up and dragged him limping to the town ten miles away and committed him to the common gaol, saying that his papers of indictment would follow.

This method of false accusation was not new to Mr. Peace. But if he was aware of the true state of affairs, he also knew how difficult it was to straighten out again. He hurried on to town and went directly to the prison. It was a little building set inside the walls of the magisterial grounds. Mr. Peace was known to the guards at the gate from having been to council meetings in the past. They let him by.

The prison building stood alone, facing a blank wall, with no windows or other ventilation than a door which was a grill of wooden bars studded with iron. Inside, a mob of men sat closely packed on what there was of furniture, about five men to each of the four rough beds, the rest squatting where they could. The floor was filthy, a wooden bucket in the corner their only sanitation.

Near the door, as Mr. Peace peered in, wondering whether it was safe to get so near these men, most of whom were brigands or spy suspects, he saw a gang of six or seven gambling with dice on a board laid across their knees. He could not see his brother; it was too dark in the further corners of the cell. He called out nervously, and heard him answer. To get him near the door was not so easy. Old residents reserved to themselves the right to air and light. But at last they had a chance to talk together.

From there he went on to the magistrate and begged an interview. He waited on and on, stifling his desire to cough and fidget nervously, until he began to fear that he was going to fail. As he gave up hope an underling came out and beckoned him. The magistrate

was out, had not returned. Would he please come in the morning? There was nothing for it but to leave his brother for another night amid the vermin and vice of the lock-up.

But next day the magistrate sent for him and in his presence called for the accusation papers to be produced. There was nothing to be found. The soldiers had gone away, and no one knew why Mr. Peace's brother was in gaol. The gaoler with the key only knew that they had said he had been hiding robbers in a cave. There was no real cave, Mr. Peace proclaimed with some relief, only a pigsty burrowed in the hill. It must have been the pigs that the soldiers had seen and heard, and hit on as an idea for carrying out their plot. The magistrate was glad. The whole thing was a hoax. The tribesmen worried him, he did not understand them, and welcomed every chance to show benevolence to balance the severity of his usual actions. He ordered his release.

A woeful pair of brothers rode out of the town, one still nursing his arms and ankles, abraded by the soldiers' thongs, telling how all the way to prison they had offered to release him if he would make it worth their while, thereby hoping to make money from both parties to the quarrel. But deeper than the incident itself, to the elder one it was the insecurity of peaceful people that mattered. That both outlawry and "law" in the hands of evil men should be a menace to his peace! In his heart he cried, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

5

Two months had passed since Meili's visit home, and it was Sunday at Kiehkow. The postal courier had come in from Temopin while Mr. Peace was listening for the bell to ring for church. The waiting knots of worshippers up by the school were hard at work discussing two exciting topics. Amongst them stood a silver-haired and bearded gentleman who was the first, and overhead the sky was seldom free from the throb of aeroplanes, the second.

For two weeks now planes had been going over, some near, directly overhead where at ten thousand feet they were but two thousand feet above the land, some creeping past the tips of distant mountains with only a faint vibration betraying their presence. The last time so many of them had gone by, the news had followed of Superfortress raids on Tokio and Manchuria. These must be transports carrying fuel and explosives to the great new airport

where, so said the travellers from the north as they sat at tea tables in the town, tens of thousands of men had worked like ants to build a runway three miles long and six feet deep with stone and concrete.

Planes were a common sight, and when alone few people turned to see them now, but met together with the time to pass they talked about these weird inventions. Only one or two had seen one on the ground. Mostly they thought of them as dazzling silver specks swaying precariously in the rough winds away up in the sky, or as the purposeful grey shapes which they had seen pressing powerfully through dark cloud banks on an undeviating course. But once or twice a low-flying machine had come searching this way and that, following the valleys, and later on excited market talk had brought the news of a forced landing or a tragic crash.

But touching their own lives more closely was the story old Mr. Lo was telling to the men and boys grouped round him. He had just arrived the night before from his home a little way to the north. It was his nephew who had been held to ransom recently.

Yesterday, he was saying, a neighbour had come in to call on him, a man who seldom called, but had always been friendly. He had talked loudly about something of mutual interest for a while and then in rapid whispers urged the old man to escape before nightfall. He went away, and two others came at different times with the same advice. They had heard by round-about means, they said, that he was going to be kidnapped, but would not say how they had come by the news. He acted promptly, saddling his horse and riding off as he was. Soon after dark he was with friends down in the lower valley of Kiehkow.

This morning a runner from his home had come to report that thirty or forty armed men had surrounded his house and closed in, ransacking it from top to bottom to find him, but had stolen nothing, and had left this morning, thwarted. It was a narrow shave, and good for the old man that he had been warned, for the paying of his nephew's ransom had drained the family exchequer dry, and he did not deceive himself that the villains would not stop at murder if his own ransom were not forthcoming in the stated time. But as he had escaped, he need not be dismayed. In fact, he stood among the churchgoers wreathed in patriarchal smiles, as if nothing had occurred to cause alarm.

Mr. Peace had seen him earlier on and heard the story already, so he was still down at the cottage when the vagabond courier

arrived and handed him the mail bag. Letters and typed news-sheets for the *mushih*, the only trustworthy news that came, and a letter for himself. There was nothing startling in it, but it stirred him to the depths. Rather it was its simplicity that added to its pathos. He slowly read the columns of artistic characters.

"MY FATHER,—Respectful greetings [Meili had written]. Every day I wish I could see and talk with you. Letters are so lifeless; and the postman only comes from you once in six days. Also I have much to discuss with you. My aunt and uncle are so kind to me, they could not do more, yet I am not able to talk with them about everything, and I have no mother. What can I do? . . .

"Father, when can I come home to you? When will this life end? Could I not live with the missionaries? Surely that would be safe. I want to work for God, not to be idle all my youth. . . .

"How are your headaches now? I pray every day for you and sorrow over your trials.

"Please send the medicines when the courier returns. Greet Jenhan with my love.

"Your little daughter,
"MEILI."

He ached and yearned for Meili as he folded up the sheet of tissue paper and replaced it in its long envelope. The hand-bell rang out on the school playground, and its clang and tinkle reached him as he stood moist-eyed, thinking of her unhappiness. He picked up his Bible and hymn-book, their leather covers, put on by himself years ago, now brown and cracking, and went up to church. The men were already trooping in so he followed, through the door beside the platform, to his usual seat up at the front, in full view of the rest.

Chiopa was to preach, and started off with hymns, three in succession, the last one in both Chinese and Nosu for those who wanted to sing in their own language. Prayers, notices and more hymns, and then he started on his sermon. He read a story from the Bible, forty verses without comment, followed by the whole again in his own words with remarks thrown in. It had no depth, but was probably suited to the humbler listeners in the congregation.

Mr. Peace's thoughts strayed off on other paths. Old Mr. Lo had led in prayer, cheerfully, with scarcely a reference to his danger so narrowly averted. A good old man. He seemed to be on top of life.

St. Paul was on top of life, amazingly, and his distresses were far worse than Mr. Peace's. He had been reading lately about Paul's bodily weaknesses, his eyes, his unattractiveness, and all his persecution. What a warrior that he could say, "I take pleasure in reproaches . . . in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak then am I strong!" What strength he had that even when near to dying he still said, "Behold we live!" David was more like himself. He had confessed "My heart is overwhelmed," but he was strong in faith and could go on: "Thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy."

The two, three and four year olds were trotting in and out between their mothers and the terrace where they played, but Mr. Peace did not see them. The late-comers, depositing their staves and baskets at the door, straggled in past the preacher, but these he barely noticed either. He was far away. He wished he was like Paul. But perhaps if Paul had had a daughter in such danger year by year and eating out her heart away from home, it might have hit him harder than the blows at him himself.

Mr. Peace's eyes fell on the letter tucked between the pages of his Bible. Of a sudden he saw Meili, the caged bird with clipped wings. Tears started to his eyes, but were hidden by his glasses. He rose and quickly went to the door, passing between the preacher and congregation. Noisily he coughed and cleared his throat, stepping further out, right out of sight.

He tried to get a grip upon himself, and cleaned his spectacles. The *sahmu* trees, their highest shoots formed like a cross, were waving in the wind, and dry leaves leap-frogged on the gravelled ground. Two wood pigeons beat busily away across the gardens as he turned and made his way inside. No one suspected what had happened. It was in no way an unusual interruption for someone to go out and spit. No one stared more than they would have any way. Babies still fidgeted and mothers did their best to keep them quiet, little boys made figures on the backs of those in front with grass burrs as before, men lolled expressionlessly or even slept, and others, interested, were listening to Chiopa.

The service over, Mr. Peace withdrew. Paul's courage and endurance were more than he could muster for himself. If ever he felt aged and forlorn he did so now. He told himself he might have been a grandfather if Jenpin's wife had borne a child. He felt exhausted by the struggle against odds, no life or power to grapple any longer.

STRONG TOWER

He would go and see the *mushihs* and enquire: perhaps they would take Meili in their house, though they had once before said, No, the risk to her was far too great. And he would say that he was going down to Hopien to get away, to give himself a chance to think it over. Better than mere sighs and passive waiting would be active prayer and hunting for a solution.

CHAPTER TWENTY

CAST UPON GOD

" . . . and special prayer is asked for this godly man."

I

AT home in Hopien and in Kiehkow were equally important claims tearing him in opposite directions. He could not leave them as he had done in the past to sort themselves out or to be managed by the people on the scene.

At Hopien his presence was imperative to preserve the peace over his brother's boundaries, and, to him more vital still, the little service that they held each Sunday in his home had lately attracted several families of neighbours, including a *pêmo*, who were attending regularly and gave hope of real conversion. If he was not there as often as he could be, their interest might lag, for only he of the Christians in the place was capable of teaching them in a way they thought worth hearing.

But at Kiehkow too his presence was indispensable, not only because of the Rogues. Jenpin had announced his intention to resign from the school at the end of the current term. This meant that he would probably leave the district altogether, virtually forsaking his childless wife. Worse still, his departure would mean the closure of the school, and this, as one of the church's more important activities, would be nothing less than another big step in her disintegration, comparable to the shrinking numbers of voluntary workers, and the polygamy of some believers.

He could not accept a situation like that. Something *must* be done, for there was still life in the church. Were not eighteen baptisms this autumn sufficient proof that the Spirit of God was still at work amongst them? And in Kiehkow itself the keenest members of the newly started women's class for study of the Bible were the women of An Toma's household, his sister Liya, and Sala his sister-in-law, with the eighteen-year-old girl betrothed to his fourteen-year-old son. Moreover, An Toma and Chiopa had turned up trumps over a ticklish matter connected with the church premises. They had agreed to erect a wall to complete the enclosure of the grounds, and it was being built on Chiopa's land and with labour supplied by each

Christian household sending men to represent them on the job. If the Christians could pull together once again, if only they could find leaders and be willing to be led, it still was not too late to start advancing as before.

One of the youngest preachers, named Li, was feeling stirred about this. He had been thrashing out in his own mind the problems of church organization and order. The structure and the system were all there. The *mushihs* had shown them years ago how it worked, and had helped them all along, but continually they let it lapse. He would welcome a chance to talk it over with the rest, the other preachers. They must arrange to meet. He would invite them to his cottage, Mr. Peace decided. A rehearsal of the possibilities in view would do a lot, for one thing, to dispel the weak defeatist attitude that they were growing into more and more. And old Su Mohsi would be glad to come over from his district in the south to meet them all again.

Then there was Jenhan's future. At the end of the year his Kiehkow schooling would be finished. He would be due to go away for higher education somewhere else. But where to send him, that was the question. There were three cities with good schools to which he might go, but the choice must be made carefully. It seemed to Mr. Peace that in most walks of life "you grow like the people you live with." He believed in the importance of environment, and, whatever the reputation of the school, it was the individual people, the masters and boys, who exerted the influence. Jenhan's sacred sense of calling to God's service was too precious to be sent out thoughtlessly into the shoaly waters of the world.

When Jenhan went, the post office would be another problem. As it was, there were always stacks of forms and statements which only Mr. Peace himself could make out and sign, so that he could never be away from Kiehkow for long at a time. If only there were someone else with the education and reputation acceptable to the city office to whom he could commit the whole affair!

The thought of Jenhan cheered him. He always gave himself away with a sparkle of happiness when he spoke of Jenhan's development. But happiness did not play a big part in his life these days. He was a lonely man, isolated by superior intelligence and enlightenment from most of those around him. It was a tragedy that Jenpin, who could have been the very friend his father needed, lacked his father's motives and found the mountain life intolerable.

Meili too, who could have given him the peace and contentment he needed, was away, and always in his heart he nursed a silent sorrow and fear for her. He had a tendency to look back to the palmy days and to live in them, talking of what might have been, letting his thoughts drift back to his youth and ambitions.

And there he struck a cheering thought: the dictionary. At last after twenty years it was going to be tackled. His native tongue was rapidly fading out, for his people spoke in Chinese almost as readily nowadays, except the women, of course. And he himself found it hard to remember the Nosu rendering of many terms that he had used without thinking in his youth. Only the oldest people whose Chinese was poor could remember them now, and their memories were failing. But the Independent Nosu knew no Chinese, and here was a chance to help in bringing the Gospel to them.

However, there were grounds enough for Peace's gloomy mood, as on the day that found him in the study fingering in his hands a flimsy document.

He laid it on the desk. "Look, *mushih*," he said, "another assessment form has come. Another tax to pay, to feed soldiers billeted in the county." And his dark eyes shone.

The war in China had taken a dramatic turn. With their garrisons in Burma and Malay and the East Indies threatened with isolation because of Allied sea power, the Japanese in China had attacked and captured all the railway from Hankow to Canton, and on to Indo-China. And not content with that, they had turned their faces westward and were pushing toward Kweichow, Mr. Peace's province.

Every market day the rumours grew. City after city falling in the westward drive. Kweiyang getting restless. Evacuation beginning. What was to be believed? The only reliable news was two weeks old before it reached Kiehkow.

Plans had been made for troops to fall back on the western hills, along the motor road from Szechwan to Yunnan, that passed through Hehchang. And the soldiers must be fed. Another tax. The form was made out in a series of columns stating the extent of Mr. Peace's land and property, and from them calculating how much grain or its equivalent in money he should pay. Fair enough.

But, reading between the lines and knowing much already of the lives these people lived, the *mushih* understood what lay behind the agitation in his good friend's face, and in his words, "I dare not speak to them." He kept silence, and Mr. Peace went on:

"You know what happened a week or two ago?" and looked enquiringly, eager for the relief of telling his experience.

When he had finished he was sweating with excitement, indignation and distress, but concluded by remarking that though his blood boiled nothing could be done or worse calamities would fall upon his head.

The *mushih* sympathized, but could not help. To interfere in matters such as that, or even in the control of wrongs like robbery and Meili's case would be to run the risk of setting "officialdom" and outlaws openly against the church. But Mr. Peace was a nobler man than he would have admitted, and took heart from what encouragement he received.

"Blow may follow blow on the anvil of life; wave may chase wave upon its shores; Ichabod may be written or appear to be written across every hope, every purpose of the heart. But there is no waste in God's economy. God never wastes His children's pain."

He smiled his characteristic smile, a weak pathetic thing as if he were amused at his own predicament and knew there was no escape. "All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me," was the burden of his thoughts these days. "Gone over . . ." that would yet be true, God's billows never stay over, they may come, but then are gone again. He of all men must not weaken.

2

Before the invitation had reached Su Mohsi, passing from hand to hand when Christians met at market, the man himself turned up in search of Mr. Peace. He had thought Mr. Peace was in Kiehkow, but found that he was on a visit to his home. A message brought him back while Mr. Su went out into the country a few miles to see about a share of grain to which he was entitled annually from a plot of land belonging to a cousin. The only one to summon was young Li. He came at once, released to do so by the Bible School at Kopu where he had joined the staff.

Mohsi had come about a problem of his own. He had a farm by which he managed to support his family of relatives and servants while he himself devoted all his time to visiting and preaching in

the churches in his area. But he could only manage to keep up this arrangement if the church contributed to his support enough to justify his leaving his affairs in the hands of less experienced people. Until the present time it had worked well, but latterly the gifts had fallen off and left him with this problem: if he stayed at home to supervise his farming, to make it pay better dividends, his pastoral duties as the district preacher would be left undone. But if he went on with his work his capital would dwindle till he was forced to the same position. Should he break off now and hope to take it up again? Or were there other funds by which he could be helped? The missionaries, he knew, would not finance him, because that would encourage the Christians not to give.

At present no solution could be found but to exhort him to a compromise, to go on with his work as fully as he could while giving to his farm what guidance he believed to be essential. But the only true solution was that the church should get new life and love for God, which would inevitably lead to gifts enough to support other teachers too.

Mohsi was not worried, though a vein of disappointment showed itself through his irrepressible good humour, and his influence upon Mr. Peace was wholly good. Peace's sense of the ridiculous was always tickled by Su Mohsi's simple hilarity.

They met in Mr. Peace's bare but speckless central room and chatted round the stove while a servant girl laid bowls and chopsticks on the table at one side. The coal that had just been added to the fire was from a poor seam and gave off noxious fumes. They made Mohsi sneeze and complain of a tightness in his chest. In his part of the mountains the coal was soft and smoky, bubbling as it burned and spitting out long jets of lurid flame, but it did not smell like this.

His epithets grew more than impolite, for he knew he was on safe ground, it would be most unlike Mr. Peace to fail to see the joke or to take offence. They were old friends, and this was Su Mohsi all over, to say just what he liked. It put them all in merry mood as they sat down to eat, waited on by Jenhan in respectful silence, trying not to smile when his elders laughed.

Mr. Peace was roused out of the shrinking state in which he lived most of the time these days, and the sight of one of the dishes on the table started him on an anecdote. His shoulders heaved and shook and his face was bathed in deep, smiling lines as he told the story.

A certain *mushih* and two friends had come to a meal with him. Because they were special guests who had not been there before, he made a dish of his best preserved pork like the one they were eating now. He watched them as they ate, and saw the *mushih's* face register surprise. Then, thinking Mr. Peace a simple country man, the *mushih* made as if to take some more, but moved his chopsticks on to another dish. The action was enough to show his friends what he meant as he said in English to them, "Beware, this meat is bad!" But Mr. Peace knew enough English to understand.

They roared with laughter and plunged in, helping themselves to more slices of the fragrant half-cured pork, and to the inevitable dishes of intestine, chopped in rings and slivers, as tough as string. That started Mohsi off on other tales of *mushihs* and their ways. The dishes they were eating were afire with red cayenne. Here again they had some tales to tell, for very few of the *mushihs* they had known could eat such food without streaming from noses and eyes too, and one at least would lose his voice by spasm of his throat. But it was good. Just as they would choose. They moved their benches back around the fire and poured out tea, sucking at their teeth, and turned their thoughts to business.

3

Two problems were before them: the need of authoritative leadership, and the need to make the organization of the church work out in practice. Each of them was aware of what was needed, but none could see the light of a solution to either poser. They had thrashed it out before and saw no hope of finding among themselves a leader whom the church would rally round. No older man was strong enough or sufficiently developed to give the right spiritual lead. Old Chiopa, for example, was a faithful Christian, but lacking the conviction to "touch not the unclean thing." And they themselves were handicapped, Yohan by his yielding nature and the fact that he was a White, Mohsi by his meagre education and being a a White too. As for Li Chaoyang, in him was hope, but he was still young, and his standing among the elders of the church inadequate as yet. Old Mr. An in his younger days would have been just the one, if only he had allowed himself to be entirely at God's disposal. If he had, the story of the Kiehkow church might have been utterly different. But his was the spiritual tragedy of a wasted life. Lost

opportunities, Mr. Peace reflected, and Christians who rebel against God's leading, do handicap His work. If only Mr. Peace were a bigger man. If only he were not apparently insurmountably obsessed with his sense of inferiority, he would be the man; in spiritual maturity ahead of all the rest, in education amply equipped. But there it was, they all knew he would never take it on. Or if he were persuaded to, his lack of confidence in himself would hinder him from acting as decisively as he should.

They were all afraid of Nosu unwillingness to be ruled, and fought shy of having to lead and discipline a wayward people. And yet they looked as they so often did at the Miao church centred round Kopu, and wished that they could be like them. But there too was the lingering basic fault of the Nosu race, haughtiness and pride. So many of them looked down on the Miao, and inwardly delighted to be different while envious of their success.

As they sat on, discussing every angle of the subject, one thing emerged on which they were agreed. They needed outside help. A *mushih* was essential, and what they would have welcomed more than anything was a *mushih* who would take control and be their leader. Were they not like children who needed and craved control, who would mature in time but at present were not ready for responsibility? Yet they understood the stand their *mushihs* took, insisting on remaining as advisers and making them themselves run the church and discipline its members. If this had not been so they would have been in a still more helpless state; for the last five years they had been left largely on their own.

So if a *mushih* could not meet this particular need, where else could they look for leadership? A Chinese pastor, someone had suggested, but in their experience very few could stand the life. They were less adaptable than missionaries from abroad, and by upbringing could not but look down on them as aborigines. It was not worth the risk.

Above all, what they needed was continuity, the same man with them till he knew them inside out. This applied to *mushihs* too. An Toma had said it openly to the *mushih* who was with them now.

"We don't want you for only a year, or only five years. We want someone who will stay for years and years, like Wên Mushih."

They had been shocked, ashamed of his brusque outspokenness, but it was their own opinion. And the *mushih* had been glad to hear it.

"How about a Nosu from another district?" Li asked; and this kept them talking for a while. Perhaps it held a hope. Was there a man of the right mettle who could come?

And then there was the vexed question of church discipline, dealing with those who take two wives or compromise with robbers. What could they do? In Kiehkow itself, for instance? Sometimes they were tempted to bemoan, "Alas that the church was centred in the upper valley among the Blacks!" If it were down among the Whites no arrogant, unspiritual men could have dominated it. But who could have foreseen that, thirty years ago, when the Blacks were the moving spirits and the natural leaders?

The hour grew late and the fuel burned low, but yet they talked until their thoughts were clear and they had decided to bring it all before the elders' conference at the New Year. They would appeal that something should be done to pull the church together. But it was not all planning and ineffective talk that occupied them. They were convinced that only life from God, abounding life, eternal life, springing up within them, every Nosu Christian, could make their church revive. It stirred them so that as they talked they became different men, more sanguine, more alert.

Mr. Peace, whose habit was to hold back on such occasions, opening his mouth as if to speak, and even framing the first word with lips and tongue and then stopping as if he thought better of what he had to say, was different now. The fellowship of saints had given him a new accession of strength. It had restored him to his real self, with strong, unblinking gaze, deep, quiet wit, ambition, faith and courage. Would that this could remain when life was up against him; he would be an apostle to his people.

They had to stop. They turned their benches and knelt down to pray together. And when he prayed Mr. Peace unconsciously opened another peephole into his character and private life, revealing where the roots of his fortitude struck water, and betraying how much he discussed his troubles with the only One really able to help. He lost himself in plaintive conversation with the Lord.

Could the sincerity and prayers of these earnest struggling men be disregarded? Then why was their church wilting before their eyes? Why should one church thrive and another faint? Surely it was not just a matter of the nature of individual Christians and of organization. Was it that they were forgotten, that Christians far away prayed for others, but not for them? The whole body would suffer

if one member withered and died. When would their prayers be answered and people realize that the church is one and indivisible, and while it dreams complacently in Christian lands it suffers in Kiehkow? When would their teachers be enough to give them all a chance to know their Bible, to save them from the ignorance that leads them into wrong? Was Mary twelve years old when she gave birth to Christ? And the Nosu Ammon, why was he at fault in taking concubines if the Old Testament patriarchs were not?

In Independent Nosuland they have a dodge for crossing streams in flood. If one man cannot keep his feet, they fell a sapling, and, holding it before them, he and his friends proceed abreast supporting one another. That was it. The river was in flood; misfortunes on the run threatening to overwhelm them. "Now therefore, O Lord, behold their threatenings and grant unto Thy servants that with all boldness they may preach Thy word." Would that the Christians who can stand would fell their sapling and support us!

Their praying over they stood up and moved toward the door. Li was staying in the school, Mohsi in Yohan's house. The eyes of night outside were misted, watching them take leave of Mr. Peace, and following them up the lane. And the moon threw soft shadows that danced fantastically and played tricks with Su's pirate profile and Yohan's goatee beard as the two men walked.

4

The hope of better things was not long-lived. Hope and dismay for ever played at leapfrog in Kiehkow. The brighter sky that they had seen appeared now to be sunset with lurid colours lighting everything, and deep long shadows leaping forth were distorted by his surroundings to curve like talons into Mr. Peace's soul. News of the war was bad. While in Europe the power of Allied arms encircled, crushed and broke the armies of the enemy, deep in China the Japanese were sweeping toward the west. They were reported getting near Kweiyang, capital of the province.

Rumours were rife. No one knew the truth. If Kweiyang fell Chungking and Kunming would be threatened and the last link with the outside world, by air, would be severed. The strategic road through Hehchang and the Nosu mountains would be taken, and the horrors of war that they had heard so much about would be repeated in their own countryside. Or if the need to economize in

men prevented the enemy from spreading far on each side of the road, then Chinese soldiers like locusts would be billeted upon them to carry on the guerrilla war of attrition. But no immediate danger was assumed. The *mushih* would have heard if there were any need to be specially prepared.

But postal services were often poor. Mr. Peace had gone to Hopien and Yohan was away conducting a funeral in the northern hills when serious news arrived. A servant went from Hopien to market and when he returned Mr. Peace could tell from his drawn face that something was amiss.

"What is it?" he enquired.

"The Japanese are coming," the man replied. "The missionaries have gone, ordered to escape at once. I met a Kiehkow man at Chuwai, and he said that when he left they were packing hard and would be gone by noon. The news came after dark last night. Chiopa was at the *mushih's* house this morning making a stretcher-chair for one of them, and the others were to go by horseback."

Mr. Peace sat down and pressed his brow. A thousand wonderings struggled in his mind. The *mushihs* gone. From Kopu too. So suddenly. The Japs must be very near. They would come to Heh-chang. Hopien would be unsafe. What should he do? Something might have happened to delay the *mushih*; it was worth going to Kiehkow in the hope of catching him.

So he thought on. Once more for him the storm clouds mounted in his sky and thunder rolled. With morning light he rode off, hastening to Kiehkow. Once more the same old track that he had traversed a thousand times since as a schoolboy he had ridden to Chaotung. Twenty-five miles of rugged mountain road, as familiar as his stable yard at home. The tree before the ferry had been slender, swaying in the breeze, when he returned a man, with schooldays over. Now it stood immovable high above him as he rode by.

What memories! What whirling thoughts jostled each other in his mind as he went on! Thinking consecutively is hard enough at any time on horseback, but to-day impossible. There on his left was the fallen boulder that he found that crisp spring morning as, fatherless and bearer now of the title "The Lake on the Mountain," he had hurried to welcome his firstborn son. Poor Jenpin . . . ! The boulder had fallen in the night, and there it had lain half blocking the way so that for a quarter of a century already the path had had to skirt around it. The rock like this on the Kopu road was really

dangerous; it overhung the track and horses tended to forget that riders on their backs would strike their heads if they went too close. The *mushih* always liked to canter along that stretch. . . .

Girth strap loose. Came a cropper two years ago just about here when the girth snapped. Coming home, to find Tingying so very ill, it was. Holly with berries. The *mushihs* always liked the look of that; reminded them of home. *Mushihs* gone; that means no dictionary after all. *Ai-ya!* Well, the Lord knows best. It's cold to-day. "Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter"; yes, indeed!

What a journey that was with Meili three months or so ago, when the ambush lay behind these rocks and let them pass. Any there to-day? Wait and see, as usual. It would be sad if they took the horse, a good steady old friend. Never had been robbed on this road, though, so it couldn't be too bad. Perhaps he wasn't grateful enough; ought to be more content. Across the River of Golden Sand there was no law at all; still savagely primitive among the Papus.

Better stop and rest the horse again, and see if the girth buckle's holding. Wonder how the *mushih's* party will get on? It looked as if Pollard's prayer was going to be answered at last. And on again. Jog, jog, hour by hour, through Chuwai and on, the last ten miles.

The winter's day closed in softer light with hoar mists hanging in the air. Bare trees tufted with parasitic clumps of green and red, a kind of mistletoe, edged the path. Close up the rocks were beautiful. Their colourful grey tones offset the unpretentious loveliness of sprawling creepers on their face, flat, spreading plants with *petite* leaves and dull red berries all along the stem.

And there, a white splash on the hillside, was the grave of Old Mr. An, backed by a grove of pines. It would be there for generations to come, when Mr. Peace had gone, when Jenhan's grandchildren would lead the church.

And then, Kiehkow.

5

Too late: his friends had gone. What a pity they could not have waited a day or two, just to see him and say good-bye. What horrors lay before the Kiehkow church that must be faced alone? No *mushihs* even at Kopu to give advice and help. Cast upon God this time without a doubt.

Yohan was back, had just arrived himself. As soon as Chengming knew the tidings he had sent to fetch him from the funeral.

Chengming had gone to represent the church and see the *mushihi*s off, and even helped to carry the *shihmu*'s¹ chair when the inexperienced bearers tired, a returning coolie had said.

They could not have waited. The telegram had come slowly and took three more days to be brought by runner from the city over the hills. With it was a letter urging speed. The last reliable convoy of motor trucks would be going through in just a few days' time, and they must hurry if it was to be caught. To dally might have been to risk getting trapped by the Japanese. The people of the mountains were comparatively safe by being inconspicuous, but foreigners might be marked and hunted down, or at least cut off without communications with the outside world.

The horse he handed over to be stalled and fed, and went into his cottage for a bowl of something hot. But wayworn as he was he could not sit, though Jenhan brought him more gruel. He rose and wandered out. There was about the place a deserted air. The school was closed, no children hung around, no music from the *mushihi*'s house such as he might hear at this time in the evening, not even bleating sheep out on the pasture slopes. No sign of Jenpin either; he did not seek his father's company these days.

The sun was setting as he wandered up past the empty chapel. The gardens on his right were looking bare, nothing much was growing, the weather was too cold, the coldest yet. Must they really travel now, in this? He went down through the gate, along the grey brick path and past the *mushihi*'s house. Ah, real haste: the curtains hanging still, a pair of child's red socks left dangling on the line, a window open.

But what of those they left behind? Was this the final dissolution of his hopes? It was only thirty years or so since the Gospel first came near them; and now this. Would the church survive if the Japs came? Of course it would. Their bodies they could kill, but not their souls; and it would be unlikely to come to that. They could hide. If the enemy came out as far as Chuwai they could flee. The girls and women could go up into the woods again.

He pulled his cold, trembling hands up into his long sleeves. The prospect now before the church was doubly grim. What of the little groups of Christians near the motor road? The best of all seemed in the most dangerous places. Yes, there was such good stuff among those men that nothing would defeat them.

¹ Wife of the *mushihi*.

Mr. Peace's steps had led him down the vegetable garden towards his own cottage again. Something touched against his gown, and turning he saw Nelson, the *mushih's* one-eyed dog. It was a foreign dog that had been brought by Chinese soldiers to the district and abandoned. For weeks it had mounded around, starved, cringing, scavenging like any local cur, until the missionaries had come, and then at once they and she had taken to each other. Now she walked along with Mr. Peace, nuzzling his hand to their mutual consolation.

He reached the garden wall, and, parting a few branches in a gap that had been lightly blocked, he stepped across the disused lane into his own orchard again. This was where he had stood that evening when the messenger came toiling up the hill, the boy with mangled hands it was, to tell him that his home had been burned down. He looked again across the misty valley. Rooks cawed their way to shelter for the night, and lights began to shine.

Weary in body and downcast in soul, Mr. Peace drooped as he stood. Dying nature and the waning light were symbols of his world. What pleasant pictures he had painted in his youth and clung to through so many years of disappointment. They had come to this. All his castles in the air were crumbling away.

"How long, O God," his spirit inarticulately prayed, "until the Sunrise, till His first rays pick up the morning mists and fill them with His glory? How long till the ripe corn once more stands golden in the fields, and these dark shadows flee away?"

"The spiritual trial to be expected most, I think, is that arising from disappointed hopes of our ministry," Ragland wrote long years ago.

Far down in the valley rose the note of a ram's horn, the horn that in some places is a call to worship, across the river is a call to arms, and here in Kiehkow called for help. A single rifle shot, and once more silence. More robbery! Then like a dagger—what of Meili? Did this Japanese advance mean new terrors for her? He saw her in his mind's eye as she heard the news; saw her as the refugee party saw her, staying near them as if she wanted to talk, yet with not much to say; standing little and forlorn on the terrace outside the Manager's fine house, watching the trail of horses, carriers and friends shrinking in size as they increased their distance from her and disappeared into the narrow defile at the far side of the rice-bowl valley. He saw her waving till the last moment came, and turn,

STRONG TOWER

outwardly controlled but as he knew full well aching in her heart more fearfully than ever.

A wave of weakness and temptation swept upon him. Retire! Withdraw! Find Meili the best unconverted husband that you can! Look: see how well your sister's marriage has turned out; and your own is going well! Let the others travail over the church; you have had your share! Go home!

But then he thought: the *mushihs* always say, "God demands faithfulness, not success." And "Be thou faithful, unto death, and I shall give thee a crown of life."

A shaft of lamplight from the cottage fell upon him where he was, as Jenhan came to the door. It flickered on his ring, recalled to him the words, "When He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold." And with the thought the Enemy's attack once more was foiled. The lesson Mr. Peace had learned from many a bitter struggle had not been learned in vain. By faith he cast himself into his Strong Tower and rested there, secure.

"Aba, aren't you cold?" asked Jenhan's voice in Nosu. Mr. Peace shivered, braced himself, and went in.

"From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee,
When my heart is overwhelmed:

"Thou hast been a shelter for me and a Strong Tower from the
Enemy.

I will abide in Thy tabernacle for ever:
I will trust in the covert of Thy wings."

THE END

SINCE THEN

THE Japanese turned back before they reached Kweiyang, and the fears of many failed to materialize. The Kiehkow Christians have been forced to continue with no more than sporadic help by visitors.

Mr. Peace has written several times. Meili is still at Temopin with her aunt and An Tekuan. Attempts to find employment for her in a safe place have so far proved fruitless. Jenhan has gone to school in Pichieh and will soon be ready to start his life-work. But of himself their father has said little. Whether he is still at Kiehkow bearing the brunt of responsibility in the church, or whether he has retired to Hopien and left old Yohan to struggle on alone, he does not say.

Kiehkow, however, is but one small corner of the vast mission field. Its needs are immeasurable, but the strong church of the "home countries" could make the burden on faithful leaders lighter if the readers of this story were to pray for these living men and women and others like them; and if some were to give themselves to God for work in such deserving spheres.

November, 1946.

HISTORICAL NOTE

THE origin of the Nosu is obscure. Theories linking them with many different races have been put forward, but in every case dependent on the flimsiest of evidence. Terra-cotta figures found in "Lolo" caves resemble closely those discovered in Japan. Nosu hieroglyphics are akin to those found near Ava and Pegu in Burma, and the Nosu language is Tibeto-Burman in construction.

Such are some of the facts, but yet another is more tempting to some scientists. Nosu features have some Aryan characteristics, and occasionally a Nosu has been seen with light-coloured hair and even with blue eyes. Anthropologists have therefore suspected Gothic ancestry in them, suggesting that their earliest forebears came from the Trans-Caucasian regions via Kokonor. And in this connection there is information, culled from ancient Chinese archives, that agrees with Nosu folk-lore. It describes a tribe of savages called the Liao who broke loose from their mountains away up on the Szechwan-Kansu border at about the time of Christ, and ravaged and pillaged as they migrated slowly southward during the next century or two, right through the then kingdoms of Pa and Shu until they finally dominated the mountains of the far south-west. There they spread widely, expelling the abject Yao tribe, and mingled with the other mountain races from whom they took the best lands.

The story of "The Three Kingdoms" records the defeat of the great leader Mêng Huo whom the Nosu recognize as one of their ancestors, but for centuries everyone feared them, and it was they who formed one of the main elements of the Nan Chao, the "Kingdom of Southern Princes," independent for four hundred years at the time when the great T'ang Dynasty spread its conquests even as far as Europe. The Mongols, however, overcame the Nan Chao, and some interesting data has been handed down by their famous protégé who travelled in those regions not many years later.

In the annals of Marco Polo, dictated in prison after his return to Europe, there is a long account of a journey he made to south-west China and Burma between A.D. 1272 and 1280. Certain features of his route are still obscure and unproved, in spite of the meticulous

research of such scholars as Colonel Yule,¹ but other points are clear beyond shadow of doubt. For example, a description of the city of "Sindafu . . . on the confines of Manzi (the Barbarians) . . ." and its waterways leaves no question that he referred to Chengtu, in the province of Szechwan.

Leaving Sindafu, he journeyed south-west over high mountains into a valley with lakes called "Caindu," he narrates.

"But let me tell you of this same country of Caindu, that you ride through it ten days . . . and come to a river called Brius. . . . In this river is found much gold-dust. It flows to the Ocean Sea."

There are few places this could refer to, but being on the route to Yunnan, Marco's "Carajan," and ending at the River of Golden Sand to the south, it becomes unquestionably the valley of the Chien-ch'ang, just west of Independent Nosuland, which the Chinese also called Chan-tu, according to Colborne Baber. Moreover it is the route taken by Kublai Khan, Marco Polo's master, in 1253, during the reign of his brother Mangku, and leads to the city of Tali where a son of the Khan was ruler.

From there Marco went on into Burma, and returned by a more easterly route into Yunnan, via Anin, which may have been the Annam of to-day. But now his descriptions are not plain until he reaches a district of "Cuiju" with a city of uncertain spelling, which is twelve days by river from a region he calls "Koloman," and twelve days further by river back to "Sindafu."

If Cuiju be taken as Sūchow, which it almost certainly is, Koloman must have been somewhere near Mr. Peace's native mountains from which the river of Lao Wa T'an, the Raven Rapids, flows direct to Sūchow itself.

"Koloman is a province towards the east," reported the great traveller, "the people of which . . . are a tall and very handsome people, though in complexion brown rather than white, and are good soldiers."

Now, the Chinese word "man" means "barbarian"; hence this name is "The Barbarians of Kolo." Thus an ancient Chinese essay on the aborigines says that "Kolo and Kihlau tribes of barbarians"

¹ See *Travels of Marco Polo*, Vol. II, Colonel H. Yule, 1875; pp. 29-114.

STRONG TOWER

are numerous on the frontiers of Kweichow province, and speaks of "the Kolo, originally called 'Luluh.'" (Is there some link here with the term "Lolo"?)

"They are tall, of a dark complexion," it goes on, "with sunken eyes, aquiline nose, and wear long whiskers. . . . They pay great deference to demons, and on that account are sometimes called 'The Dragons of Lo' ('Lo-lūng': here again, is there a possible origin of the term 'Lolo'?) . . . These Kolo are divided into forty-eight clans, the elders of which are called chieftains, literally 'Head and Eyes,' and are of nine grades. . . . The men bind their hair into a tuft with blue cloth and make it fast on the forehead like a horn. Their upper dresses are short, with large sleeves, and their lower garments are fine blue. . . . Their large bows, long spears and sharp swords are strong and well wrought. They train excellent horses, love archery and hunting, and so expert are they in tactics that their soldiers rank as the best among all the uncivilized tribes."

It seems quite likely, then, that the district of Kolo round which the events of Mr. Peace's life were cast, was the historic home of the "Koloman" of long ago, of whom Marco Polo wrote.

GLOSSARY

Aba—Nosu word for "Father."

Ai-ya—Chinese for "Oh dear!"

An—a common surname.

Blacks—the upper caste or true Nosu.

Chao-chio—(Dzowjaw)—A small walled town in Independent Nosuland.

Ch'ao-mien—roasted oatmeal.

Chaotung (Dzow-tung)—a city of North Yunnan Province.

Chengming—Yohan's son.

Chengtu—capital of Szechwan Province.

Chiopa (Jaw-pah)—a Christian of Kiehkow.

Chu Koliang (Joo Gawliang)—historical Chinese statesman.

Chungking—wartime capital of China.

Chuwai (Joo-wai)—a market near Kiehkow.

Duchess—Old Mrs. An, Mr. Peace's mother-in-law.

Erh Sao—a Christian lady of Kiehkow.

Fêng Pémo—a converted sorcerer-priest.

Genghis Khan—founder of the Mongol Dynasty.

Golden Sand—a name of the Upper Yangtze River.

Han Chia—the Chinese.

Hehchang—a county town near Kiehkow.

Hopien—Mr. Peace's home district.

Hsiang-chang—a district official.

Hump, the—air route from West China to India.

Hungwu—one of the Rogues.

Huo-p'en—a charcoal stove.

Ih-chia—aboriginals; the Nosu.

Ih-jen—Ditto: a less respectful term.

Independent Nosu—Nosu living in the Taliangshan, sometimes called Luloland, west of the Upper Yangtze.

Jenhan—Mr. Peace's second son.

Jenpin—Mr. Peace's eldest son.

Jenting—Mr. Peace's third son.

K'ao-huo—to sit round the fire.

Kiehkow (Jeer-go)—name of a valley and church centre.

STRONG TOWER

Kolo—a market village between Kiehkow and Kopu.

Kopu—a church centre for the Miao people.

Kublai Khan—grandson of Genghis Khan.

Kunming—Capital of Yunnan Province.

Kweiyang—Capital of Kweichow Province.

Li—a third of an English mile.

Li Chaoyang—a young Nosu Christian leader.

Lin Wanli—one of the Rogues.

Liya—Mr. Peace's sister-in-law.

Lolo (Law-law)—derogatory term for Nosu and other tribes.

Mahjong—Chinese game played for high stakes.

Meili (May-lee)—Mr. Peace's daughter.

Mêng Huo—historical aboriginal chieftain.

Miao—an aboriginal race (tribe).

Mien—dough strings.

Mila—a *pêmo*'s assistant.

Mohsi—Christian name of the preacher Su.

Mushih (Moo-sssh)—used here for a missionary.

Nosu—a race of aboriginals in South-West China.

Nzemo—a hereditary Nosu prince.

Old Man An—Mr. Peace's father-in-law.

Pao-chang—a minor local official.

Papu—local name for the Independent Nosu.

Peace—translation of surname An, used for the leading member of the Kiehkow church.

Pêmo—a Nosu sorcerer-priest.

Pichieh—a county town north of Kiehkow.

Pollard, Rev. Sam—an early Methodist missionary.

Pukai—Chinese wadded quilt.

Rogues—a band of unscrupulous outlaws.

Sahmu—a prickly pine tree.

Sala—sister of Shenteh, sister-in-law of Mr. Peace.

Salawu—a Nosu church centre north of Kunming.

Shama—Snow Mountains in Independent Nosuland.

Shenteh—one of the Rogues.

Süchow—also called Suifu, a city on the Yangtze River.

Su Mohsi—a White Nosu preacher.

Tekuan—husband of Mr. Peace's sister.

Temopin—An Tekuan's home.

Tingying—Mr. Peace's wife.

STRONG TOWER

Toma—Tingying's brother.

Tui-chang—Chief of an armed band.

T'u-mu—a hereditary Nosu noble.

T'u-szu—a Nosu holding high Chinese rank.

Weevil—a stored-grain pest.

Weining—ancient walled city near Kiehkow.

Wenliang—Mr. Peace's name.

Wenling—Mr. Peace's sister.

Wên Mushih—the late Mr. W. Windsor.

Whites—the lower caste, servants of the Black Nosu.

Yao—a debased aboriginal tribe.

Yohan—a White Nosu preacher.

Yunlo—one of the Rogues.

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