THE GAY GENIUS

The Life and Times of Su Tungpo

BY

LIN YUTANG

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The Life and Times of Su Tungpo

Also by Lin Yutang

MY COUNTRY AND MY PEOPLE
THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING
MOMENT IN PEKING
WITH LOVE AND IRONY
A LEAF IN THE STORM
BETWEEN TEARS AND LAUGHTER
THE VIGIL OF A NATION

To

Adet, Taiyi, and Meimei

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Book Three: MATURITY
(1080–1093)

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(1094–1101)

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PREFACE

THERE is really no reason for my writing the life of Su Tungpo except that I want to do it. For years the writing of his biography has been at the back of my mind. In 1936, when I came to the United States with my family, I brought with me, along with a carefully selected collection of basic Chinese reference books in compact editions, also a few very rare and ancient editions of works by and about this poet, for which all considerations of space were thrown overboard. I had hoped then to be able to write a book about him, or translate some of his poems or prose, and even if I could not do so, I wanted him to be with me while I was living abroad. It was a matter of sustenance of the spirit to have on one's shelves the works of a man with great charm, originality, and integrity of purpose, an *enfant terrible,* a great original mind that could not conform. Now that I am able to apply myself to this task, I am happy, and this should be an all-sufficient reason.

A vivid personality is always an enigma. There had to be one Su Tungpo, but there could not be two. Definitions of a personality generally satisfy only those who make them. It would be easy to pick out from the life and character of a man with such a versatile talent and colourful life a conglomerate of the qualities that have endeared him to his readers. One might say that Su Tungpo was an incorrigible optimist, a great humanitarian, a friend of the people, a prose master, an original painter, a great calligraphist, an experimenter in wine making, an engineer, a hater of puritanism, a yogi, a Buddhist believer, a Confucian statesman, a secretary to the emperor, a confirmed wine-bibber, a humane judge, a dissenter in politics, a prowler in the moonlight, a poet, and a wag. And yet that might miss the sum total of what made up Su Tungpo. I can perhaps best sum it up by saying that the mention of Su Tungpo always elicits an affectionate and warm admiring smile in China. For more than other Chinese poets', Su Tungpo's personality had the richness and variety and humour of a many-sided genius, possessing a gigantic intellect and a guileless child's heart—a combination described by Jesus as the wisdom of the serpent and the gentleness of the dove. Admittedly, this is a rare combination, shared only by a few born upon this earth. Here was a man! All through his life he retained a perfect naturalness and honesty with himself. Political chicanery and calculation were foreign to his character; the poems and essays he wrote on the inspiration of the moment or in criticism of something he disliked were the natural outpourings of his heart, instinc-

tive and impetuous, like "the bird's song in spring and the cricket's chirp in autumn", as he put it once; or again they may be likened to the "cries of monkeys in the jungle or of the storks in high heaven, unaware of the human listeners below". Always deeply involved in politics, he was always greater than politics. Without guile and without purpose, he went along singing, composing, and criticising, purely to express something he felt in his heart, regardless of what might be the consequences for himself. And so it is that his readers today enjoy his writings as those of a man who kept his mind sharply focused on the progress of events, but who first and last reserved the inalienable right to speak for himself. From his writings shines forth a personality vivid and vigorous, playful or solemn, as the occasion may be, but always genuine, hearty, and true to himself. He wrote for no other reason than that he enjoyed writing, and today we enjoy his writing for no other reason than that he wrote so beautifully, generously, and out of the pristine innocence of his heart.

As I try to analyse the reasons why for a thousand years in China each generation has a crop of enthusiastic admirers of this poet, I come to the second reason, which is the same as the first, stated in a different way. Su Tungpo had charm. As with charm in women and beauty and fragrance in flowers, it is easier to feel it than to tell what elements it is composed of. The chief charm of Su Tungpo was that of a brilliant genius who constantly caused worries to his wife or those who loved him best—one does not know whether to admire and love him for his valiant courage, or stop him and protect him from all harm. Apparently there was in him a force of character that could not be stopped by anyone, a force that, started at the moment of his birth, had to run its course until death closed his mouth and stopped his laughing chatter. He wielded his pen almost as if it were a toy. He could be whimsical or dignified, playful or serious, very serious, and from his pen we hear a chord reflecting all the human emotions of joy, delight, disillusionment and resignation. Always he was hearty and enjoyed a party and a good drink. He described himself as impatient in character and said that when there was something he disliked, he had to "spit it out like a fly found in one's food". When he disliked the verse of a certain poet, he characterised it as "the composition of a Shantung school-teacher after sipping bad liquor and eating tainted beef".

He made jokes on his friends and his enemies. Once at a great court ceremony, in the presence of all the high officials, he made fun of a certain puritanical neo-Confucianist and stung him with a phrase which made the victim smart, and for which he suffered the consequences. Yet what other people could not understand was that he could get angry over things, but never could hate persons. He hated evil, but the evil-doers did not interest him. He merely disliked them.

Since hatred is an expression of incompetence, he never knew personal hatred, because he did not know incompetence. On the whole, we get the impression that he played and sang through life and enjoyed it tremendously, and when sorrow came and misfortune fell, he accepted them with a smile. That is the kind of charm which I am trying to describe in my lame and halting fashion and which has made him the favourite poet of so many Chinese scholars.

This is the story of a poet, painter, and friend of the people. He felt strongly, thought clearly, wrote beautifully, and acted with high courage, never swerved by his own interests or the changing fashions of opinion. He did not know how to look after his own welfare, but was immensely interested in that of his fellow men. He was warm, generous, never saved a penny, but felt as rich as a king. He was stubborn, garrulous but witty, careless of his speech, one who wore his heart on his sleeve; versatile, curious, profound, and frivolous, romantic in manners and classicist in letters, a Confucianist as a father, brother, and husband, but a Taoist under his skin, and a hater of all shams and hypocrisy. He was so much better a writer and scholar than others that he never had to be jealous, and he was so great he could afford to be gentle and kind. Simple and unaffected, he never cared for the trappings of dignity; when he was shackled with an office, he described himself as a harnessed deer. Living in troublous times, he became the stormy petrel of politics, an enemy of a fatuous, selfish bureaucracy and a champion of the people against their oppressors. With the successive emperors as his personal admirers and the empresses as his friends, Su Tungpo managed to be demoted and arrested, and to live in disgrace.

The best saying of Su Tungpo and the best description of himself was what he said to his brother Tseyu:

> "Up above, I can associate with the Jade Emperor of Heaven, and down below I can associate with the poor folks. I think there is not a single bad person in this world."

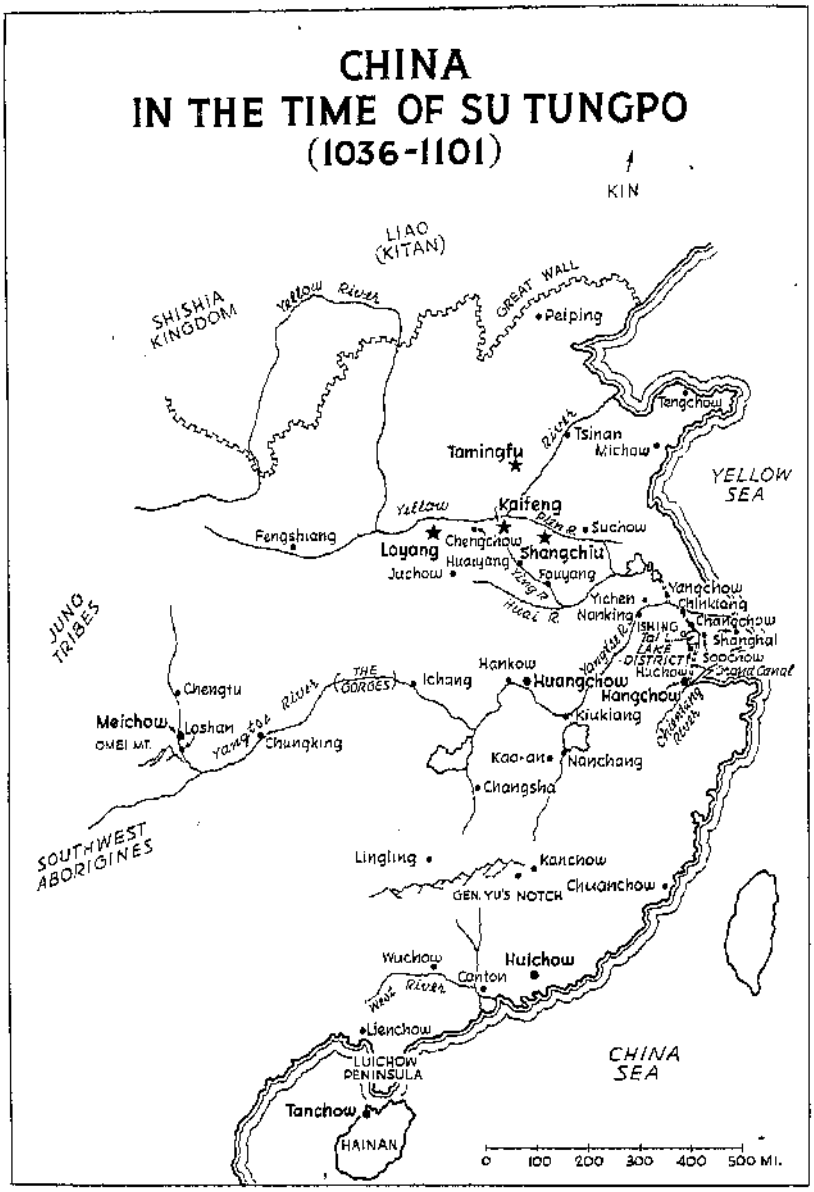
So he had reason to be joyous and unafraid, and went through life like a whirlwind.

The story of Su Tungpo is essentially the story of a mind. He was a Buddhist in metaphysics, and knew that life was a temporary expression of something else, an eternal spirit in a temporary carcass, but he could never accept the thesis that life was a burden and a misery—not quite. At least for himself, he enjoyed every moment he lived. Metaphysically he was Hindu, but temperamentally he was Chinese. Out of the Buddhist faith to annihilate life, the Confucian faith to live it, and the Taoist faith to simplify it, a new amalgam was formed in the

crucible of the poet's mind and perceptions. The maximum span of human life was only "36,000 days", but that was long enough; if his search for the elixir of immortality was in vain, still every moment of life was good while it lasted. His body might die, but his spirit in the next incarnation might become a star in heaven, or a river on earth, to shine, to nourish, and to sustain all living. Of this living, he was only a particle in a temporary manifestation of the eternal, and it really did not matter very much which particle he happened to be. So life was after all eternal and good, and he enjoyed it. That was part of the secret of the gay genius.

I have not burdened the text with footnotes, but have taken care to make only statements which can be backed by sources, and have as far as possible used the original words, though this may not be apparent. As all the sources are in Chinese, footnote references would be of no practical value to the great majority of readers. A general statement of the sources will be found in the Bibliographical Appendix. To prevent readers from floundering in Chinse names, I have eliminated those of the less important persons, or sometimes indicated only their family names. It is necessary also to refer to a person consistently by one name only, where a Chinese scholar had four or five. In spelling Chinese names, I have abolished the atrocious "hs" and substituted "sh", because this is the only sensible thing to do. Some of the poems I have translated into English verse, and some I have had to paraphrase into prose on account of the literary allusions which would make the translation grotesque and unpoetic, and the meaning obscure without lengthy comments.

LIN YUTANG


CHINA
IN THE TIME OF SU TUNGPO
(1036-1101)
KIN
LIAO
(KITAN)
SHISHIA
KINGDOM
Yellow River
GREAT WALL
Peiping
Tengchow
Tsinan
Michow
Tamingfu
YELLOW
SEA
Kaifeng
Yellow
River
Suchow
Fengshiang
Chengchow
Loyang
Shangchiu
Huaiyang
Juchow
Fouyang
Yangchow
Chinkiang
Yichen
Nanking
Changchow
Shanghai
TAI LAKE
DISTRICT
Soochow
Huchow
Grand Canal
JUNG
TRIBES
Hankow
Yangtze
Hwangchow
Hangchow
Kiukiang
Chengtu
Ichang
THE GORGES
River
Meichow
Loshan
OMEI MT.
Yangtze
Chungking
Kao-an
Nanchang
Changsha
SOUTHWEST
ABORIGINES
Lingling
Kanchow
GEN. YU'S NOTCH
Chuanchow
Wuchow
Canton
Huichow
West River
Lienchow
LUICHOW
PENINSULA
CHINA
SEA
Tanchow
HAINAN
0 100 200 300 400 500 MI.

BOOK ONE

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

(1036–1061)

Chapter One

LITERARY PATRIOTIC DUKE

IT is really not so difficult to know a man dead a thousand years ago. Considering how incomplete our knowledge usually is of people who live in the same city with us, or even of the private life of the mayor, it seems sometimes easier to know a dead man than a living one. For one thing, the living man's life is not completed, and one never knows what he is going to do next when a crisis comes. The drunkard reforms, the saint falls, and the pastor runs away with a choir girl. A living man has always so many "possibilities". Then, too, the living man has secrets, and some of the best secrets usually come out long after the man is dead. That is why it is so difficult usually to judge a contemporary, whose life is too close to us. Not so with a dead poet like Su Tungpo. I read his journals, his seventeen hundred poems, and his eight hundred private letters. The question of knowing or not knowing a man has nothing to do with being his contemporary. It is a matter of sympathetic understanding. After all, one knows only those whom one really understands, and one completely understands only those whom one really likes. I think I know Su Tungpo completely because I understand him, and I understand him because I like him. The question of liking a poet is always a question of taste. I think Li Po reached a greater height of sublimity and Tu Fu reached a greater stature in his total impression as a poet great by all the standards of greatness in poetry—freshness, naturalness, technical skill, and compassion. But without any apology, my favourite poet is Su Tungpo.

For me the great personality of Su Tungpo today stands out more sharply and fully etched against his life and writings than that of any other Chinese writer. There are two reasons for the clearness of the mental portrait of Su Tungpo in my mind. First, it comes from the brilliance of Su Tungpo's own mind, stamped upon every line he wrote, like the black lustre of ink in the two original bamboo paintings by Su that I have seen, which still glistens as if it were applied only an hour ago. This is a curious phenomenon, as in the case of Shakespeare, too. The vitality of Shakespeare's lines, coming straight from a sensitive and generous mind, remains fresh today. In spite of the labours of generations of research scholars, we still know extremely little about his external life; yet we feel some four hundred years after his death that we know the recesses of his mind by the power of emotion he injects into his writing.

The second reason is that there is a more complete record of Su

Tungpo's life than of other Chinese poets. The material exists in various historical records of a long and colourful political career, in his own voluminous writings, both poetry and prose (close to a million words), in his journals, autograph notes, and private letters, and in the tremendous gossip about him as the most loved and admired scholar of his times, which has come down to this day in the form of journals and memoirs by his contemporaries. For a century after his death, there was not an important book of memoirs which did not have something to say about the poet. The Sung scholars were great keepers of diaries, notably Szema Kuang, Wang Anshih, Liu Chih, and Tseng Pu; or indefatigable writers of memoirs, like Wang Mingching and Shao Powen. Owing to the imbroglio over Wang Anshih's state capitalism and the heat and excitement of the political battles that extended through Su Tungpo's lifetime, the writers preserved the material for the period, including dialogues,* in more than usual abundance. Su Tungpo himself kept no diary; he was not the diary-keeping type—it would have been, for him, too methodical, too self-conscious. But he kept a journal, which was a collection of dated and undated items on particular trips, thoughts, men, places, and events. Other people were busy keeping memoirs of what he said and did. His letters and his postscripts were carefully preserved by his admirers. As a first-rate calligraphist very much sought after, he had the habit of writing a poem on the spot or of recording a thought or a comment and giving it away to a friend after a wine dinner. Such brief notes were carefully preserved and handed down to the friend's grandchildren, or, in some cases, parted with for a very handsome sum of money. These casual notes contain admittedly some of Su's best writings. Some eight hundred of his letters and six hundred of his famous autograph notes and postscripts are preserved today. In fact, it was Su's popularity that started the fashion of collecting the postscripts and casual notes of other scholars after him, like Huang Tingchien, and publishing them in a volume. There was an art collector of Chengtu who, soon after his death, began to collect any autograph notes and intimate letters of Su Tungpo, inscribed them on stone, and sold rubbings from them as calligraphy.† The poem Su Tungpo wrote on a certain occasion was immediately circularised and repeated by heart among the scholars of the land. Innocent and honest, such poems of protest against the government's doings, at a time when all good scholars were hounded out of the capital, concentrated on him alone the fury of the ruling regime and almost cost him his life. Did he repent? Outwardly, in his banishment, to his less intimate friends he

* The dialogues in this book are based on actual records. See Bibliography, Section 1.

† The *Western Tower Scripts*, in thirty volumes. See page 243.

said he did, but to his best friends he said he did not and that he would do it all over again when the necessity came for spitting out a fly in one's food. Through these outpourings of his spirit, he found himself, to his sorrow, at the head of all decent-minded scholars of his time, and after a futile struggle with petty minds but great politicians, he went into his second exile outside civilised China in the island of Hainan, somewhat fatalistically and with great peace of mind.

It is natural, therefore, that the life of this man should be the centre of literary gossip and honoured with profound reverence, especially after his death. For Western analogies, Li Po may be compared to Shelley or Byron, a literary meteor that burned itself out in a short spectacular display. Tu Fu was like Milton, a devout philosopher and a good old man, writing in a profusion of apt, learned, and archaic metaphors. Su Tungpo was for ever young. He was as a character more like Thackeray, in his politics and poetic fame more like Victor Hugo, and he had something of the exciting quality of Dr. Johnson. Somehow Dr. Johnson's gout is exciting to us even today, while Milton's blindness is not. If Johnson were a Gainsborough at the same time, and also a Pope making criticism of current politics in verse, and if he had suffered like Swift, without the growing acidity of Swift, we would have an English parallel. The human spirit in Su Tungpo was mellowed, not soured, by his many troubles, and we love him today because he suffered so much.

There is a current Chinese saying that final judgment upon a man is possible only when the cover is nailed on his coffin. A man's life is like a drama, and we can judge a drama only when the curtain drops. There is this difference—a man's life is a drama in which the wisest and shrewdest actor does not know what comes in the next act. But real human life always evolves with an inevitability which only the best drama approaches. There is, therefore, a great advantage in writing the biography of a man of the past, where we can review scene after scene already completed, watching the inevitable development of events arising out of the necessity of outward events and inner temperament. After I had completed research on the chapters of Su Tungpo's life and understood why he had to do what he did, against his deep and sincere urge to forsake politics and retire, I felt as if I were reading the predictions of a man's entire life by a Chinese astrologist, clear, definite, inescapable. Chinese astrologists are able to plot the course of a person's entire life year by year, and are willing to put the whole prediction down in writing for a substantially higher sum than usual. But the hindsight of biographers is always better than the foresight of astrologers. Today, we are able to discern a clear pattern in Su's life with its many ups and downs, perceiving the same inevitability, but

with the certainty that the different phases all came to pass, whether or not the fault was in the stars.

Su Tungpo was born in 1036 and died in 1101, twenty-five years before the conquest of northern China by the Kins and the end of the Northern Sung dynasty. He grew up under the best emperor of that dynasty, served under a well-meaning but over-ambitious one, and fell into disgrace when an eighteen-year-old idiot ascended the Dragon Throne. The study of Su Tungpo's life is, therefore, at the same time a study of national degeneration through party strife, ending in the sapping of national strength and the triumphant misrule of the petty politicians. Readers of *All Men Are Brothers* are acquainted with the quality of this misrule when good, honest men, in order to avoid tax-gatherers or evade the "justice" of rapacious officials, one by one took to the woods and became the much-beloved forest heroes of that novel.

At the time of Su Tungpo's youth there was a brilliant galaxy of scholars gathered at the court of the Chinese emperor. At the end of the dynasty there was none left. During the first persecution of scholars, and the purging of the censorate and packing it with underlings by the illustrious state capitalist Wang Anshih, there were at least two dozen distinguished scholars and men of integrity who were willing to suffer for their convictions. During the second persecution, under the idiotic boy emperor, the good men were mostly dead or soon died in exile. This sapping of national strength had started in the name of "social reform" to prevent "exploitation by private capital", "for the benefit" of the always lovable common people of China, by an ardent believer in himself. Nothing is so dangerous to a nation's destiny as a misguided but opinionated idealist. Su Tungpo the poet and human philosopher pitted his common-sense against the logic of Wang Anshih the economist, and the lesson he taught and China paid for we still have not learned today.

In such ardent zeal for social reform Wang Anshih inevitably regarded any means as justifiable by the end, including purging of all dissenting opinion. A holy cause is always a dangerous thing. When a cause becomes holy, the means used to achieve it inevitably becomes vile. Such a trend of things could not escape Su Tungpo's perspicacious mind and was a little too much even for his sense of humour His path and Wang Anshih's crossed; their clash determined his whole career and the fate of the Sung dynasty.

Neither Su nor Wang lived to see the outcome of their struggle and the conquest of China by barbarian hordes from the north, although Su lived long enough to see the terrible results of the widely-publicised "social reforms". He lived to see that the "peasants" whom Wang had so "loved" had to flee their homes, not during famine or flood, but

in years of good crops, when the officials put them in jail if they dared return to their villages, for failure to pay the loans and interest which the socialist regime had forced upon the peasants. And his voice cried to high heaven; he could not help himself. There were dishonest reporters who thought it expedient to maintain a strict silence on the bad features of the socialist regime, of which they could not be unaware, and to glamorise its virtues. The success of telling big lies, if the lies are big enough and repeated often enough, is not a modern invention. The eunuchs had to make their living. In such a way did irresponsible men play with a nation's destiny, as if they themselves could escape its consequences. Su Tungpo could at least keep his own soul and pay the price for it. The honest intentions of the Emperor were no excuse for his gullibility, for he was wrong, and Su Tungpo right, on the main issue. An iron rule was clapped over the people in the holy name of social reform. In the mad struggle for power, party fanaticism overruled patriotic interests, and the moral and economic fibre of the nation was consumed and weakened as Su Tungpo foretold, making the country an easy prey to a conqueror from the direction of Siberia. When petty men were ready to serve as puppets of a powerful neighbour from the north in the name of a "regional independent China" which owed allegiance to a foreign power, it was but right that the imperial dynasty should be extinguished and China should retreat south of the Yangtse River. When the Sung house had burned down, historians, walking among the charred ruins, began to survey the field and ponder, with self-important historical perspective, but a little too late, the causes of the catastrophe.

One year after the death of Su Tungpo, when the petty partisans were in power before they handed North China over to His foreign Majesty from across the Mongolian wilds, a historically important episode occurred. This was the establishment of the famous Yuanyu Partisans' Tablet, a symbol and a summing up of the struggles of the whole period. "Yuanyu" is the name of the reign (1086–1093) under which Su Tungpo's own party was in power, and the tablet was a black-list of 309 men, headed by Su Tungpo, of the Yuanyu regime. It banned for ever by imperial order these persons and their children from assuming office in the government. Descendants of the royal family were forbidden to marry children of the "Yuanyu partisans," and if there had been a betrothal, it was to be broken off by imperial order. A tablet containing the black-list was to be set up in all districts of the country; some of these still exist today on China's mountain-tops. It was a method of weeding out all opposition for ever, and, in the authors' minds, of committing these men to eternal infamy. Since China was turned over to the conquerors from the north by the social reformers,

the effect achieved by these tablets was very different from what the authors had intended. For over a century, the children of the black-listed men boasted that their ancestors' names were included in the tablet. That is why the Yuanyu Partisans' Tablet became so famous in history. Actually, some of these ancestors did not deserve the honour, for in the zeal to weed out all opposition, the authors of the tablet included all their personal enemies, and black-listed some bad men as well as the good ones.

As the gods had decreed it, however, in January 1106 a comet appeared in the sky and the tablet established on the east wall of the Wenteh Palace was struck by lightning and split in two. There could not be a clearer indication of Heaven's displeasure. Emperor Huitsung was frightened, and in fear of the objection of the premier had the other tablet at the Tuan Gate secretly destroyed at night. On finding this out, the premier was greatly chagrined, but righteously exclaimed: "The tablet may be destroyed, but the names of these men shall be remembered for ever!" We know today that his wish was fulfilled.

The striking of the tablet by lightning started Su Tungpo's steadily increasing fame after his death. During the first decade all stone inscriptions bearing his handwriting or composition were ordered destroyed, his books were banned, and he was deprived of every rank he had held in his lifetime. A writer of this time noted down in his journal, however, that "the poems he wrote in exile are very popular. Although the court has increased the fine for possession of Su's works to 800,000 cash [or $800], the stronger the ban, the wider the poems spread. Scholars feel disgraced and are considered uncultured when they cannot recite his poems in company."

Five years after the lightning had struck, a Taoist priest reported to the Emperor that he had seen the spirit of Su Tungpo serving as the minister of literature at the gods' court in Heaven. The Emperor was still more frightened and hastily restored to Su the highest rank he had obtained in his lifetime, and later conferred one higher than he had ever possessed. By 1117 the imperial household, under the same emperor, was itself collecting Su Tungpo's manuscripts, offering as much as 50,000 cash apiece. The eunuch Liang Shihcheng paid 300,000 cash, roughly $300, a high price according to the then standard of living, for the inscription on the Stone Bridge of Ingchow (which had been discreetly hidden), and another man paid 50,000 cash for three words written by Su on the tablet of a scholar's studio. A brisk business was going on, and soon these precious manuscripts were in the palace or in the homes of rich collectors. When the Kin (Manchurian) barbarians captured the capital, they specifically demanded as part of the booty the works of Su Tungpo and Szema Kuang, for Su's name had spread to the northern tribes beyond China's border even in his

lifetime. Some of the best of Su's paintings and manuscripts were carted north to enemy territory, together with two emperors who died there in captivity. (Huitsung had resigned in favour of his son.) Still hundreds of Su's manuscript items survived and were brought by their owners to the south.

Now that Su Tungpo was dead and the storms of passion over current politics were over, the emperors in the southern Sung dynasty, sitting in the new capital of Hangchow, began to read his works, particularly his state papers, and the more they read, the more they admired the intrepid patriotism of the man. One of his grand-children, Su Fu, was given a high office in consideration of his illustrious grandfather. All this leads to the final culmination of Su Tungpo's posthumous fame and position. By 1170 the filial emperor Shiaotsung conferred upon him the posthumous title of "Literary Patriotic Duke" and gave him the rank of Grand Imperial Tutor. The Emperor wrote what remains to this day the best tribute to his genius. The imperial decree and the Emperor's own preface to his *Works* stands at the beginning in all editions of Su's *Complete Works*. The imperial decree conferring upon him the title of Grand Imperial Tutor reads:

> By Imperial Order: We come after the tradition of the hundred sages and seek wisdom in the Six Classics. While desiring to promote the culture of ideas, our thoughts turn back to the great one of the past. Although it is no longer possible to see him in person, we have the works of this great man before us. We desire to confer upon him the honour of an Emperor's teacher and exalt him to leadership among the scholars.
>
> The deceased, Su Shih, formerly Minister of Education, Scholar of the Tuanming Palace, subsequently made Scholar of the Tsecheng Palace and posthumously titled Literary Patriotic Duke, cultivated the noble and upright spirit born in man and elevated to a higher level of understanding the tradition of the past. His scholarship was all-embracing, like the sea and the earth, and his words of advice were like the striking of jade and bells. In literary eloquence he can be compared to Mencius, and in political criticism he was not second to Lu Chih. At the nation's height of literary prosperity during Chiayu [reign of Jentsung] he was exalted to fame; during the confusing changes of Shining [reign of Shentsung] he submitted the principles for a lasting national prosperity. We sigh at the appearance of such a rare genius and are shocked at his suffering from his detractors. He was banished across the seas and mountains, but he remained the same man as if he were holding power at the court; he studied the past and the present and his mind comprehended the laws of the universe. What could not be taken away from him was his

sturdy integrity, and what no man could confer upon him was his popular fame. In his lifetime he had no consideration for his own good, and posterity gave him his fair due after his death. So today everyone continues to speak of the scholar of Yuanyu, and every home possesses a copy of the works of Meishan. Three times over we have read his bequeathed works, and for a long time we have admired his high principles. We regret not being born at the same time with him in order to make full use of his talents as a counsellor of kings, but from generation to generation, the superior man's teachings ever grow from obscurity to popular acceptance.

We wish that your spirit could rise from the underground springs, so that the world might pay homage to your fame, and we pray that your talented soul will accept our Imperial favour. Su Shih is hereby specially given the title of Grand Imperial Tutor. His other titles may be kept as before.

Su Tungpo's peculiar position in China's history was, therefore, based on his courageous stand for his principles and opinions, as well as upon the charm of his poems and prose. His character and principles constitute the "bones" of his fame, while the charm of style and language forms the "flesh and skin" that embody the beauty of his spirit. I do not think that we can, at heart, admire a writer lacking in integrity, however brilliant and charming his writings may be. The imperial preface to Su's *Collected Works* emphasises the greatness of his "spirit", which distinguishes his works from mere "fine writing" and gives solidity to his fame.

But let us not forget that Su was principally a poet and writer. On this his reputation rests. His writings have a quality that is difficult to explain, much less feel in translation. A classic becomes a classic because the people in all ages recognise "good writing" as such. Ultimately, lasting fame in literature rests on the pleasure the writing gives to the readers, and who shall say in what way a reader is pleased? What separates literature from ordinary writing is the charm of sound and sense and manner which pleases the spirit. That a classic pleases all men in all ages and survives temporary literary fashions must come of a quality that we may call *genuineness,* like that of precious gems which survive all tests. "Literature is like genuine gold and good jade," Su wrote to Shieh Minshih. "They have an intrinsic value independent of fluctuating prices."

Yet what is that "genuineness" which accounts for its quality of wearing well? Su expressed his opinion on writing and style as clearly as anyone ever put it. "Roughly, [good writing] is like the sailing of clouds or flowing of water, moving forward where it is natural to move

forward, and stopping where it must stop. From the natural flow of thoughts and language arises its wayward, abundant charm. 'An expression lacking literary beauty cannot survive very long,' said Confucius. Again he said: 'All you ask of writing is that it *expresses* well.' One may think that if the aim of writing is merely to express something well, it may be lacking in literary beauty. That is not so. Only one person in a thousand or ten thousand can appreciate an intangible, elusive idea, or the essence of a given situation, and make it clear to himself. It is still more difficult to communicate it by hand or mouth to others, which is what we mean by expressing it well. When one can do this, he can do anything with his pen. Yang Shiung loved to clothe a simple, insipid thought in high-flown, difficult phraseology, just because he knew that if he did not, the thought itself would be shown to be quite commonplace. That is the trick of the so-called petty journeyman writers." In this definition of style, Su Tungpo aptly describes his own process of literary composition, moving and stopping like "sailing clouds and flowing water", and he gives away all the mysteries of composition and rhetoric. There are no rules on when to go on and when to break off. The charms and wayward beauty come by themselves if the writer's thoughts are beautiful and he only can express them truthfully, genuinely, and well. They are not something laid on the writing. Simplicity, naturalness, and a certain freedom which comes from mastery of expression are the secrets of a good style. When such qualities are present, and the writing is not insipid, we have genuine literature.

Anyway, pleasure given was a characteristic of all Su's writings. Most pleased of all was the author himself in the act of writing. "The happiest moments of my life," Su said to his friend one day, "are when, at the time of writing, my pen can express all the intricacies of my thoughts. I say to myself: 'There is no greater pleasure in this earthly life than this.'" Much the same was its effect on his contemporaries. Ouyang Shiu said that whenever he received a new composition by Su, he remained happy for the whole day. An attendant upon Emperor Shentsung told people that whenever the Emperor's chopsticks stopped in the middle of his eating, it was sure to be Su Tungpo's memorandum that he was reading. Always whenever a new poem reached the court, even during the period of Su Tungpo's exile, the Emperor would praise it before the other ministers with sighs of admiration. But it was also these sighs of admiration on the part of the Emperor that frightened the ministers and kept Su in exile so long as this emperor lived.

Once the poet defended the power of giving pleasure as literature's own reward. In the last years of his life he sometimes wanted to throw away his brush and stop writing entirely, since it was writing that had brought him all his trouble. A friend and admirer, Liu Mien, edited his

works and wrote to him about it. In his reply to Liu Mien he said: "I have fallen upon evil days because of my writing, and sometimes I wish to black out my intelligence, which unfortunately cannot be done. My youngest son, Kuo, is beginning to write more beautifully than ever. During my hours of boredom, living overseas, sometimes Kuo shows me one of his compositions, and I am happy for days and enjoy my food and my sleep better. This shows that literature is like gold and jade or precious stones, which have an intrinsic value of their own that cannot be denied." In the pleasure it gives to the author during his free creative activity, and in the happiness it gives to its readers, literature justifies its own existence.

Su possessed an unusually generous talent, which broke all boundaries and seemed to know no limitations. His poems were always fresh, not like Wang Anshih's, which occasionally attained perfection. Su did not have to attain such perfection. Where other poets were limited by poetic diction and conventional themes, Su could write a poem on massage at a bath-house, and he could incorporate slang and make it sound well in a poem. Always it was that extra something which others could not do that compelled admiration from his fellow craftsmen. His chief contribution to a special form of poetry, the *tse,* confined hitherto to yearnings of the lovelorn, was that he could turn the metre into a vehicle for discourse on Buddhism and philosophy, and he succeeded in this almost impossibly risky task. Usually he wrote a little better and a little faster than others, for he often had to compose poems after dinner with people looking on. His thoughts were fresher and his analogies and allusions more appropriate than those of other poets. Once at a farewell dinner given him at Huangchow, a female entertainer came up and asked him to write a poem on her shawl. Now he had not heard of this entertainer, Li Chi, during his stay at Huangchow. He asked her to grind the ink and took up the brush and wrote a simple beginning:

> Four years has Tungpo lived at Huangchow,
> Strange that he never mentioned Li Chi.

Then he stopped and went on talking with his guests. It was, in the opinion of those present, a rather flat beginning, and besides, the poem was not finished. Su went on eating, chatting and laughing. Li Chi came up again and asked him to finish it. "Oh, I almost forgot," said Su. He took up the brush again and dashed off the second half of the quatrain:

> Exactly like Tu Fu of the West River;
> Of the best flower, begonia, he sang the least.

It fitted perfectly in rhyme and tone, and in effect the poem was like a little gem, written as usual with the poet's effortless grace. It gave a very subtle compliment to the girl, and Li Chi thereby became immortal in literature. The technical restrictions in Chinese poetry were many, requiring a high skill in the use of allusions and in the writing of a poem with the same rhyme words as those used in a poem written by a friend. Somehow, Su's rhyming was more natural, and his allusions, upon close examination, were found to suggest deeper implications. In prose his pen commanded a wide range of powers, from the most dignified pure prose in the simple style of the ancient classics to charming chatter in the style of the familiar essayists. It is difficult to choose between the two. That is why he was acknowledged a master.

Su Tungpo, therefore, ranks as a major poet and prose writer of China. In addition he was a painter and calligraphist of the first order, a distinguished conversationalist, a great traveller. Quick to comprehend Buddhist philosophy, he constantly associated with monks, and was the first poet to inject Buddhist philosophy into Confucianist poetry. He made a good guess that the dark spots on the moon were the shadows of mountains. He pioneered in a new school of painting, the "scholar painting" which makes Chinese art unique. He opened up lakes and canals, fought floods, built dams. He picked his own herbs and was a recognised authority in medicine. He dabbled in alchemy and was interested almost to his last days in his search for the elixir of immortality. He pleaded with the gods and argued with the devil—and sometimes won. He wanted to wrest the secrets of the universe, was half defeated, and died with a laugh.

Were the word not so much abused today, we would say he was a great democrat, for he associated with all manner of men and had for his friends emperors, poets, cabinet ministers and retired farmers, pharmacists, wineshop-keepers, and illiterate peasant women. His best friends were poetic monks, unknown Taoists, and those poorer than himself. He loved official honour and yet was happiest when the crowds did not recognise him. He established good water systems for Hangchow and Canton, founded orphanages and hospitals, instituted prison physicians, fought infanticide. During the aftermath of the social reforms he worked passionately and single-handedly at famine relief, against the colossal obstruction of bureaucracy. It almost seems he was the only man concerned over the widespread famine and the roaming refugees. Always he was the champion of the people against the government and worked for the forgiveness of debts to the poor until he got it. He wanted only to be himself. Today it may be said that he was truly a modern man.

Chapter Two

MEISHAN

IF you go up the Yangtse River, beyond Hankow, past the famous gorges into the westernmost province of Szechuen, and further follow the river past Chungking to its origins, you will come to a giant stone Buddha, three hundred and sixty feet high, carved out of a mountain cliff on the bank. Here at the western border of the province and at the foot of the giant Omei Mountain, the highest in China, is Loshan, called Kiachow in the days of Su Tungpo. At this point the Min River flows into the Yangtse. The Min River, coming down from the north-western mountains of the western aborigines, rushes down in a big and deep torrent and, joining another river coming down from the Omei, makes a straight dash for the Giant Stone Buddha of Loshan, where the river then turns gradually south-east and then east to flow directly into the China Sea. Lying in the shadow of the eternally cloud-covered peaks of the Omei, and some forty miles north of Loshan, is the town of Meishan, in Meichow district, made famous in China's literary history as the home of the most distinguished literary family in China. This was the Su family, also known as the "Three Sus". The father was Su Shün, who gave birth to two illustrious sons, Su Shih (Tungpo), and Su Cheh (Tseyu). Together the father and sons account for three of the "Eight Great Prose Masters of the Tang and Sung Dynasties."*

At Loshan, then as now, a traveller could go up the Polikiang, or Glass River, in a junk to Meishan. The river received its name from its colour, for it was a deep crystal blue in winter, while in summer the torrents coming down from the mountains turned it into a murky yellow. The river was a branch of the Min River, and as Meishan lay halfway between Loshan and the capital of the province, Chengtu, travellers who wanted to go to the capital had to pass through the town. You would go up in the junk until you saw the Moyishan, or Frog's Jowl Hill, standing directly over the stream. It was a low, round hill like those we see around Kiangsu. Here was Meishan, the home town of the Sus. Thanks to the engineering genius of Li Ping, who lived at the end of the third century B.C., there was a perfect water control and irrigation system, maintained and kept working for over a thousand years; it made this whole region of western Szechuen into a perennially fertile plain, free from floods. The little hill stood against a vast plain of rice-fields, orchards, and vegetable gardens, dotted here and there with bamboo groves and curiously dwarfed palm trees. You

* Of these eight masters, six are important figures in this book. Besides the "three Sus," the other three are Wang Anshih, Ouyang Shiu, and Tseng Kung.

entered the city from the south and went up the clean stone pavements into the heart of the city.

It was not a very big town, but it was comfortable for a place of residence. A poet of the twelfth century reported that the streets were kept very clean and that Meishan was famous for its lotus flowers in May and June. The cultivation of the lotus flower had grown into an industry, for dealers from the neighbouring cities obtained their lotus flowers from this place. As one went up the streets, one passed many ponds on the roadside covered with these flowers, whose fragrance filled the air. At Shakuhang one came upon a middle-class home. Entering the gate, one faced a green painted screen which shut out the view of the interior from the passers-by. Behind the screen, a medium-sized house with its courtyards appeared. Somewhere near the house stood a tall pear tree, and there were a pond and a vegetable patch. In the little family garden there was a great variety of flower and fruit trees, while outside the wall stood a grove of hundreds of bamboo trees.

It was the year 1036, thirty years before the Battle of Hastings. On December the nineteenth, a baby boy was crying and kicking in his swaddling clothes. Since the first son had died in infancy, he was the eldest son of the family. And here, as the baby was doing nothing in particular or doing what every baby does, we may take time to look around at the family. But first something must be said about this birthday, lest we but add to a certain confusion plaguing Chinese biographies abroad. A Chinese baby is "one year old" the moment he is born, following the general pattern of everyone's desiring to reach venerable age as quickly as possible. On the next New Year's Day, when all people advance their age one year, he is "two years old". According to the Chinese reckoning, therefore, as compared with Western reckoning, a person always counts himself two years older before his birthday and one year older after that date in any given year. In this book, ages are given according to the Western reckoning, without taking into consideration a person's exact birthday. In the case of Su Tungpo, however, a little more exactness is required. As he was "one year old" the day he was born, on December nineteenth, he would be "two years old" already on the following New Year's Day—when he was hardly two weeks old, actually. As his birthday came toward the very end of the year, he was actually always two years younger than he would be according to the Chinese reckoning.

The second thing to be said about the birthday is that he was born under Scorpio. According to the poet himself, this explains why he ran into so many troubles all his life and was a target of rumours, both good and bad, which he did not deserve—a fate similar to that of Han Yu, who was born under the same star, and who was also sentenced to exile for his opinions.

On the central panel of one of the rooms in the house hung a portrait of a certain fairy by the name of Chang. The father of the baby, who was now twenty-seven and going through the greatest spiritual crisis of his life, had seen this portrait at one of the markets and had got it by offering a jade bracelet for it to the dealer. He had prayed to this fairy every morning for the last seven years. His wife had given birth to a girl several years ago and to the boy who died in infancy. He had always wanted a boy, and now his wish was granted. He must have been happy; and yet we know that he was suffering from a sense of terrific shame and torment.

It was a fairly well-to-do family, owning lands and perhaps richer than the average middle-class family. There were at least two maid-servants, and besides, the family was able to afford a wet nurse for Su Tungpo and his elder sister. When the younger brother was born, they were able to hire another wet nurse, and these two nurses remained according to Chinese custom for the rest of their lives with the children they had brought up to maturity.

At this time of Su Tungpo's birth, the grandfather was still living and was sixty-three years old. In his young days he had been a tall, handsome man, hale and hearty, given to drink, big-hearted and generous. One day when Su Tungpo was the acknowledged first scholar of his time and was acting as secretary to the emperor, he moved into a new residence close to the palace. Some of his close friends and admirers came to visit him, and as it happened to be his grandfather's birthday, he began to tell them certain amusing incidents about this curious old man. He was wholly illiterate, but a rather extraordinary personality. At that time they were living out in the country and owned large tracts of land. But instead of storing up rice in the way everybody did usually, he exchanged it for unhusked rice and stored it up to the amount of thirty or forty thousand bushels in his granary. People could not understand why he was doing this. Then a famine came, and the grandfather opened the granary and began to distribute the unhusked rice first to his own immediate family and relatives, then to his wife's relatives, then to the tenant farmers, and then to the poor of the village. Now people understood why he had accumulated the unhusked rice—it would keep for years, whereas husked rice would spoil in wet weather. Being carefree and well provided, he would often pick up a wine jug and go about with his friends to sit on the grass and enjoy himself. They would laugh and drink and sing, to the amazement of the usually quiet and well-behaved peasants.

One day during a carousal an important piece of news arrived. His second son, Su Tungpo's uncle, had passed the imperial examinations. There was another family in the neighbourhood whose son had also passed the same examinations. This was the family of Su Tungpo's

mother, the Chengs. As the two houses were then connected by marriage, it was a double occasion for joy. The Chengs, however, were a very rich family, belonging to the landed aristocracy, and had long ago prepared for this celebration, while Su's grandfather had not. The son knew his father and had himself sent, along with the announcement, the official cap and gown and the ceremonial hand tablet, together with an armchair and a beautiful teapot. The news arrived when the grandfather was very drunk and was holding a large chunk of beef in his hand. He saw the red button on the official cap peeping out from the luggage bag and knew what it meant. Still under the influence of liquor, he took the official message, read it aloud to his friends, and gaily dumped the chunk of beef into the bag along with the announcement and the cap and gown. Having called a village boy to carry the luggage, he rode on a donkey into town. It was the happiest moment of his life. The people in the streets had heard the news and laughed at the sight of the drunken old man on donkey-back with the curious luggage following behind. The Cheng family thought it a disgrace; but Su Tungpo says only the intelligent scholars appreciated its beautiful simplicity. This grand old man was also a free-thinker. One day, in a drunken fit, he went into the temple of a particular god and smashed the idol into pieces. He had developed a special hostility towards this god, who was very much feared by the populace of this district, or more probably a special hostility toward its soothsayer, who extorted money from the believers.

Su Tungpo did not inherit from his grandfather his capacity for wine, but he did inherit his love for it, as we shall have occasion to see later. The intellectual brilliance of this illiterate old man, which lay dormant in his blood, was to blossom forth in all its power and glory in his son's sons. That extra energy of mind and body, that bigness of heart, and underneath it all the strong integrity of purpose were there in the grandfather. The Su family rose from the land, as all other distinguished families rose, by the law of infinite variations and natural selection. We have no indications of the mental qualites of Su Tungpo's mother's family, but a fortuitous combination of the blood of the Sus and the Chengs somehow produced the literary genius.

Apart from this, there was no great influence of the grandfather over the poet's literary life except the fact that his personal name was "Shü". It was most embarrassing for a writer, for this word meant "preface", and Su Tungpo, being a renowned scholar, had to write many prefaces. As it would have been sacrilegious for him to use the word preface, he called his prefaces forewords (*yin*) throughout his works. This taboo against mentioning one's parent's or grandparent's name was a very ancient custom which sometimes produced embarrassing results. It is particularly irritating when personal names of fathers happen to be

very common words. In the voluminous tomes of Szema Chien, t
greatest historian of China, we cannot find the word *t'an*, meani
"talk" or "conversation", because that was the historian's father's p
sonal name. There was a man by the name of Chao T'an—he h
arbitrarily to change his name to Chao T'ung. In the same way t
author of the *Later Hon History* had to avoid the personal name
his father, T'ai, and today we cannot find that word in all its hundr
and twenty volumes of verbiage. The personal name of the father
the poet Li Ao happened to be the common word meaning "now'
thus the poet had always to use an archaic word for the contemporary
moment. The same thing resulted from the taboo with respect to the
personal names of the emperors of a ruling dynasty. A candidate f
the state examinations was expelled if his name contained a wor
identical with any of the personal names of the preceding emperors
the dynasty. As it happened, the emperors of a dynasty were usua
known by their reigns or their posthumous titles, so that many schol
did forget about the emperors' personal names and were expelle
Sometimes an emperor would fail in this way himself, as no one alwa
remembers his ancestors' names back for ten generations. In a momer
of forgetfulness an emperor once named a new pavilion and the
suddenly realised that he had used a tabooed word—the name o
his ancestor. No sooner was the name conferred than it had to b
changed.

Su Tungpo's father, Su Shün, was a reticent man, and as far as h
political ambitions were concerned, he died disappointed, although h
hopes for literary and official honours were realised in the persons
his two sons before he died. Possessing a high intelligence, severe i
temperament, independent in mind, and crotchety in character, Su
Shün was not a man easy to get along with. He is known to this day
as the one great scholar who did not seriously begin to study until he
was twenty-seven. This is usually pointed out to young children as an
example to prove that with determination and industry, success always
awaits a man; though a bright child might deduce the opposite con-
clusion that one did not *have to* begin to study in childhood. And the
fact is, Su Shün had full opportunity to learn to read and write in child-
hood; it seems that there was enough ruggedness in this individual to
resist coercion and resent the formal education of those times. We
know that many brilliant children do. It cannot be true that he did
not learn to read and write at all in childhood, but rather that he com-
pletely wasted his childhood years. Yet, he made enough impression
as a young man for the Cheng family to be willing to make him their
son-in-law. Equally amazing is the fact that, starting at the late age of
twenty-seven, he did achieve such a high literary fame, a fame which
was by no means totally eclipsed by his brilliant sons.

SU TUNGPO

Portrait by Li Lungmien. From a copy owned by Weng Fangkang.

"Gathering of Scholars at Western Garden" (home of Prince Wang Shien) in the year 1087, from a late copy, probably Ming, of the original painted by Li Lungmien and described by Mi Fei. An earlier and more faithful copy by Chao Mengfu exists in the Palace Museum, Peiping. Many copies were made of this famous painting of a famous gathering. Present were three Sung painters and Su Tungpo's disciples. In the copy above, Huang's position has been changed. Chang Lei was originally kneeling on the ground instead of sitting. The figures of Chao Puchih, Cheng Chiahui, and two others are missing. The three illustrations that follow are details from this painting. (See page 242.) *Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

Prince Wang's
Concubines

Tsai Tienchi

Su Tungpo

Prince Wang Shien

Li Chihvi

Huang Tingchien

Li Kunglin (Lungmien)

Chang Lei

Su Tseyu

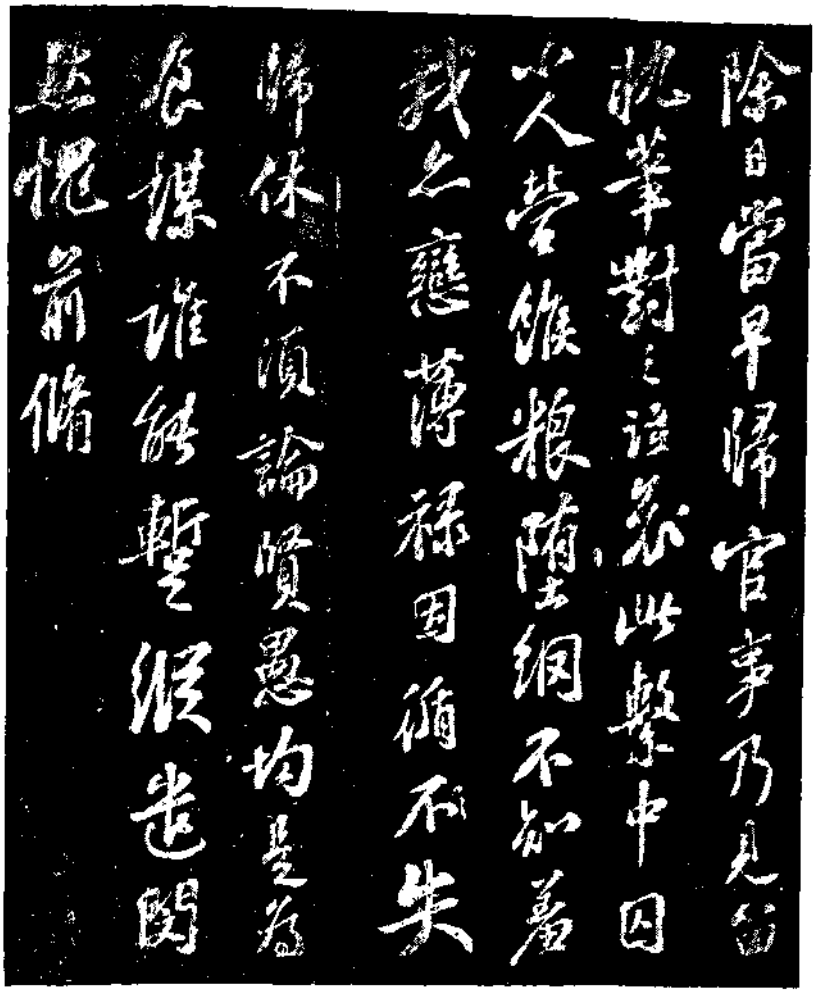
Chen Pishü

Wang Chungchih　　Chin Kuan

Mi Fei

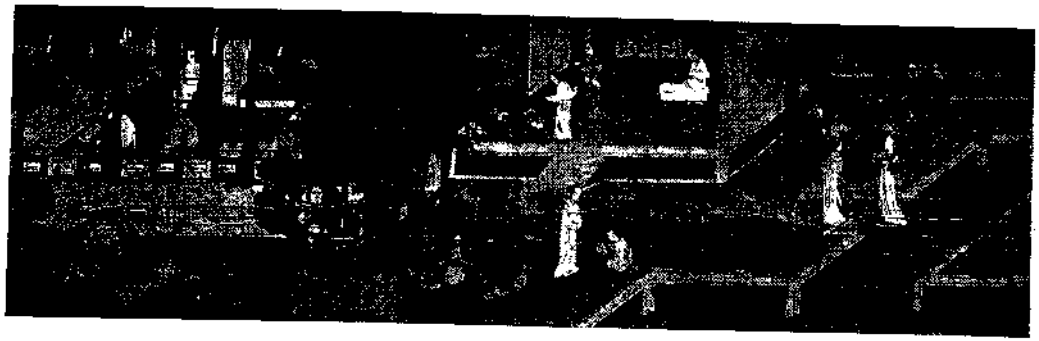
BAMBOOS by Sun Tungpo

Inscription reads: "Recluse of Tungpo. Painted in March, first year of Shaosheng [1094]." *Collection of Mr. M. C. Tsai, Shanghai*



Su Tungpo's calligraphy was famous and widely collected by connoisseurs, and many volumes of it are to be found in Chinese libraries. Most of them are rubbings from stone inscriptions; to preserve the living quality of the handwriting the highest special skill and the finest stone are required. One of the best examples is that shown above, which is a Sung rubbing taken from a stone inscription of the famous poem which Su Tungpo wrote on New Year's Eve, 1071, when, as a magistrate at Hangchow, he had to sentence to prison men arrested for smuggling salt. The translation appears on page 128,

From Western Tower Scripts, *owned by Governor Tuan Fang* (1861-1911).



"Lady Su Hui and Her Verse Puzzle" by Chiu Ing, showing interior of Chinese house and ladies' costumes, as imagined by a Ming artist. Lady Su Hui was a poetess of the Su clan in the fifth century who won back her husband's love by an intricate verse puzzle. *Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

"Lady Blossom," poetess of the tenth century in Su Tungpo's province, by Chiu Ing. Su Tungpo rearranged one of her poems and put it into a song. Lady Blossom was queen of Szechuen when it was an independent kingdom. *Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

About the time when his son was born, he began to take himself seriously, regretting rather late, but with a sharp sense of remorse, the wasted years of his youth. He must have been bitten with shame to see that his own brother and his wife's brother, and his two sisters' husbands, had all passed state examinations and were going out as officials. Such a state of affairs might not affect a mediocre person, but to one gifted with the mental powers that he showed in his *Complete Works*, the situation must have become unbearable. In his sacrificial prayer to his wife on her death, he afterward indicated that she had prodded him along, for the wife, Su Tungpo's mother, was a very well-educated woman. The grandfather, however, had said and done nothing about the son, who to all intents and purposes appeared to be nothing better than a stubborn, erratic, loafing genius. When friends asked him why his son did not study and why he had done nothing about it, he replied placidly, "I am not worried", suggesting an enormous confidence that his brilliant but erring son would himself realise the mistake in due time.

The people of Szechuen were, even in those days, a hardy, argumentative, self-reliant, and largely self-governing race, retaining, as people of remote districts or colonies often do, certain ancient customs and habits and culture. Thanks particularly to the invention of printing in this province a century earlier, a sudden impetus had been given to learning, and in Su Tungpo's day a fairly high percentage of officials, or successful scholars, came from this province. Its general level of scholarship was higher then than that of the provinces now named Hopei and Shantung, for at the imperial examinations candidates from the latter provinces often failed in poetry. Chengtu was the centre of culture, famous for its fine letter paper, Szechuen brocade, and beautiful monasteries. There were gifted courtesans and talented beauties, and in the centuries immediately preceding Su Tungpo it had produced at least two famous women poets. In their writings the scholars still held to the early Han tradition of simple austerity of style as against the decadent, ostentatious style prevalent elsewhere at the time.

Then, as now, the people of that province were given to arguments and eloquent disquisitions. Even in middle-class society, conversations were often studded with learned instances and clever allusions, and had an air of archaic refinement to those from the outside provinces. Of this inborn eloquence and this determination not to be worsted in an argument, Su Tungpo had a fair share. Not to mention his arguing several times with the devil, his state papers were distinguished for clarity and forcefulness of presentation. Both Su and his father were attacked by their enemies as resembling the sophists of the Warring Kingdoms, and were praised by their friends as having the style of

Mencius, with Mencian eloquence and aptness of analogy. Szechuen people should make good lawyers.

It is for this reason that the people of Meichow acquired the reputation of being "difficult to govern". Su Tungpo once defended it thus: the people here, as different from the people of less cultivated regions, could not be easily bullied by a magistrate. The gentry kept law-books in their homes and "did not regard it as wrong" to be thoroughly conversant with the laws and statutes. These scholars tried to live according to the laws and wanted to hold the magistrates to them also. If a magistrate was good and just to the people, they would on his termination of office make a portrait of him and worship him in their homes and remember him for fifty years. But, like modern children at school upon the arrival of a new teacher, they had a game of their own to play. When a new magistrate arrived they would test him, and if he "knew his onions", they would let him alone. But if he was in any way officious or overbearing, he would have a hard time of it. As Su explained, they were hard to govern only when the magistrate did not know how to handle them.

In addition to a certain ancient quaintness in their local customs and habits, the people of Meichow also had developed a kind of social aristocracy. The well-known old families were classified as "A" and "B", and called *chiang ching* or "river squires". The squires would not marry their children to other families, however rich and powerful, if they did not "belong". There was also a well-developed custom of co-operation among the farmers. In the second month of each year the farmers would start work on the fields. By the beginning of April the time came for weeding. The farmers would come together by the hundreds and work collectively at this chore. They chose two leaders for command, one in charge of the hour-glass and the other in charge of a drum, and they started and stopped the day's work according to the drum signal. Those who arrived late, or those who were slack, were fined. Farmers who had proportionately more land but fewer farm hands had to make up for it by contributing money to the general fund. At harvest-time, the villagers came together and made a grand festival of it. They broke the earthenware "hour-glass" and with the money from the fines and the assigned dues bought mutton and wine to celebrate the harvest. The ceremony was preceded by a sacrificial offering to the god of agriculture, and the people ate and drank and made merry before they dispersed to their homes.

Chapter Three

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

WHEN Su Tungpo was a child of between eight and ten years, his father went to the capital to take his chance at the imperial examinations. After his failure, he travelled abroad as far as the modern Kiangse Province, and the mother took over the personal instruction of the child at home. There is an incident recorded both in the official biography of the poet in the *Sung History* and in the long tomb inscription written by the poet's brother. The mother was teaching the young son a chapter in *Later Han History*. As a result of terrible misrule the government had fallen into the hands of eunuchs; and the scholars rebelled against the rule of the intermediate sex. Corruption and graft and extortion, and arbitrary arrests, were the order of the day, for the local magistrates were all underlings and protégés of the eunuchs. Courting death for themselves, the good scholars time and again impeached the ruling clique. Repeated waves of reform and protest followed repeated inquisitions. The scholars were subjected to bodily torture, persecuted, and murdered by imperial decree.

Among this group of upright scholars was a fearless young man by the name of Fan Pang, and it was his life that the mother and son were reading. The story was that after repeated persecutions and escapes, the end came. The imperial courier bearing the message that sentenced Fan Pang to death had arrived. As bearer of the unhappy news, the good courier shut himself up in the *yamen* and wept. The magistrate himself was a good man, too, and had high respect for the scholar. He offered to lay down the magistrate's seal and, instead of carrying out the arrest, flee with him, but Fan Pang refused, saying that it would involve his old mother and condemn her to the life of a fugitive from justice. Confiding the care of his mother to his younger brother, he went to say farewell to her. In this decision not to escape the mother concurred, and she said to him: "I had hoped for you a long life and a good name, but since you cannot have both, I prefer that you have a good name." So they parted, and in going, Fan Pang said to his young son: "If I should advise you to do wrong, I know that this would not be right, but if I should advise you to do right, you see I have done no wrong."

The young Su Tungpo looked up to his mother and asked her: "Mother, if I grow up to be a Fan Pang, will you permit it?" And his mother replied: "If you can be a Fan Pang, can I not be Fan Pang's mother?"

* * * * *

The young child entered school at the age of six. It was a fair-sized school with over a hundred pupils, all of whom studied under a Taoist priest. The brilliant young mind quickly distinguished itself, and among the great number of pupils Su and another child were the most praised by the teacher. This other pupil, Chen, later also passed the state examinations but became a Taoist with the ambition to become "an immortal". Quite late in his life, Chen was preparing to go up to Heaven, and he came to pay a visit to one of his friends. The friend gave him food and money. He went out and distributed the food and money to the poor and then sat down in Taoist fashion outside the gate, ready to depart from this earthly life by starvation. Some days later, to all intents and purposes, he had breathed his last. The friend, therefore, called his servants to remove the corpse. However, it was New Year's Day, and the servants complained at having to remove a corpse on such an auspicious day. Thereupon the dead man said: "Never mind, I will carry myself." He got up, walked to the country, and died in a more convenient place. Such is the factual manner in which many of the Taoist recluses were supposed to have "ascended to Heaven".

As a child Tungpo interested himself in other things besides study. After school, he would come home and peep at the birds' nests. His mother had strictly forbidden the boys and maidservants to catch birds, as a result of which, in a few years' time, the birds knew that they would not be molested in this garden and some came to build their nests on a branch low enough for the child to see. Su Tungpo remembered particularly a small bird with wonderful bright plumage that came and visited their garden for days.

Now and then, an official would pass by the town and pay them a visit, since Tungpo's uncle was already an official. There would then be a hullabaloo in the family and the maidservants would run about barefooted to pick vegetables from the garden and kill chickens to prepare a dinner. Such visits of the officials produced a deep impression upon the child.

He played with his cousins on the mother's side. He and his younger brother would visit the village fairs or dig in the vegetable garden. One day the children dug up a beautiful stone slab with a wonderful lustre and having delicate green veins in it. They struck it and it gave out a clear metallic tone; they tried using it as an ink slab, and it served the purpose very satisfactorily. Ink slabs had to be of a special porous stone, absorbing and retaining moisture well; they had a great deal to do with the art of calligraphy. A specially good one was always highly valued by a scholar, since it was an object upon his desk with which he had to do most of the day. The father gave the child this slab, which he kept until he grew up, and upon which he carved a special inscription. This

was considered a good omen for his rise in *belles-lettres*.

If we believe the records, he is supposed to have penned some extraordinary lines at the age of ten. Two of these lines are found in his amusing tale of "The Cunning Mouse". It is a short piece describing how a little mouse, when found trapped in a bag, had pretended death, and then worsted his captors when thrown upon the ground. Also at about this time his teacher was reading a copy of a long poem describing the galaxy of illustrious scholars then living at the court. The young pupil looked over the teacher's shoulder and began to ask questions about these scholars. They were names great in China's history, for in Su Tungpo's childhood China was ruled by perhaps the best emperor of the dynasty, who was a patron of literature and the arts. There was peace in the country and peace with the barbarian hordes on the north and north-west, the Kins, the Liaos, and the Shishia kingdom, which had been a constant source of trouble. Under such a regime, good men held office and a number of literary talents had arisen to grace the court with their presence. It was then that the child first heard of the great names of Ouyang Shiu, Fan Chungyen, and others, and he was deeply inspired. Happily, these are about all the revelations we have of the poet's childhood. Though Su recorded many of his adult dreams and unfinished poems written during his dreams, there are no unwitting remarks for the modern biographer to build, with a mixture of interpretation, intuition, and fantasy, into a fabric of the poet's subconscious neuroses. Su Tungpo mentioned no diapers or constipation.

At the age of eleven he entered the secondary school in serious preparation for the official examinations. To meet the official tests, the students had to cover in their reading all the ancient classics, history, and poetry, and selected prose. Naturally they had to commit the classics to memory, and recitation in class consisted in repeating the passages by heart, with the student's back turned towards the teacher to prevent him from looking at the book lying open on the teacher's desk. The more ambitious ones would memorise whole chapters from the histories. It was not only the contents and information that were important but also the language and phraseology, which were to become elements in a writer's vocabulary. The use of a famous phrase or of an allusion without indicating the source aroused an aristocratic and egoistic pleasure in the learned reader. It was a kind of coterie language; the reader conceived a respect for the writer for writing it and for himself for understanding it. It worked by suggestion and the association of ideas, and was always more effective than an explicit statement that lacked the charm of suggestion.

This memory work was hard and strenuous toil. The traditional method was for the student to go over a printed history book, which was never punctuated, and try to punctuate the passages as a means of

making sure that he had completely understood them. But the most ambitious of all would do the really hard thing by copying the whole of the classics and dynastic histories once over by hand. This was actually what Su Tungpo did in his student days. Considering the severe canons of Chinese prose and poetry, and the constant allusions to names and incidents and metaphors used in the standard histories, such a method had distinct advantages. For after copying the whole book word by word, one began to know that book in a way that no amount of reading would give him. This labour served Su Tungpo well in the future, for when pleading with the emperor or drafting an edict for him, he was never at a loss to quote historic examples, used by scholars in those times as "cases" are used by lawyers today. Besides, in copying, he could practice his calligraphy.

Before the invention of printing this copy work was necessary, but in Su Tungpo's time the commercial printing of books had been in existence already for about a hundred years. The invention of printing from movable clay types had been made by a certain Pi Sheng, an ordinary business-man. The method was to have individual types for characters made of a special clay which hardened after carving; these were set on a metal tray prepared with a coating of resin. When the types had been set in line, the resin was heated and a flat sheet of metal was used to press upon the assembled type and give it a perfectly even surface. After printing was done, the resin was heated again; the types came off easily from the metal tray, to be cleaned and put in place for the next job. However, the method of printing from wood blocks, each block representing two pages, continued to be the one in popular use.

While Su Tungpo and his brother Tseyu were storing away this immense knowledge of literature and the classics, their father had failed at the examinations and had come back home. The civil service examinations went by set standards and formulas. Like a Ph.D. thesis, they required conformity to certain standards, a certain amount of drudgery, a good memory of facts, and normal intelligence. Too much intelligence or originality might be a hindrance, rather than an aid, to success at the examinations. Many brilliant writers, such as the poet Chin Kuan, could never pass them. In the case of Su Shün, his weak point may have been versification; tests in poetry required a passable virtuosity and aptness of phraseology, and Su Shün was chiefly interested in ideas. Since, however, an official career was the only road to honour and success and almost the only profession outside teaching open to a scholar, the father must have come home despondent.

It was the custom for young people to read aloud while their father lay on a couch and listened to their voices reciting the classics, said to be one of the most pleasant and musical sounds ever heard upon this earth. In this way the father was able to correct any errors in pro-

nunciation, which was full of traps for the uninitiated. As Ouyang Shiu, and Su Tungpo himself later, lay and listened to their sons' recitation, so Su Shün lay now on the couch listening to the musical flow of his sons' voices, his eyes fixed on the ceiling, approximately in the state of mind of a hunter who had shot his last arrow and missed the deer, and it was as if he was refashioning new arrows and sending forth his sons to shoot that deer yet. Something in the boys' eyes and their voices, as their tongues rolled so smoothly over the syllables of the classics, told him that they would succeed, and his hope recovered and his wounded pride was healed. The probability is that the adolescent brothers had already outstripped their father, from exact memory of history to excellence of penmanship. One of Su Tungpo's disciples later said that Su Shün had a greater natural talent but that Su Tungpo was the more profound scholar. The father had not yet given up all ambition for an official career, but he would have been an idiot had he not already grasped the certainty that his two sons would pass the examinations though he had failed. This is not said in any disparagement of the father, for we know that he guided his two sons in the direction of purity of style and of a serious concern with history and government, through the study of the laws of prosperity and decay of a period.

It was lucky for Su Tungpo that his father had always stood for simplicity of style in contrast to the precious, ornate manner prevalent at that time; for when later the young scholar went up to the capital to take the examinations, the minister of education and chief examiner, Ouyang Shiu, had determined to start a reform of the literary vogue by failing all candidates who indulged in pedantic nonsense. This pedantic style may be described as a continual piling up of abstruse phrases and obscure allusions in order to "beautify" one's composition. It would be difficult to find one simple natural line in such compositions. The great fear was that things should be called by their right names and a line might be left unadorned. Su Tungpo described such pathetic writing as "building up each sentence by itself and using each word by itself" without reference to the total effect—like the opulent jewels worn on an old lady's arms and neck at an opera *première*.

The home atmosphere seemed just right for the growing up of an adolescent with a strong literary bent. The library was stacked with books of all kinds. The grandfather now was a different person; on the merit of his second son's having become an inspector in the finance ministry, the old man had also received an official rank, that of "counsellor" at an imperial court of justice. Such ranks were purely honorary, their chief merit being that of enabling an official to refer to his father as "the Counsellor" or "the Commodore", although he might never have seen a court or a ship in his life. It seemed at times

that to die with some title on his epitaph was all that a man lived for—if one could not live as a gentleman, he at least hoped to die like one. And if he happened to die too soon, before securing such honours, there was always the convenient device of posthumous titles. Particularly in the Sung dynasty, even for the regular officials, one's title had little to do with one's actual post. Readers of the tomb inscriptions of the Su family may be misled into thinking that the poet's grandfather was a counsellor at a court of justice and also an imperial tutor, and that his father was a tutor to the prince, honours conferred upon them when Su Tseyu became a vice-premier. As a matter of fact, neither had ever held such an office in his lifetime. Su now had an uncle who was an official and two aunts who were married to husbands holding government offices. Both his paternal and maternal grandfathers held official ranks, one honorary, as we have just pointed out, and the other actual.

But the most important member of his family who grew up and studied with him and with whom his life was to be most closely connected was his younger brother, Tseyu. The love and devotion between these two brothers and their constant loyalty to each other through all vicissitudes of fortune was a theme song of the poet's entire life. They comforted each other in sorrow, helped each other in distress, and dreamed about each other and wrote poems to each other as a form of communication. Even in China the beautiful love between the two brothers was something quite unique. Tseyu was of steady, phlegmatic temperament, with practical sense, and somehow he managed to attain, eventually a higher position than his elder brother. Although they shared the same political views and followed the same ups and downs through their entire political careers, Tseyu was the more hard-headed one and often helped his brother with wise counsel. Perhaps he was less headstrong; perhaps, being less brilliant and not enjoying such a singular reputation as his elder brother, he was considered less dangerous by their political opponents. At this period Su Tungpo acted not only as a fellow student but also as a teacher to his brother. He wrote in a poem: "In my youth I knew Tseyu as a child, gentle and bright. I regarded him not only as a junior fellow student, but also as a clever pupil." And the younger brother wrote in Su Tungpo's tomb inscription: "I had knowledge from you, my brother. You cared for me as an elder and guided me as a teacher."

At this point it is convenient to state the various names of the three Sus. In accordance with ancient custom, a Chinese scholar has several names. Besides the family name he has a legal personal name (*ming*) with which he signs his own signature in all letters and official registrations. He has a courtesy name (*tse*) by which he should be addressed orally and in writing by his friends. The usual way of addressing a

person formally is by his courtesy name without his family name, with "Mr." added to it. In addition many scholars adopt special poetic names (*hao*) on various occasions as names for their libraries or studies —names that are often used in their seals, and by which they are popularly known once they become famous. Others are sometimes referred to by the names of their collected works. A few who rise to a position of national importance are referred to by the name of their home town. (A Chinese Wendell Willkie might have been known as "Indiana Willkie", and F.D.R. would have been entitled to be called "Hyde Park Roosevelt". A great many eminent officials received also a posthumous honorific title.

Su senior's personal name was *Shün;* his courtesy name, *Mingyun;* and the poetic name by which he was commonly known, *Laochuan,* which came from the name of his family cemetery. The elder son was *Su Shih;* his courtesy name was *Tsechan,* and his poetic name, *Tungpo.* This last comes from his poetic title, "Recluse of Tungpo", the name he adopted for himself when he was living in banishment on the Eastern Slope (*Tungpo*) of Huangchow. This in time became the name by which he was and is popularly known all over China. Chinese records usually refer to him as "Tungpo", without "Su", or sometimes as "Mr. Tungpo". His complete works sometimes go by his posthumous title of *Wen Chung Kung* or "Literary Patriotic Duke", the title conferred on him by the emperor about seventy years after his death. Poetic critics sometimes refer to him with great respect by his home district: as Su *Meichow.* The younger brother's name was Su *Cheh,* his courtesy name *Tseyu;* in his old age, living in retirement, he styled himself "the Old Recluse on the Bank of the Ying River". He was therefore sometimes referred to in Chinese works as Su *Yingpin,* and sometimes as Su *Luancheng,* Luancheng being the title of his collected works and of the district of the remote ancestry of the Su family, situated near Chengting, south of Peking, whence the family had come to live at Meichow two hundred years earlier.

As one Chinese name per person is more than enough for the Western reader to follow, I shall always call the father *Su Shün,* the elder son *Su Tungpo,* and the younger son *Su Tseyu,* following the prevailing Chinese practice. The confusion arising from so many names adopted by one scholar takes up a great deal of the time of a student doing research in Chinese history. In Su Tungpo's time at least eight persons had the same name, *Mengteh,* which meant that the person's mother, before she conceived, had dreamed that she had a boy.

When Tungpo was sixteen, there was an episode which put a heavy strain on the relationship between the father's and the mother's family, and which reveals something of the father's character. As often hap-

pens in Chinese families, the father had married Su Tungpo's elder sister to a first cousin in the mother's family. We cannot know details at this late date, but we know that the young bride was unhappy in the Cheng family. Perhaps she was persecuted by her husband's relations. Anyway, she soon died and under circumstances that stirred up Su Shün's indigation. It seems the girl's father-in-law was a thorough scoundrel. Su Shün wrote a poem couched in bitter words and blaming himself for his daughter's death. He then did an unusual thing. He compiled a family genealogy, had it inscribed in stone, and erected a pavilion over it. To celebrate the occasion, he gathered the entire Su clan, before whom he intended to read a public denunciation of his wife's family. After the members of the clan had poured wine offerings to the dead ancestors, Su said to the clansmen that a "certain" person in the village, meaning his wife's brother, represented a powerful family; that he had brought moral chaos into the village; that he had driven out the orphan child of his own brother and monopolised the family property; that he had placed his concubine above his wife and indulged in licentious pleasures; that the father and son caroused together and the women's behaviour was scandalous; that they were snobs, "confusing the wealthy with the nice people"; that their beautiful carriages dazzled the eyes of their poor neighbours, and their money and official connections were able to influence the court; and finally, that "they are the scoundrels of the village. I dare not tell this to all the villagers, but I say it to the people of our own clan." The father undoubtedly offended his wife's family for ever, but he was prepared to sever all connections with them, and he told his sons never to have anything to do with their brother-in-law. For more than forty years after the incident neither Su Tungpo nor his brother had any contact with their brother-in-law, Cheng Chihtsai, although they maintained cordial relations with the other cousins after their father's death. The challenge to the powerful clan and the tone of the public denunciation show in the father something of the impetuosity and intolerance of evil that were characteristics of the poet in his later career.

The mother was very unhappy over the incident. She, too, felt great sorrow over the loss of her young daughter. It is difficult to surmise whether, in this family conflict, she stood for her own dead daughter or for her maiden family. The mother was, as we have said, a well-educated woman, her father being an official who had risen to a fairly high rank at the capital. For all we know, she may have rebelled against the snobbery of her family, or at least against the debauchery of her brother. She was broken-hearted and her health rapidly declined.

Charming legends very generally accepted in China credit Tungpo with having a very talented, if not beautiful, younger sister. She is

reputed to have been a poet, and to have married Chin Kuan, a very well-known poet and a protégé of Su Tungpo. Stories are told of how she kept away the bridegroom from her chamber on the wedding night until he had completed a couplet she had set for him to finish. It was an extraordinarily difficult task and the poet bridegroom was in despair, pacing up and down the court-yard frantically, until Su Tungpo helped him out. Other stories tell of how the two lovers exchanged the most fanciful kinds of poems with words arranged to be read backward and forward and in a circle. In such stories Su Tungpo was reported to have said to his sister: "If you were a man, you certainly would have become more famous than myself." One would like to believe these stories. Unfortunately there is no historic basis for them. In the hundreds of letters and records in Su Tungpo's works and those of his brother, with many mentions of Chin Kuan, I have not been able to find the slightest indication that they were ever related. Nor was it once mentioned in the dozens of memoirs written by scholars of the period that Su Tungpo had a younger sister. Moreover, Chin Kuan never saw Tungpo until he was twenty-nine and married, and Su's younger sister, if she was born at all, would have been around forty when Chin Kuan met Su. The legends grew up very much later and are usually connected with stories which made good after-dinner conversation. But the existence of such popular legends merely shows how the personality of Su Tungpo captured the imagination of the Chinese people.

Tungpo, however, had a younger cousin-sister, who was his first love, and for whom he showed very tender feelings till the end of his days. She was his first cousin on the father's side. When his grandfather died, Tungpo's father returned from his trip abroad, and so also did his uncle with his family, to attend the funeral ceremony. The cousins therefore had much chance of seeing and playing with one another. According to Tungpo she was "good and intelligent and kind". Since they both bore the same family name, marriage was out of the question, as would not have been the case had she been a first cousin on the mother's side—that is, had she borne a different family name. In time, the cousin was married to one Liu Chungyuan. Later, in his travels, Tungpo had occasion to visit her at Chinkiang at her home for three months. During his stay he wrote two poems that are difficult to explain except as love poems addressed to her.* No writer of the period and no research student of Su Tungpo's life ever mentioned this special relationship, because no one would. However, when he was living in exile in his old age and heard of this cousin's death, he wrote to her son that he felt as if "a knife had been thrust into his heart". After his return from exile, when he was passing through Chinkiang, where

* See pages 143–5.

her grave lay, he made an effort, though he was very sick at the time, to go and sacrifice to her spirit and the spirit of her husband. The day after, when some friends went to call on him, he was found to be lying in bed and shaking with sobs with his face turned towards the wall.*

* See pages 307, 338–9.

Chapter Four

THE EXAMINATIONS

WHEN Su Tungpo and his brother were adolescents and almost ready to take their examinations, inevitably the marriage question came up. If they went up to the capital unmarried and if they passed the examinations, they would be spoken for by families having grown-up daughters anyway. At this time there was the custom of *chuo-hun* ("catch marriage"): rich merchants at the capital with unmarried daughters were on the look-out for the announcement of the results of the examinations, and were ready to negotiate financial settlements on successful bachelor candidates. The time of the civil service examinations was also the busy season of the matrimonial market. It was far preferable, from the parents' point of view, to have their sons married to girls from their own town, born of families they knew. As was the general custom, it was all properly arranged by the parents. Tungpo was going on his eighteenth year when he married Miss Wang Fu, aged fifteen, of a family living at Chingshen, some fifteen miles to the south, on the river. His younger brother was married the following year at the age of sixteen to a girl two years younger. These were early marriages, though not uniquely so.

In principle, early marriages, though not quite as early as those of the Su brothers, tend to save the young people a great waste of time and energy and emotional confusion in trying to select and attract a desirable match. It was most desirable for the young people to have their love and romance settled and out of the way. In China, the system of parents' support of daughters-in-law made it unnecessary for young people to postpone marriage, and it was perhaps just as well for a girl to love a man who was already her husband as to love one who was not yet married to her, though to an incurably romantic society the latter seems more exciting. Anyway, the Su brothers were happily married. It is not by any means implied that mistakes were not made by parents in arranging their children's marriages, or that a higher percentage of happy marriages ensued; all marriages, however arranged, are a gamble and an adventure upon an uncharted sea. The prescient parent or fortune-teller who knows exactly how his son's marriage is going to turn out, even if arranged by him, does not exist. In an ideal society where marriages are made in a blindfold game in a dark forest, participated in by unmarried men and women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, but where social ethics and community life are stable, the percentage of happy marriages may still be the same. Men, whether at the age of eighteen or fifty-eight, select their mates,

with rare exceptions, still on the basis of sexual selection designed by nature, while women attract, but do not select, on the same basis. They make more of an attempt to approach an intelligent choice, and this alone prevents a modern marriage from completely resembling the amorous mating of animals. The advantages of the system of arrangement by parents are merely that it is simpler, more efficient, less wasteful of time, and allows a much greater freedom and wider range of choice. All marriages are contracted in heaven but made on earth and by the men and women who have to make it *after* they come away from the altar.

Soon after the younger son's marriage, therefore, the brothers and father set out for the capital. They had first to go to Chengtu, the capital of the province, where they came into contact with Chang Fangping, a very high official who later was almost like a father to Su Tungpo. Their father also hoped to obtain a position of some kind. He was now about forty-seven, but he had worked hard since his return after his failure at the examinations. In that period he had produced an important work on the principles of government, war, and peace, showing great depth and originality, which should bring him the attention and respect of the scholars at the capital. There were at the time possible channels for one to receive an office on special recommendation of some high minister of state. He submitted his works to Chang Fangping, who thought very highly of them and was ready to appoint him a teacher at the district college of Chengtu. But Su senior was not content with a "mere post as a college teacher". Eventually, overcome by his enthusiasm, Chang was persuaded to write a letter of introduction to Ouyang Shiu, the first writer of the land, although he was not on very good terms with him. Another friend, by the name of Lei, also wrote a letter of introduction, speaking of the eldest Su as having the "talent of a counsellor of kings". Armed with these letters to Ouyang Shiu and Mei Yaochen, the father and sons went up to the capital by a land journey of over two months, passing through the high mountain ranges of northern Szechuen and Shensi.

In May of 1056 the three Sus arrived at the capital and put up at a Buddhist temple, awaiting the tests that were to come in the autumn. These were the preliminary tests given by the ministry of education selecting candidates for the spring examinations to be held under the personal supervision of the emperor. Of the forty-five candidates from Meichow, both brothers were among the successful thirteen. Having nothing more to do than to wait for the palace examinations in spring, the father and sons stayed to look over the city and get an introduction to society. Su Shün now submitted his works to Ouyang Shiu, the highly respected and loved leader of the scholar class. The genial-mannered Ouyang Shiu had unusually white long ears and a short

upper lip which revealed his gums when he laughed. He was not particularly handsome to look at, but to meet this dean of letters and receive his favour was the dream of all aspiring scholars. Ouyang Shiu had won the love of the *literati* because he had always regarded it as his duty to discover and encourage young talent. He received Su Shün cordially, and through him Su senior was invited to privy councillor Han Chi's home and introduced to the high-ranking officials. But with his aloof and somewhat self-important manner, Su Shün failed to make a good impression on the government leaders.

The young brothers spent their time looking at the gay streets, eating at the famous restaurants, and standing in the cold watching with great admiration the renowned ministers passing by in their carriages. The Sung dynasty had four capitals, of which Kaifeng, in modern Honan, was the chief. Kaifeng, then called the Eastern capital ("Tungking", which in Japanese would be pronounced "Tokyo") consisted of an outer city, thirteen miles in circumference, and an inner city seven miles in circumference. The city had twelve gates, provided with double and triple traps against enemies, and on top of the city wall "horse heads" resembling gun emplacements were constructed at regular intervals. As the capital was situated on a low-lying plain without strategic protection, save that on the north it was protected by the long stretch of some two hundred miles of the Yellow River, along which the modern Lunghai Railway now runs, a well-thought-out plan of military defence had been devised.

On the west at Loyang, about a hundred and thirty miles away, was the Western Capital, which was established as a bulwark guarding the approach from the north-west through the strategic Tungkuan Pass. On the east, at Shangchiu, some eighty miles away, was established another military anchor, the Southern Capital. There was no fear of invasion from the south. On the other hand, during the first half of the tenth century, barbarian tribes from the north had invaded China. There was a war lord then who had set up a separate government and was able to defy the rest of China by pledging allegiance to a strong dictatorial foreign power lying in the direction of Mongolia. Shih Chingtang became the son of the Siberian emperor, though he declared that he loved China and was concerned for the peace and welfare of the people. He called himself the "Sonny Emperor", while he addressed the Siberian as "Daddy Emperor". While he lived and broke up China's unity, he won the plaudits of foreigners. Particular care, therefore, was taken to prevent a repetition of such a separatist regime, because, whether in ancient or in modern China, there are always enough "patriots" willing to serve as puppets of a foreign government in the name of the common people of China so long as they can keep themselves in power. The fact that the "son" of a foreign

dictator was thrown out of power and died of shame and frustration did not prevent the rise of another puppet, Chang Pangchang, in the twelfth century; and the fact that Chang was thrown out when he had served his purpose did not prevent still another "patriot" in the sixteenth century, Wu Sankuei, from leading his army, armed by a foreign power, inside the Great Wall to crush the Chinese government. The Northern Capital, therefore, was established at Tamingfu in southern Hopei, guarding against the approach of a Mongol potentate from the north.

The city was the metropolis of China, kept in imperial grandeur, where the wealth and talent and beauty of the nation gathered about the court. All around the city ran a moat a hundred feet wide, planted on both banks with elms and willows, revealing the white parapeted walls and vermilion gates behind. Four rivers flowed through the city, running mainly east and west, the most important being the Pien River, which carried all the river traffic and food supplies to the capital from the south-east plains of Anhuei and Honan. Water gates on these rivers were closed at night. Inside the city, the great avenues were provided with guard posts every hundred yards. Painted and carved wooden bridges spanned the rivers running through the city, while the most important one in front of the palace was built of carved marble, elaborately designed. The palace occupied the centre of the city, beginning in the south with a long stretch of stone and brick wall below the Shüanteh Tower, with an elaborate bas-relief of dragons and phœnixes, while above showed the glittering roofs of the palaces, made with glazed tiles of variegated colours. Around the palace on four sides were the main streets, named by the four points of the compass. On the west of the palace stood the premier's office, and the office of the military privy council. In the southern outer city, outside the Red Sparrow Gate, stood the national college and imperial temples. The streets swarmed with pedestrians, officials' horse-carriages, bull-carts, and sedan chairs, which were the general mode of travel, while a few small two-wheeled carts were pulled by men—prototypes of the modern rickshaw. The women in the bull-carts travelled with their screens let down. It was the peculiarity of the imperial city that no one was allowed to go about bare-headed, and even the humblest fortune-teller tried to dress like a scholar.

The time for the palace examinations came. Ouyang Shiu was nominated by the emperor to be chief examiner, together with a number of distinguished scholars as judges. The approach to this most critical moment of a scholar's life was always filled with keen excitement, tense hope, and a nervous fear of failure. It was the moment to which all his years of grinding labour and hours of burning the mid-

night oil were supposed to lead. The candidates had to get up in the middle of the night and come to the palace at dawn, bringing their cold meals with them, for they would not be able to leave until the examinations were over. During the examinations, they were shut up in cubicles under the supervision of palace guards. There was a rigorous system to prevent bribery or favouritism. The candidates' papers were recopied by official clerks before they were submitted to the examiners, to avoid recognition of their identity by their handwriting. In the recopied papers the writers' names were taken out and kept on file. While the candidates were let out after the examinations, the judges themselves were shut up within the palace and forbidden to have any contact with the people outside, usually from late January till early March, until the papers were properly graded and submitted to the emperor. The candidates were examined first on questions of history or principles of government. There was a second examination on the classics, and finally, after the successful ones had been graded, there was one—under the direct supervision of the emperor—on lyrics, descriptive poetry (*fu*), and again, essays on politics. Emperor Jentsung was especially anxious to recruit good talent for his government and took a personal interest in these tests. He sent out the subjects for the papers by his own personal servants, and sometimes, to avoid leakage, changed them at the last moment.

Both the Su brothers passed with high honours. Tungpo wrote a paper which Ouyang Shiu later showed to his colleagues and admired for days. It dealt with the principle of simplicity and leniency in the administration of a country, which was Su Tungpo's basic philosophy of government. However, there was an unfortunate mistake. Ouyang Shiu was so delighted with the brilliant style and content of the paper that he thought it must have been written by Tseng Kung, his friend. In order to avoid criticism he shifted it from the first to the second place, and thus Su Tungpo came out second in the examinations. On April 8, 1057, Su passed the examinations, and on April 14, at the age of twenty, was officially decorated a *chinshih*, almost at the head of 388 successful candidates. To obtain such an honour meant that one became at once nationally known as one of the first scholars of the land.

It was typical of the brilliant young man, however, that he took some liberties with history and invented a dialogue in his paper. He was developing the theme that in giving rewards one should rather err on the side of generosity, and in punishment one should give every benefit of the doubt to an offender lest an innocent man be killed. In the time of Emperor Yao, he wrote, a man was about to be condemned to death. "Three times the minister of justice said: 'Let him be killed!' and three times Emperor Yao said: 'Let him be pardoned!'" The dialogue read very well, and it seemed to support an authentic story

that the sage emperor was willing to use a bad man and give him a chance to prove his talent. The judges read the story, but dared not question it, because it amounted to their admitting not having read it somewhere in one of the obscure ancient texts. So Su Tungpo was passed. After the examinations one day Mei Yaochen, one of the judges, said to him:

"By the way, where does that story occur about Emperor Yao and the minister of justice? I can't quite recall where I read it."

"I invented it," the young scholar confessed.

"You did!" said the old judge.

"Well, that was what the sage emperor would have done, wasn't it?" replied Su Tungpo.

To pass an examination under a certain examiner was to place a scholar under heavy obligation to him for recognition of his talent, and establish a permanent relation between the two as "master" and "disciple" (*menshia*). The candidates went up to pay their respects to their master and the chief judges and wrote them letters of gratitude. Ouyang Shiu was the authority on literature. He could make or unmake a scholar by a word of praise or blame. A writer of the time said that the scholars did not know the fear of punishment or the joy of promotions, nor did they value the gift of life or fear the doom of death, but they did fear the opinion of Ouyang Shiu. Imagine, therefore, the effect on the young poet when Ouyang Shiu said to one of his colleagues: "On reading Su Tungpo's letter, somehow I perspired all over with joy. My old person must give place to this young man and let him rise to the top" When such a statement was made by Ouyang Shiu, the whole capital heard about it. Ouyang Shiu was also reported to have said to his own sons: "Mark my word, thirty years from now nobody will talk about me." This prediction came true, for in the first decade after Su Tungpo's death, nobody was talking about Ouyang Shiu, but everybody was talking about Su Tungpo and reading him in secret, when his works were banned.

Just as he was about to begin his official career, Tungpo's mother died. It was such an important event according to Confucian custom that even a premier had immediately to retire and go into a twenty-seven-months' period of mourning before he could return to office. Tungpo's eldest sister had died several years earlier, and thus when all the men of the family went away to the examinations, the mother was left alone with the daughters-in-law. She died without hearing the good news from the capital. Hurriedly the father and brothers set out for home, to find the mother gone and the house in very bad condition, with the fences broken down and the roof leaking, "like the home of a refugee".

After the proper ceremonies they selected a site for the family cemetery at Old Man's Spring, at the foot of a mountain slope. The spring was so named because, according to the people of the district, on clear moonlight nights an old man with white hair and a beautiful face could be seen sitting or reclining on the bank; but upon the approach of people he would disappear into the water. Later Su Shün was buried in the same grave, and it was from the name of this place, Old Man's Spring, that he was popularly known as "Laochuan".

In his sacrificial prayer to his wife's spirit Su Shün said: "I know your heart as a mother did not wish your children high official honours, but that they might be renowned in literature. When I was young I wasted my talent; I knew that in your heart you were concerned lest I should die unknown. With a sigh, I decided to reform, and it is thanks to you that I have this day. . . . In your grave I have opened two chambers that I may share the tomb with you when I die. . . . Alas, I am old and alone in this wide world; after your death, who will give me good advice? I am going back to our old home to make improvements and alterations in our house. If your soul has not perished, come and visit us."

The twenty-seven months of compulsory hibernation were the happy days of Su Tungpo's youth. The brothers were living with their young wives. Tungpo often visited his wife's home at Chingshen, which was in beautiful mountain country with streams and deep ponds and Buddhist temples on high mountain-tops. An air of mystery and romance and legends hung over the region. Su Tungpo often visited the temples or enjoyed picnics and drinking parties on the banks of the river near the Juitsao Bridge with his wife's uncles and cousins. On summer evenings he sat outside their cottage eating melon seeds and hard fried beans. It was a big household: there were his wife's father, Wang Chieh, and her two uncles and their families. Among the cousins in the Wang family, some thirty in number, there was one girl, known as "Miss Number Twenty-Seven", who was destined to become a part of his life.

Meanwhile Su senior was waiting for his appointment. He was eligible for office at this time because mourning for a wife was not an impediment to holding an office, as mourning a mother was. High officials at the capital had promised help, but he had been waiting for over a year and no news had arrived. Finally an imperial edict came, asking him to go up to the capital and submit himself to special examinations. This threw the old man into consternation. By that time he had developed a phobia about all examinations. He wrote a reply to the emperor declining to go, giving old age and poor health as his excuse. But in his letter to a friend he said: "I do not necessarily want to be an official, nor do I decline on principle to be one. . . . Why

should I, at this dignified old age, submit myself to the disgrace of being judged by official examiners and become a laughing-stock of others? . . . I have already submitted my works to Ouyang Shiu. If he considers them good, why should there be further examinations? If he cannot believe the best that I have written, how can he rely upon the tests of a day?" In another letter, to a high official, Mei, he said: "I have never been able in my life to conform to the standards of the judges, and that is why I have not succeeded to this day. . . . I remember how when I was young and preparing to go into the examination hall, I got up at midnight, packed up my rice and cakes, and stood at dawn before the Eastern Palace Gate. Then we filed in together and sidled up to our respective seats and cowered over our desks. Every time I think about that scene, my heart shudders. . . ."

By June of the following year, 1059, he received another order from the government, a repetition of the first. There was no mention of any special exemption from examinations; but nothing else would satisfy him. The government leaders should believe in him—take it or leave it. He was not going to be quizzed like a schoolboy. So a third time he declined. He was already about fifty, he wrote to say. What could he do at this stage for the country? A scholar, after all, wants to go into the government only to do something for the country, or else he should live as a poor humble scholar. If he should decide to go into the government now, he would neither gain an opportunity of serving the country nor enjoy the distinction of being a great recluse. But, he concluded, it was summer already, and his sons' mourning period would be over by the next month; he would go with them to the capital again. He hoped to see the officials then and talk over the situation. The tone of the whole letter suggests that he really did not mind going into the government even at the age of fifty, provided these influential people arranged that his papers would not be graded by the examiners like those of school children.

In fact, Su senior was prepared to leave his Szechuen home for ever, now that his wife was dead. It was clear that he belonged at the capital. His two sons had obtained official degrees and the next step was, therefore, to see what openings there would be in the way of government positions for them, if not for himself. Hardly two months had passed after the regular mourning period when the father and his sons set out once more for the capital, this time with the young wives. Proper preparations had been made for the spirit of the deceased mother. Su Shün had had images of six bodhisattvas made and placed in two carved and gilt wooden niches, to be set up at the Hall of Buddha Julai at the Paradise Temple. These six bodhisattvas were: the Goddess of Mercy; the God of Wisdom; the Ruler of the Skies; the Ruler of the Earth; a saint specially in charge of pacifying souls who were victims

of injustice in human life; and a celestial guide for all the wandering spirits. Immediately before their departure, Su Shün formally presented these images to the temple and went to say farewell to the spirit of his dead wife. The prayer ended with the words: "I have done these things in the hope that your soul, if it is still conscious, will either go up to Heaven or float around in the upper or the lower regions in complete comfort and ease, just as I myself am going to roam over the world in complete freedom."

Chapter Five

FATHER AND SONS

THE father and sons and sons' wives were now ready to set out for the capital. It was to be a different journey from the one they had taken previously. Their literary ambitions had been vindicated, their success in official careers was almost assured. As they were moving their home to the capital, they took the voyage down the Yangtse instead of going by land through the north-west. It would be a journey of eleven hundred miles, about seven hundred miles by water and four hundred by land, beginning some time in October and ending in February of the next year. There was no great hurry, and as the women were with them, they took their time, drinking and playing cards while on the boat and enjoying the beautiful scenery on the way. The brothers' wives had never been outside their home town. They knew they were travelling with *chinshih* scholars for their husbands, but they could hardly be aware that they were in a family of three prose masters of the dynasty, one of them a major poet. The brothers made verses all the way—but all scholars versified in those days, to record a scene or a sentiment, as we write letters today. Tseyu's bride came from an old family of Szechuen, the Shihs. Young Mrs. Su Tungpo was by position and age the senior. She was the practical, sensible, able sort, with whom it was easy for her sister-in-law to get along. Besides, the old father, the head of the family, was with them; nothing short of obedience and complete harmony would be considered good form. She saw that of the three men, her husband was decidedly the excitable, irrepressible, talkative one. Tseyu was taller, thin, and not as robust as his brother, while Tungpo, born with very prominent cheek-bones and a well-proportioned jaw, was handsome and had a more muscular build. With them was her baby boy, the first grandson of the Su family, born within the year. That was all good and proper. It would have been slightly embarrassing if the baby had been born a year earlier, for it would have meant that the young poet had indulged himself during the first year of mourning for his mother. The Sung neo-Confucianists might look askance at such a regrettable lapse from austere filial piety.

Embarking at Kiachow, where the Great Stone Buddha was, the young couples set out on a voyage of hope; keen, enthusiastic, confident. "Leaving our home town far behind, we look forward to the vast horizon beyond." Szechuen was the largest province of China, the size of Germany, and closely connected with the history of the Three Kingdoms. It took them a month to come to the eastern border

of the province, where the Yangtse Gorges begin and where cities and towns and temples on mountain-tops reminded them of the warriors and Taoist saints of long ago. The brothers went up to visit Shientu, the "Fairies' City", where an ancient Taoist saint had lived before he went up to heaven. One of the earliest poems by the young poet, about a legendary white deer, a companion of the Taoist, already bore witness to the elevation of his spirit.

The unremitting wheels of time turn round,
And we to this terrestrial life are bound.
The fairy went to his celestial home
And left his deer upon the sainted mound.
The homeless deer now sadly gazed afar
At where, cloud-capped, the Elysian City lay.
I hear at night this creature of the forest
Come wandering and cry on river's bay,
While myriad pines are sighing in the wind,
So near the ancient Master's hallowed place!
Oh, where are you, night-crying deer? Alas!
Among the woods I cannot find a trace.

The Yangtse Gorges, majestic in their beauty and exciting in hazards for the travellers, are a stretch of two hundred and twenty miles of the river where the torrents swirl in and out through the rocky precipices, with hidden rocks beneath the water, requiring a great dexterity on the part of the boatmen. The gorges annually claim their toll of shipwrecks and travellers' lives, for this is a big, deep river, and those who sink are lost. But the gorges are also, in their majestic, awe-inspiring beauty, unsurpassed anywhere in China and by very few places in the world. They are also the reason why Szechuen has always been considered practically a kingdom by itself, naturally protected by the gigantic mountains on its eastern border and by these narrow gorges, impenetrable by an enemy.

While going up the gorges was a strenuous task for the boatmen, with perhaps sixty or seventy boat hands tugging a little junk against the swift current by long ropes slung across their shoulders, the voyage down was always more dangerous, the boat being carried forward by the force of the current and guided only by the extreme skill of the boatman at the rudder. This dangerous long stretch is known as the Three Gorges: the Chutang Gorge and the Wu Gorge in Szechuen, and the Shiling Gorge above Ichang in Hupeh. Each of these consists of a series of dangerous rapids alternating with whirlpools and torrents that pass between sharp cliffs rising several hundred feet high straight from the water.

The thrills and dangers began at Chutang, conveniently indicated by a group of rocks which sometimes stood up thirty feet above water and sometimes were partly submerged, as the water rose and fell according to the seasons. It was winter, a difficult time for navigation. Because of the narrow passage, the difference in the level between the summer flood-tide and the dry winter could be as much as a hundred feet. The boatmen usually watched the level of the water at this group or rocks in the middle of the river. These rocks, called Yenyu, took their name from the appearance of swirling waters which, breaking against them, formed spray like the misty, tremulous hair of women. When completely submerged, they formed a vortex even more dangerous for the sailors. There was a local proverb: "When Yenyu appears like a horse, down the Chutang do not pass; when Yenyu becomes an elephant, up the Chutang do not ascend." But the saying really did not help much because of the varying nature of the river-bed; it was desirable at one place for the water to be low, and at others to be high, all depending on the height of the hidden rocks under the water. At a certain point, if there was a sudden storm, the boatmen would wait for days for the water to recede to its safe level before they proceeded. Still, through these gorges people went and were willing to risk their lives for money or for fame, as the Su brothers were doing now. All a traveller could do was to confide the care of his soul to God, because there was nothing else he could do about it. People usually offered a prayer at the beginning of the gorges and another prayer of thanks at the end, in whichever direction they were travelling, and consequently the gods at the more dangerous sections of the voyage were always well provided with wine and beef.

One of Nature's wonders, the gorges provided the proper setting for strange tales and legends of fairies living on the mountain-tops. Just before coming to the entrance to the Chutang Gorge, there was the "Spring of the Holy Mother". This was a small crevice in the rock on the bank, responsive to the sound of human voices. Whenever a traveller went up to this crevice and shouted loud enough: "I am thirsty!" the spring would give forth water to the amount of exactly one cup and then stop. A man who wanted a second cup had to shout again.

The Sus asked the blessing of the gods and proceeded down the river. As it was dangerous for boats to travel too closely together, it was the custom for one boat to pass at least half a mile below before another boat started. When officials were travelling, soldiers were stationed at proper intervals with red flags in their hands to give the signal when the boat in front had safely passed a dangerous point. As Su Tungpo described it:

Entering the gorge, the river seemed blocked in front.
Then from the cliffs a cleft appeared like Buddha's niche.
The swirling waters began to leave their wide expanse,
And narrow themselves into a deep abyss.
The winds bellowed through the cliffs,
And the clouds spewed forth from the caves.
Overhanging cliffs whistled in the high winds,
And twining vines glistened in resplendent green.
Bamboo groves stood over rocks, dripping with cold verdure,
And rhododendrons dotted the mountainside.
Falling cataracts spread a shower of snowy mist,
And strange rocks sped past like horses in fright.

Now and then they sailed past lone cottages, and saw, silhouetted high up against the sky, some country lads cutting wood. The bare huts of the cottagers bore witness to their extreme poverty; their roofs were made of wooden boards, without tiles. As Su was reflecting on the toil of human life, his attention was arrested by a grey falcon circling at ease and in freedom in the sky without a thought for the morrow, and he wondered whether the honours and emoluments of office were worth the fetters of a civilised life. The falcon became a symbol of the emancipated human spirit.

Now they entered the famous Wu Gorges, a stretch of fifty miles. Here the mountains rose in height, the cliffs closed in, and the river narrowed. The daylight changed into the dusk of an eternal dawn. Gazing up from the boat, the travellers could see only a tiny ribbon of blue which was the sky. Only at high noon could they see the sun for a moment, or at night only get a glimpse of the moon when it was at its zenith. Strange monoliths rose straight from the banks, while the peaks were usually hidden in clouds. As the clouds, driven by the high winds, constantly shifted and changed, the peaks at the awe-inspiring heights changed their shapes also, making a moving picture beyond the power of portrayal by artists. One of these peaks, the Fairy Girl, had the shape of a nude female form and had become the most famous one of the twelve since a poet of the third century B.C. celebrated it in a passionate, imaginative poem. It was clear that here up on the mountain-tops, where the heaven and the earth met in an eternal interplay of winds and clouds, the *yang* and the *yin*, or the male and the female, principles had achieved a union, and today the "rains and clouds of the Wu Mountains" remain a literary euphemism for sexual union. The air itself seemed filled with fairies and sprites frolicking in the clouds. For a moment, Su Tungpo's young rationalism asserted itself. The legends carried a logical contradiction. "People are only little children. They like to talk about spirits and ghosts," he

said. "The ancient tale of Ch'u is pure fiction. The fairies do not have a sex life."

But the old boatman began to tell him stories, how in his young days he used to climb the highest peaks, bathe in a mountain pool, and hang his clothes on a branch to dry. There were monkeys on the mountains, but as he went up to the great altitudes, the bird-calls and the monkey-cries stopped, and there was nothing but silence and the mountain wind. The tigers and wolves did not go up there and he was completely alone and unafraid. At the temple to the Fairy Maiden there was a special variety of bamboo whose soft branches bent low and touched the ground, as if in worship of the fairy spirit. As the wind moved, the branches swayed and kept the stone altar always clean, like a servant of the goddess. Su Tungpo was touched. "Perhaps one can become a fairy after all. The difficulty lies in forgetting human desires." Throughout his life Su Tungpo, like his contemporaries, was quite open-minded about the possibility of meeting fairies and becoming one himself.

When they entered the Wu Gorges, "divine birds" began to follow the boat. These ravens were doing no more than what every bird of sense would do. For several miles above or below the Fairy Girl's Temple, they spotted a boat coming and followed it all the way to pick up food from its passengers. The latter usually made a game of it. They tossed up cakes into mid-air and watched with delight how the ravens swooped down and picked them up without fail.

Naturally, these regions were uninhabited and uninhabitable. The Sus passed through the East Dashing Rapids, where the water surged and billowed and tossed the boat about like a dry leaf in a small whirlpool, and when they thought they had gone through the worst, they came upon the even more dangerous Roaring Rapids. Strange monster rocks lined the shore and extended to the middle of the stream. Then they came to a place whose name, to be intelligible, can only be translated as "the Jar of Human Herrings", meaning a place where many travellers had lost their lives, like a kettle of dead fish. This was a giant boulder occupying four-fifths of the river, narrowing it down to a small passage and forcing the boat going down to take a precipitous curve. Any traveller surviving the sudden dip around the Jar of Human Herrings would feel towards the old boatman as towards his second father.

Coming out of the Wu Gorges, they soon arrived at Tsekuei and began to see shabby huts dotting the bank at different levels. It was a very small town, with no more than three or four hundred families, situated on the sharp slope of the hill-side. The inhabitants were extremely poor, and yet considering the exciting beauty of the place, which must enter into men's souls, it was not altogether unreasonable

hat this half-civilised remote village should have produced two major poets, a famous queen, and another famous woman in history. As is generally the custom with mountaineers, the men and women carried their loads in a barrel or basket swung on their backs; but it was mostly the women who did the carrying. This was tiring for their muscles, but, as we know, was always good for their figures. The unmarried girls distinguished themselves by wearing a high coiffure in two joined buns, decorated with as many as six silver pins sticking out on both sides and a large ivory comb, the size of one's palm, at the back.

But the travellers had passed only two of the gorges, and the worst was yet to come. About thirty years before, there had been a landslide which threw sharp-edged rocks into the middle of the stream, and made it impossible for navigation. River traffic had been stopped at this point for about twenty years until a narrow passage had been opened. This place was, therefore, called "the New Rapids". At this point Su Tungpo and his family were held up for three days by a snow storm.

Lying huddled in the night, I slept like a frozen turtle,
But I was the first to know that it was snowing outside.
In the morning I discovered a vast expanse of white,
And the cold wind was shaking the tree-tops.
The green hills were like a youth transformed,
Overnight covered with white hair and whiskers.
The atmosphere of warmth had descended to the river,
And the gurgle of the stream had been silenced on the bank.
Up in the air the flakes fluttered without choice of direction,
And down they came and spread and disappeared
Over the wide river and the empty wastes.
But entering the boat their fluffy footsteps were light;
Like engraved flowers they rested on one's clothing.
Could it be that God had carved these one by one?
Extravagantly these were broadcast and filled the valley;
Alas! Who held this mighty power in his hands? . . .

I see the mountaineers carrying their load of fuel;
They would not know of the pleasure of warm wine and song. . . .
The poet's frozen brush is hard and ready to break,
And the peasant girl is weaving at night uncurtained.
A recluse is treading in the icy cold in his sandals,
And the wind blowing at his hood makes him look like one of God.

A poor monk is clearing the snow before his doorstep,
And the cold liquid is frozen below his nose. . . .

What does the traveller in the boat want?
He wants a hunting horse to dash through the winds.
While a cold rabbit is hiding in the grass,
A lone falcon swoops down like a fierce host.
Ah, to boil venison in water from broken ice!
Though I cannot drink, I will raise the cup high.
The people of Ch'u are known for hunting;
I will follow whoever leads the hunt.
Let the snowflakes flutter and swirl round my face;
I will take up my brush and make of them a worthy poem.

The natives of this place profited from the natural hazards. They made a business of salvaging wrecks and selling the boards for repair of other ships. They also profited in the way of all resort towns from trade with the tourists, who were often compelled to remain there for days. The torrents were such at this point that the boat usually had to be relieved of all its load and the passengers preferred to walk on land for their health.

From Tsekuei on, the back of the Giant Buffalo was visible on the distant horizon, towering above the tops of the nearer mountain ridges. For they were now entering a section dominated by the giant Yellow Buffalo Mountain. The rocks here were so strange that the Yellow Buffalo seemed to be led by a cowherd in blue, wearing a farmer's hat on his head, as the silhouette of the mountain was etched against the distant sky. The local saying here described the dominating appearance of the Buffalo as follows: "In the morning you start from the Buffalo and at night you stop at the Buffalo. For three mornings and three nights you do not get away from the Buffalo." The women here were of fair complexion and tied scarves with black polka dots on their heads. The landscape vied in its beauty with that of the Wu Gorges, even surpassing it in the opinion of some travellers. It was the kind of landscape that we usually see in Chinese paintings, with monoliths of unbelievable shapes standing against the horizon like a stone screen designed by God, or a group of stone giants, some with bended heads and some on their knees, offering their prayer to heaven. On the river-banks were formations of rock strata designed to impress men with Nature's grandeur. Here a massive bluff with a flat surface would stand like a giant sword-blade sticking its point into the bank. Some distance below, before they were quite finished with the dangerous section of their voyage, they came to the Frog. The Frog was a great flat boulder with a striking resemblance to a frog's head, with water

dripping down into the river like a crystal screen from its mouth. The colour of the boulder was a mossy green, and the Frog's back was covered with little globules. At the tail end there was a stone cave from which came the clear gurgling sound of a spring. Some scholars, going up to the capital for their imperial examinations, would collect water from the Frog's mouth and use it to grind ink for their examinations.

Not far past the Frog the temporary spell of Nature's fury spent itself, the drama of rocks and water came to an end, and below Ichang the landscape changed into one of peace and quiet. The setting sun shone upon a low plain of rice-fields and cottages with chimney smoke, reminding the travellers that they had come back once more to a habitable world. According to custom, the travellers congratulated one another on their narrow escape and their good fortune in remaining alive. The boatmen were rewarded for their labours with pork and wine, and everybody was happy and grateful. Looking back, the travellers felt as if they had lived through an unbelievable dream.

At Kiangling they left the boat and began the land journey by cart towards the capital. By the time they had ended their voyage, the brothers had already composed a hundred poems. These were published in a separate volume entitled *The Southern Voyage*. Yet some of the best poems Su Tungpo wrote were composed on the land journey, which concentrated on music and tone and atmosphere alone, and were rich in rhythm and variety of form. At Shiangyang he wrote "songs" or boatman's ditties, like the "Song of the Eagle", recalling the story of Liu Piao, and the "Song of Shangtu", recalling the story of Meng Ta, who lost his control of a rich district through two incompetent officers:

On the wind-swept terrace stands a handsome knight.
His sad song melts into the autumn forest's moan.
Some maidens attentively listen unobserved;
They learn the tune but cannot imitate his tone.
O knight! what ails you?—Two idiot lads
Have lost a golden city and silvery plain,
Well guarded by the White Horse and Phoenix Hill!
The kingdom's lost, though land and water remain.
To what avail do I distress myself?
The bream are hard to catch in this deep cold.
The people on the bank listen and pass by,
But the burden of my song cannot be told.

The Su family arrived at the capital in February. They bought a

house and garden, about half an acre, near the Ichiu Gate, far away from the busy streets. There were tall old locust trees and willows around the house, and the rustic atmosphere suited the family of poets very well. Thus settled, the father and sons waited for official appointments, which usually were a long time in coming. The brothers passed yet two other examinations, one for ministry posts in the capital, and the other, more important, for "frank criticism" of the administration. Emperor Jentsung, anxious to secure good talent, ordered this special examination to encourage the spirit of public criticism, and all scholars could apply upon the recommendation of some minister and upon the merits of special works submitted. On the recommendation of Ouyang Shiu, both the brothers applied and passed, Su Tungpo receiving a grade given to only one other person in the Sung dynasty. He also submitted a collection of twenty-five historical essays, some of which have remained favourite prose selections for schools. Later, the wife of the Emperor told people that Jentsung had said: "Today I have secured two future premiers for my descendants."

Happily, the father was appointed an examiner of scripts in the department of archives, *without examinations,* according to his wish, and later was given a post in a bureau to compile a history of the lives of the emperors of the dynasty. It was a writer's job and he accepted it gladly. But then the question came up how truthful these lives of the emperors should be, the emperors being the ancestors of the reigning ruler. Su Shün took the view that this was strictly a historian's job and a historian should not gloss over the faults even of one's ancestors. There was a dispute. In a paper preserved in his *Collected Works* today, Su Shün said: "I hear that some colleagues have petitioned to Your Majesty, saying that the ancestors may have had personal blemishes, but that if they were no concern of the state, these should be struck off the records. . . . We are not establishing a code of ceremonies or moral conduct for the future generations to follow. It is a historian's duty to record all that they did, regardless of good and bad, to the end that posterity may learn of the truth. If it is the intention of the court to present and preserve idealised, complimentary portraits of the ancestors, I cannot regard this as part of my duty. The author of *Han History* recorded all that happened. If we now emulate his example, we shall be able to show that their personal weaknesses were easily outweighed by the great things that they accomplished, and we shall have a record that the future generations may regard as honest and reliable."

The reputation of the three Sus as scholars and writers had now steadily risen. They were friends of the most famous writers of the land, their poems and essays were greatly admired, and the family was already known as a literary phenomenon. The brothers were just

over twenty, and youth sometimes acted as a handicap for a genius. Vivacious, irrepressible, ambitious, Su Tungpo felt like a thoroughbred impatiently pawing the ground, ready to break into whirlwind speed to conquer the world. But he had a silent partner, Tseyu, and an old father, deep in intellectual penetration, uncompromising in spirit, and socially aloof in character, who held the pair of thoroughbreds in check.

BOOK TWO

EARLY MANHOOD

(1062–1079)

Chapter Six

GODS, DEVILS, AND MEN

IN spite of Su Tungpo's brilliant record, he had to start from the bottom. Late in 1061, the sixth year of the reign of Chiayu he was given the rank of a councillor of justice and the office of an assistant magistrate at Fengshiang, with the power of countersigning reports and official communications with the court. In the previous Tang dynasty, the country had suffered from decentralisation, and at the end the dynasty had fallen as a result of rebellion among the provincial governors, who were often princes of royal blood. The Sung dynasty, therefore, tried to correct this evil by centralisation, concentrating its army around the capital and devising a system of checks and controls for the magistrates in the provinces. Magistrates' terms of office were usually three years, so that they were constantly shifted around. The system of having assistant magistrates with the power of countersigning official memorandums was a part of this set-up. Tseyu also had been appointed to an assistant magistracy at Shangchow; but their father's work was at the capital, and one of the brothers had to stay, as it was unimaginable to leave the widowed father living alone. Tseyu therefore declined the appointment. After he had seen Tungpo and his family as far on their way to his post as Chengchow, a distance of forty miles, the two brothers parted for the first time in their lives, and Tseyu returned to live with his wife and father for the three years while Tungpo was away. Tungpo watched his brother riding on a thin horse in snow outside the West Gate of Chengchow, his head bobbing up and down above the sunken road, until he could see him no more. And in his first poem letter to his brother Su Tungpo wrote:

"Why is it that I feel like being drunk without wine? When your horse turned back home, my heart went home with it. I knew you were thinking of our parent, but now what am I to do with myself? I went up the slope and turned back for a last look, and saw your black hat bobbing up and down beyond the ledge. I was sorry that you were so thinly clad in this weather, riding on a skinny horse in that declining moonlight. A few passers-by came my way singing and laughing, and the servants wondered why I looked so sad. I know that there must be parting in this life, and I fear the months and years will too quickly pass over us. Remember, my brother, whenever you sit in the lamplight on a cold evening, how we promised each other that one day we shall sleep in opposite beds

and listen to the rain in the night. Keep this in mind, and don't let us be carried away by our official ambitions."

This idea of "sleeping in opposite beds listening to a storm at night" was found in the poem of a Tang poet to his brother, and it became a pledge between these brothers and an ideal of the happy life that they planned to live together when they were able to retire. Twice later, when the brothers met together in their official careers, they reminded one another of this promise in their poems.

Mail from the capital to Fengshiang took only ten days, and the brothers sent each other regularly one poem a month. From these poem letters we are able to read Su Tungpo's restlessness of spirit during the beginning of his official career. The brothers often *ho,* or "echoed" each other's poems; to "echo" a poem is to answer it with another one using the same rhyme words. It was a good test of poetic skill, for the rhyming had to be natural, and this was one of the accomplishments of all scholars in ancient China. People looked for surprising, or delightful, or refreshing turns of thought, expressed with the prescribed rhyme words, and the lines had to have natural sequence. As in a crossword puzzle, the difficulty increased the delight when the rhyming was done with ease and without effort. In one of these earliest "echo" poems, written to Tseyu, Tungpo revealed already a complete mastery. Having to write a poem where the first two rhyme words had to be "snow" and "west", Tungpo wrote:

"To what can human life be likened?
Perhaps to a wild goose's footprint on snow;
The claws' imprint is accidentally left,
But carefree, the bird flies east and west."

It remained one of Tungpo's best poems. The flying bird was a symbol of the human spirit. In truth, the events and doings of Su Tungpo we are reading about in this book are but the accidental footprints of a great spirit, but the real Su Tungpo is a spirit, like a phantom bird, that is even now perhaps making dream journeys among the stars.

Fengshiang is near the Wei River in the western part of Shensi province. The whole Wei valley is filled with historic sites and names connected with ancient history, for Shensi is the cradle of Chinese civilisation. Owing, however, to constant troubles with a very strong neighbouring kingdom, the Shishia, situated in what is now northern Kansuh, there was a heavy drain on the man-power and wealth of the people, and the country was very poor. In the first year after his arrival Su Tungpo built a little house and garden as the deputy-magistrate's

official residence, with a pond in front, a very good garden planted with thirty-one varieties of flowers, and a pavilion at the back.

Now he was well settled and without too much official responsibility as an assistant magistrate. He was free to travel, and he made trips to the mountains east and south for days. Once his official duty called for extensive travel in the neighbouring district on an inspection tour to settle outstanding cases of crime quickly and to release as many prisoners as he could. Nothing could have suited him better, and he roamed through the mountains of Taipo, the temples of the Black Water Valley, and the birthplace of the founder of the Chou dynasty. Sometimes there was nothing to do, and he would go as far as the famous Chungnan Hills near Sian, to look at a precious manuscript or an original painting by the famous portrait painter Wu Taotse, owned by one of his friends.

Su Tungpo was young and restless. For the first time he was completely on his own, living with his young wife and baby. Now that he had tasted the first flavour of official life, it did not seem so wonderful as he had pictured and dreamed. Living away from the excitement of the capital, the position of a deputy magistrate in an outlying district countersigning documents and trying lawsuits rather bored him. Now and then he would feel very lonely, but at other times, seeing the moonbeam in his wine goblet, he would be elated.

In his years of immaturity, he had need of the advice of his wife. Mrs. Su seems to have had far better practical sense than he. She admired her husband, it is true, for she realised that she had married a famous, young, handsome poet. When a brilliant poet lives with a woman of plain common-sense, however, it usually turns out that the wife rather than the husband shows superior wisdom. Always in marriage there is the continual play of the opposite and complementary forces of man and woman. Knowing Tungpo's very forthright and sometimes impetuous nature, she felt not so much the need of admiring him as the duty of taking care of him. Su Tungpo had sound sense in big things and no sense in little things; but life usually consists of the many little things and the big things are usually few and far between, and Tungpo the husband listened to his wife. Mrs. Su reminded him that he was now living for the first time without the guidance of his father. Su believed in everybody, but his wife was a better judge of men. She would stand behind the screen and listen to the conversations between her husband and his visitors. One day, after a guest had left, she said to him: "Why did you waste your time talking with that man? He was always watching what you were going to say in order to agree with you."

She warned him against superficial friends who were a little too demonstrative, and whom he had befriended on his famous theory that

there was not a bad person in this world. To the end this seemed to be his trouble; he could not see faults in others. His wife said to him: "Be careful of those people. A friendship which is too quickly formed never lasts." Tungpo admitted that her advice turned out to be true. She had learned this wisdom, I think, from the accepted Chinese saying: "The friendship between gentlemen is mild, like the taste of water"—it has no exciting flavour, but one never grows tired of it. Sincere friendship is never demonstrative. Really good friends don't write letters to each other, for in the complete trust of each other's friendship no one needs to write. And after a few years of parting, they meet again and find the friendship as true as ever.

Su Tungpo was the type that was unhappy and bored when he had nothing to do. A drought, however, was threatening to come over the land there. It had not rained for a long time, and the farmers were desperately worried over their crops. There was nothing to do except to pray for rain, and it was the magistrate's duty to do it. Su Tungpo was suddenly aroused into activity. Something was wrong somewhere, for the gods were angry, and the farmers were going to suffer if rain did not come immediately. He had a very good case to present to the gods. In this he could not possibly fail and he was ready to plead for the farmers before the gods with all the eloquence in his command. And he did.

On the south of the Wei River there is a high mountain range, generally known as the Tsinling Mountains, and in this range the highest and best-known peak is the majestic Taipo. On top of the Taipo Mountain, in front of a Taoist temple, there was a little pool where lived the God of Rain, a "dragon" who could disguise himself in the form of any small fish. Su Tungpo went up to this temple and prayed. He pleaded for the farmers, but, like a good lawyer, he tried to make the Dragon God see that a drought or famine was not to the god's own interests. After flattering the god a little, he said in the official prayer: "There has been no rain or snow since last winter. Thou knowest well that the people's lives depend upon their crops. If it doesn't rain now, there will be a famine; the people will starve and be forced to become bandits. This is not only my personal duty as a magistrate to prevent; as a spirit, thou shouldst not stand quietly by and do nothing about it. His Imperial Majesty has conferred upon thee the different honours, and we have kept up the sacrifices, all for this day when we may need thee. Wilt thou please listen and fulfil thy obligation to His Majesty?"

Coming down from the Taipo Mountain, he went on to visit various places, particularly one that he had missed on his previous trip. He had offered the prayer on the seventh day of the month, and, returning to

the town, he found that there was a slight shower on the sixteenth, but not enough to satisfy the crops or the farmers. He searched for the reason and was told that prayer at the Taipo Mountain had never failed, but that since the god had been made a count by a Sung emperor, prayers to him no longer worked. Su looked up a volume of *Tang History* and discovered that in the previous dynasty the Mountain Spirit of Taipo had been created a duke. The spirit had been in fact degraded in rank and was probably displeased on this account. Immediately, he drafted for the chief magistrate a memorial to the Emperor asking that the Mountain Spirit of Taipo be restored to his previous rank as a duke. Then he and the chief magistrate took a ceremonial bath and sent a special messenger to inform the spirit of what they had done in the way of securing a higher rank for him, and also to bring back a basin of the "dragon water" from the pool.

On the nineteenth, Su Tungpo went out of the city to welcome the arrival of the basin of "dragon water". The whole country population was excited, for in the success of this venture they were all concerned. Several thousand people had come from all over the countryside and there was a great hubbub. The "dragon water" had not yet arrived. But a huge sheet of dark clouds had overcast and darkened the sky. The people waited a long time and still it did not rain. Su Tungpo went into town again and prayed at Chenshing Temple with the chief magistrate, Sung. On his way, he saw a column of cloud coming very slow over the ground and spreading in his direction. Borrowing a basket from one of the farmers, he caught some of this cloud in the basket and shut it as tightly as he could. The poem prayer he addressed to this cloud when in the city says: "Now I am going to let you return to the mountain-tops. Pray do not embarrass us, the officials." After the prayer, he and Sung came out of the city again. As they reached the suburb there was a sudden gush of cold wind. The flags and pennants and tassels of spears waved violently in the air, and from up in the heights the clouds descended like a herd of wild horses. There was a rumble of distant thunder. At this point, the basin of "dragon water" arrived. Su and Sung went up to receive the basin and after setting it up on a temporary altar, said a prayer to it, which is preserved along with his other prayers in his *Works*. As if in answer to the prayer, the showers came and spread all over the countryside. Two days after, there came another heavy rain lasting three days, and the wilting stalks of wheat and corn stood up again.

Now there was great joy all over the country, but the poet was the happiest of all. To commemorate this joyful occasion, he gave the pavilion at the back of his official residence a new name, the "Pavilion of Joyful Rain", and wrote an inscription on it. This inscription is one of the favourite prose selections from Su Tungpo for use in schools

because it is simple in language and typical of Su Tungpo's character, happiest when he was sharing the happiness of the common people.

A sequel to this episode was that the god on the Taipo Mountain was promoted and appointed a duke by the Emperor. Both Su and Sung went up again to the mountain on this occasion and offered their thanks and their congratulations. In July of the following year there was another drought, but this time the prayer was not answered. Disappointed, Su Tungpo went to Panchi to pray to the spirit of a famous man, Chiang Taikung, who is still a very popular god among the common people of China today. He had been a great and wise old man, living in the twelfth century B.C., who, in legend, was reputed to have fished with a hook and line three feet above the water. What the beautiful legend seems to say is that Chiang was a kind and fair person, and if a fish jumped three feet out of the water to be caught by his hook, it was the fish's own fault.

There is no record whether the prayer to Chiang Taikung was answered. But that is no reason for believers in any god, whether it be Buddha or a magic old stump, to doubt the efficacy of prayer. It can never be proved that prayer is not efficacious because, according to Buddhist teachings, something can always be wrong with the man saying the prayer, usually his lack of complete faith. All gods must answer prayers, or humanity would not be interested in them. Besides, prayer is based upon one of the deepest instincts in man. To pray, or to have the attitude of prayer, is, after all, the important thing; whether it is answered or not is secondary.

Anyway, Su Tungpo, as a magistrate in different districts, continued to pray for rain whenever the occasion required it. He knew he was doing the right thing. He believed in the essential justice of the Creator and in His reasonableness. Since he believed in the existence of spirits, he could not but believe also that a spirit would do its best to help relieve suffering and bring happiness and justice into human life. For if reasonableness is the highest human attribute, surely God must be reasonable too, and open to persuasion and a fair argument. But in some of his later memorandums on natural calamities, Su pointed out also, in the orthodox Chinese fashion, that prayers were useless unless at the same time the government gave the people relief from its own oppressive measures. Such is the Chinese religion of common-sense which made a writer in the earliest classic say: "Consult the oracles after you have made up your mind what to do." After knowing all the stupid things the Chinese have done, such sayings as this restore my confidence that the Chinese are, after all, truly great thinkers.

I am almost tempted to say that the spirit of Su Tungpo represents the Element of Fire, for all his life he was fighting floods and drought and was always preoccupied with a city's water supply and with canal

systems and drinking wells wherever he went. The symbol of fire is also appropriate because it was a life distinguished by an expansive spirit, or *esprit;* in simple words, his temperament and his whole life were like a leaping flame, giving life and warmth wherever it went and also destroying certain things on its way.

This leaping flame, according to the record, twice argued with the devil. For Su went safely upon the assumption that not only the gods, but also the devil, should be open to a forceful onslaught of his logic. He hated anything that did not make sense, and even the devil should be made to see the sense or nonsense of what he was doing. Devils may be sometimes forgetful or confused, but if by Su Tungpo's eloquence they could be made to see the folly of what they were doing, they could also be stopped.

Once, walking along a mountain road on his return from Fengshiang to the capital, he was passing Paihua Mountain. One of his guards was suddenly possessed of the devil and began to take off his clothes one by one while on the road, until he was completely naked. Su Tungpo ordered that they put his garments on him by force and have him bound, but the clothing came off again. Everybody said that the Mountain Spirit must be angry and that the soldier was possessed. Su, therefore, went up to the temple and addressed the spirit as follows:

> "Dear Mountain Spirit, I am paying thee a visit because I happen to be passing this way. When I passed here last time, I did not ask anything of thee and now, when I am returning, I am asking nothing for myself. I have, however, a guard who is possessed of the devil and the people say that thou art angry. I do not know whether this is true or not. He is only a small, insignificant being in thine eyes, not worthy of the manifestations of thy spirit. If this man had committed some great crime unknown to others, I would not know what to say. But if he has committed only small offences, such as negligence of duties or discourtesy, or perhaps if he has stolen food or dress, thou shouldst not bother thyself with these small things. It seems to me that thou, the spirit of a mountain, dost control a vast district, and in this vast district there are a great many rich and powerful persons who commit much greater offences and violations of the law. Is it not preposterous that thou darest not to manifest thyself against the rich and powerful, but showest thy anger against a humble soldier? I am only a small official, dependent upon the service of my little retinue, and when one of them is ill, there is nobody to do his work. Wilt thou not please forgive him? I am a stupid and straightforward person, and am therefore telling thee frankly all this."

As soon as Su Tungpo left the temple after finishing this prayer, a

gust of wind blew right into his face. Soon it developed into a squall blowing up pebbles and sand into the air and blinding the travellers. Su Tungpo said to his followers: "Is the spirit getting angrier still? I am not afraid of him." He went ahead on his journey and the storm blew fiercer than ever. Only one man with his immediate luggage followed him, while the others and the horses tried to seek shelter, for they found it impossible to proceed. Someone advised him to go back to the temple and to apologise to the Mountain Spirit. "My fate is controlled by God in high heaven," Su Tungpo replied. "If the Mountain Spirit chooses to be angry, let him be angry. I shall proceed. What can the spirit do to me?" Then the storm abated and blew over, nothing else happened, and the soldier was cured.

Always believing in matching his wits against the unseen spirits, Su Tungpo once drove a sharp bargain with the devil himself. Years later, when he was a high official living at the capital, the wife of his second son, who was a granddaughter of Ouyang Shiu, one night was also possessed of the devil, after childbirth. The young daughter-in-law assumed the personality of a dead woman and said to those present: "My name is Tsing and my surname Wang. My coagulated spirit has not been able to disperse and I have remained a ghost around this place for a long time." Su Tungpo said to the possessed woman: "I am not afraid of ghosts. Besides, there are plenty of priests at the capital who can drive out an evil spirit, and they can drive you out, too. Don't be so stupid! Apparently you died because you were a stupid woman, and now that you have died, you still want to create trouble." Then he explained to the ghost some Buddhist ideas about human spirits, and told her: "Now go quietly away, and tomorrow at dusk I shall say a prayer to Buddha on your behalf." The ghost then put her palms together and said: "Thank you, Your Excellency," and the daughter-in-law recovered. The next day after sunset he wrote a prayer to a buddha and prepared an offering of incense and wine and meat and sent the ghost away.

Soon after, however, a child of his second son said that he had seen a thief running about the house, looking very dark and thin, and clad in a black dress. Su told his servants to search the house, but could find nobody. Then the wet nurse suddenly fell on the floor and screamed. Su went to see her and the wet nurse shouted:

"I am that dark, thin person in a black dress! I am not a thief, I am the house ghost. If you want me to depart from the person of the maid-servant, you must invite a sorceress."

Addressing the ghost, Su said firmly: "No, I won't do it."

"If Your Excellency won't do this, I will not insist," replied the ghost in a modified tone, "but can I have a prayer in my favour?"

"No," Su said.

The ghost began to come down in her terms and asked in a still softer tone if she might have a little wine and meat, but Su Tungpo was still adamant. Over-awed by the infidel, the ghost would now be satisfied with the burning of a little prayer money. The poet still refused. Finally the ghost asked only for a glass of water, and Su Tungpo said: "Give it to her." After drinking the water, the wet nurse fell upon the ground again and soon recovered her consciousness. But her breasts dried up thereafter.

There was an episode during his Fengshiang period of which Su Tungpo seemed a little ashamed and which he did not like to talk about in later life. So far, he had got along beautifully with his superior, Sung, who was an old friend of his family. When a new chief magistrate arrived, however, there came a change. The new magistrate, one Chen, was an old soldier and a stern disciplinarian, dark and muscular and with a sharp glint in his eyes. He came from Su Tungpo's home district and was inclined to look upon him as a young upstart. Chen had an unusual and creditable official record. Once he arrested a corrupt monk of Changsha with many powerful connections and handed him over to justice, to the amazement of the people of the district. Another time he arrested more than seventy sorcerers who preyed upon the ignorant populace, and he compelled them to return to their homes as farmers. At the same time he demolished certain temples given over to immoral practices. It was said that when his soldiers were commanded to stand still, they would do so even when arrows from the enemy were falling thick from the sky.

It was such a person that Su Tungpo now had for his superior. All the military and civil officials bowed their heads in his presence, but in the case of Su Tungpo, as we can well surmise, two uncompromising characters were brought face to face. Often in an argument hot words were exchanged. Su Tungpo was both young and brilliant, and it was difficult for a brilliant young man who had very definite ideas of his own to bow to external authority. Probably the chief annoyance to Su Tungpo as a writer was the fact that the chief magistrate again and again would correct and mutilate Su's drafts of official communications. As a means of showing his displeasure, Chen often would not receive him when he called, and sometimes kept him waiting long enough for Su to take a nap. The quarrel between the two eventually went so far that Chen sent a report to the capital on Su Tungpo's insubordination.

The opportunity soon came for Su Tungpo to have his revenge. The chief magistrate had erected an open terrace inside the official residence, where, in his leisure hours, he could go up and get a better view of the

surrounding country. For what reason we do not know, Chen asked Su Tungpo to write a piece, to be inscribed on stone, in commemoration of this terrace. It was too good a temptation for the young poet to resist: he had to have his fun. A text prepared for stone inscription was meant for posterity; it should be solemn, elegant, and even poetic. Obviously he could not make direct attacks on Chen, but he knew he could aim little shafts of fun at the old man and get away with it. And so today the "Record on the Terrace for Stepping on the Void" reads:

"Since the terrace is situated at the foot of the southern hills, it would seem that every day one would eat and sleep and live in close association with the hills, but His Honour the Chief Magistrate was unaware of their existence. When His Honour Sire Chen was walking around in the garden one day, he saw hill-tops showing above the trees like the knotted hair of passengers walking outside the wall, and he declared: 'This is strange indeed!' His Honour ordered a square pond to be dug in the front part of the garden, and with the dug-up earth he built a terrace to the level of the house roof, so that future visitors of this terrace would not be aware that they were standing on a high place but the hills would seem to meet their eyes on the level. 'Let this terrace be called the Terrace for Stepping on the Void,' said His Honour. He told this to his junior colleague, Su Shih [Su Tungpo], and asked the latter to write an inscription for the terrace. Su Shih replied to His Honour and said: 'Who can tell how and when the things of this life rise and decay? When this place was a stretch of wild country, exposed to the dew and frost, and foxes and snakes made their homes therein, who would suspect that one day the Terrace for Stepping on the Void would be erected at this place? Since the laws of rise and decay go on in a continual cycle, who can tell but one day this terrace may once more become a stretch of wasteland and barren fields? Once I went up to the terrace with His Honour and looked around. On the east we saw the prayer temple and springs of Emperor Mu of Chin, on the south we saw the halls and terraces of Emperor Wu of Han, and looking to the north we saw the Jenshou Palace of Sui and the Chiucheng Palace of Tang. I thought of the days of their glory, their magnificence and everlasting solidity, greater a hundred times than this terrace. Yet, after a few centuries, travellers over these ruins found only broken tiles and rubble, and mounds covered with brambles and fields of corn. How much more must this be true of the present terrace? And, if even the solid structure of a terrace cannot last long, how much more deceptive are the successes and failures and the ever-changing fortunes of human affairs, It would indeed be a mistake for some

people to pride themselves on their present good fortune. For we know that there are things in this life which last for ever, but this terrace is not one of them.'"

If Su Tungpo had been older, his tone would have been mellower and his shafts better concealed. As it is, the inscription, containing such a calm contemplation of the ruin of the terrace it was supposed to celebrate and the innuendos about an old man never hearing of the hills outside the city where he lived, is certainly unique in the literature of inscriptions. But the old man was also big enough to take it. This time he ordered the text to be inscribed on stone without any corrections.

As may be seen, Chen was really not a bad person at heart. After the two parted their ways, Su came to see this and made amends. One of the constant obligations of a writer who became famous was to write a tomb inscription for a man upon the request of his sons or relatives. Tomb inscriptions containing expected and rather hackneyed eulogies of the deceased were of no literary value, besides always bordering on dishonesty. The writing of such a tomb inscription was sometimes called by the ancients "flattering the dead". Still, it was a social obligation that a writer often found hard to decline. On this point Su Tungpo made a rigorous rule for himself and carried it out; he would not write a tomb inscription even upon the request of a prince. In all his life he wrote only seven tomb inscriptions, each for a very special reason, when he really wanted to say something. He also wrote one for this chief magistrate years later. It was the longest he ever wrote except that for Szema Kuang. For in the end the two men gained a high respect for each other.

One must mention here Chen Tsao, the chief magistrate's son, who became Su Tungpo's friend for life. Chen Tsao loved drinking, riding, fencing, and hunting, and was a great spendthrift. Su Tungpo met him one day in the mountains when Chen Tsao was hunting with two soldiers on horseback. A magpie had suddenly appeared in front of him and his horsemen failed to shoot it down. With a curse the young hunter dashed out from his hiding-place in the thicket and brought the bird down with his first arrow. Something in the face of that young man attracted Su Tungpo to him. Later, Chen's father was sentenced to death on account of allegedly receiving a bribe when serving in another place. The story goes that when Su Tungpo was about to be banished, Chen Tsao was at the time living in retirement in Huangchow. Remembering the quarrel Su Tungpo had had with Chen's father, Su's enemies banished him to this place with the idea of placing him at Chen Tsao's mercy. Perhaps Chen Tsao might want to avenge his father, and Su's enemies would be technically guiltless. As a matter of fact, Su had nothing to do with the father's death, and Chen Tsao

turned out to be Su Tungpo's best friend during his long years of banishment at Huangchow.

Another "friend" Su Tungpo met, Chang Chun, was destined to blight his later career. Chang Chun, who later became a vicious political enemy, was then a young magistrate serving in a district nearby in the same province. We have no record whether Mrs. Su had advised him against Chang Chun, but the latter was brilliant, hearty, of the type Su Tungpo liked. The story has often been told how Su Tungpo predicted Chang Chun's future. On a trip to Loukuan, the two friends went deep into the mountains and on to the Black Water Valley, where they came to a chasm. A small wooden plank served as a bridge across the chasm, with a deep current churning perhaps a hundred feet below, enclosed by the straight rocks of the canyon. A very courageous man himself, Chang Chen made a bow to Su and proposed that he go over the wooden plank and leave a writing on the wall of the cliff on the opposite side, as tourists often do. Su Tungpo declined, but Chang Chun went over the bridge alone with great nonchalance. Gathering up his gown, he took hold of a suspended rope and descended the sheer cliff to the bank of the stream, where he wrote five big characters on the rock: "Su Shih and Chang Chun visited this place." Then he returned in as leisurely a fashion as if nothing had happened. Patting his friend on the back, Su Tungpo said: "One day you are going to commit murder." "Why?" asked Chang Chun, and Su Tungpo replied: "One who can take his own life in his hands can also kill others." Whether Su Tungpo's prediction was correct or not, we shall see later in the story.

Except for a brief period when he was aroused to great activity again when Emperor Jentsung died, and was put in charge of supervising the transportation of timber from the mountains of western Shensi to build the Emperor's mausoleum, Su was not particularly happy with himself. He grew very homesick. In the autumn of 1063 he wrote to Tseyu: "When I first came, I learned to countersign the signatures, and now I have learned even to preside at a law court. Every day I carry on the daily duties, without asking what they are for. Before a scholar obtains an office, he worries about obtaining it, and if after obtaining it he worries about losing it, what is to be the end of such a life? Now I feel like a tired traveller on a journey, coming upon a clear stream midway. Though I cannot shake off the dust of the road, I would like to have a dip in the stream. I was going away to the southern brooks, where I could hear the bird's song in spring, but official duties tied me down, and now already autumn begins. Every day I receive rush orders for timber, and as a magistrate I have to draft even more farm hands. Who would dare to complain about service to the Emperor? But the

people's hard life is an official's shame. I see hundreds of workmen lugging one piece of lumber, and yet at every step forward they have to pause for rest. The rations are barely enough to keep their stomachs filled. That leaves no time to worry about other things. I am glad that the work is now over, and I wish my vessel were made of better clay. Soon there will be high winds in September, and I am going to roam on the western hills, to let one day of happiness make up for a life of toiling days."

In December, 1064, he was relieved of his post. His wife's elder brother had come from Szechuen to stay with them, and the family returned to the capital in January of the following year. Usually, at the end of three years' service, a local official was put through a review of his records, called *mokan,* literally meaning "the grind". On the basis of such a review an official would receive recommendations for other appointments. Now that Tungpo was back, Tseyu could be relieved and he very soon departed to serve as a magistrate at Tamingfu up in the north, then called the Northern Capital or "Peking", but actually over a hundred miles south of the present Peiping.

The new emperor, Ingtsung, had heard of Su Tungpo's fame and wanted to make an exception of him and promote him at once to the post of a *hanlin* serving as secretary to the Emperor in charge of drafting edicts. Premier Han Chi opposed this step and advised the Emperor that, for the good of Su Tungpo, the young poet should be allowed to mature his talents and not suddenly come into a position of such high eminence. The Emperor then suggested that perhaps he might be put in charge of recording the official proceedings of the palace. Again the premier objected, saying that such a post was too close to that of an imperial secretary. He recommended some post in the cultural and educational departments and suggested that Su Tungpo be submitted to the regular tests for such a post. "We give a test," said the Emperor, "only when we do not know a person's real talents. Why should we test Su Tungpo?" But the premier had his way, Su was put to the tests, and again he passed and was given a post in the department of history. In this department, officials took turns working in the imperial library, and Su Tungpo was delighted at the opportunity of looking at the rare books, manuscripts, and paintings in the imperial collection.

That year, in May, Su Tungpo's wife died at the age of twenty-six, leaving him a son six years old. His father said to him: "Your wife has followed you and lived with you without being able to enjoy success with you. You should bury her together with her mother-in-law." On the tenth anniversary of his wife's death, Su wrote an exquisite poem revealing his sentiments about her, full of a strange, ghostly beauty and a haunting music which unfortunately cannot be reproduced.

Ten years have we been parted:
The living and the dead—
Hearing no news,
Not thinking
And yet forgetting nothing!
I cannot come to your grave a thousand miles away
To converse with you and whisper my longing;
And even if we did meet
How would you greet
My weathered face, my hair a frosty white?

Last night
I dreamed I had suddenly returned to our old home
And saw you sitting there before the familiar dressing-table
We looked at each other in silence,
With misty eyes beneath the candle-light.
May we year after year
In heartbreak meet,
On the pine-crest,
In the moonlight!

His wife's death was followed by that of his father in April of the next year, 1066. Su Shün had completed his work on the *Lives of the Emperors* of that dynasty. As was expected, both brothers immediately resigned from their offices. They carried the father's and Mrs. Su Tungpo's coffins home a thousand miles by land and water to be buried at their home town in Meichow. Their friends showered them with funeral gifts.

With the coffins, they had to take a boat down the rivers of Anhuei and then go up the Yangtse. The brothers took a long time going home, trying perhaps to satisfy their yearning for travel on the way, and they did not arrive at Meichow till April of the following year. The construction of their father's tomb had been completed by the father himself, and all they needed to do was to lay the coffin in the chamber provided for it next to that for his wife. However, Su Tungpo liked to do big things, and on the mountain slope he planted thirty thousand pine seedlings, hoping that one day they would grow into a great pine forest.

Again a period of compulsory hibernation followed until the twenty-seven months of mourning were over, in July, 1068. Before they returned to the capital, two things had to be done. Following his father's example in setting up buddhas in honour of his mother, Su Tungpo had a temple erected in his father's honour. In this temple he placed a portrait of his father and four extremely precious paintings of buddhas

by an old master, Wu Taotse, which he had acquired at Fengshiang. The temple was erected at the cost of one thousand dollars, of which the Su brothers contributed fifty, the rest being provided by the monks.

The second important thing Su Tungpo did after the mourning was over was to remarry. The bride was his wife's first cousin, daughter of Wang Chieh. Ten years earlier, in the period of his mother's mourning, Su Tungpo had returned home and had often visited his wife's home at Chingshen. Junchi, then a girl of ten or eleven, frequently saw him in her house. On their outings and picnics she was excited about this young man who had gained the highest honours in the imperial examinations. Now she was a girl of twenty, and she was Su Tungpo's choice, since his parents were dead. The match was probably instigated by her brother, who had become devoted to the poet. Being eleven years her husband's junior, and adoring him with complete surrender, she seems to have let her husband have everything pretty much his way. She was unable to make him save money to the end of his days. Less capable than the first wife, she was also of a gentler disposition, yielding and always content. She was to be the poet's companion during the most active period of his life, bringing up her cousin's son and her own sons, and sharing with him all the ups and downs of fortune that came in alternate succession in his life. Against the man's curious adventures of the mind and spirit, it was enough that a woman remained sane and normal and stood as a constant reminder of beauty, health, and goodness. With his mind darting about in all directions, absorbed in new interests and occupied with a world of ideas, with his leaps of high gaiety and deep anguish, many times did he wonder at the serenity of woman that enabled human life to be carried on.

In December, 1068, the Su brothers with their families returned to the capital by land, after entrusting the care of their parents' cemetery to their cousin Tse-an and a good neighbour, one Yang. Neither of the brothers ever visited their home again, for soon after their arrival at the capital they were swept into the centre of a political storm. Their later official duties took them to almost every province of China except their own.

Chapter Seven

EXPERIMENT IN STATE CAPITALISM

THE Su brothers arrived at the capital in 1069, in the second year of Shining, in the reign of Shentsung, the "Divine Emperor". From that year on, China was to be plunged into a wave of new social experiments amid political storms whose concussions were felt to the very end of the Sung dynasty. This was the last of China's experiments in state capitalism, though by no means the first. In the four thousand years of China's history, four great political experiments in totalitarianism, state capitalism, socialism, and drastic social reforms were attempted, and each of these failed miserably. The most successful one was the Fascist totalitarianism of the philosopher Shang Yang, whose theories were effectively carried out by the first emperor of Chin, the builder of the Great Wall (third century B.C.). The outstanding two principles of this early fascist theory were the glorification of war and soldiery and the promotion of agriculture, but the two were really one because Shang Yang believed that peasants made the best soldiers and that all business-men and traders of the bourgeois class should be suppressed as far as possible. As is well known, the powerful military machine built up and developed according to these doctrines enabled Chin to establish a dictatorship over all China; but as soon as such a theory of government was applied to the whole of the Chinese Empire, it dramatically collapsed within a few years.

Two other drastic reforms were attempted under Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty and under Wang Mang, in the second century B.C. and the first century A.D. respectively. The first, following the finance theory of state capitalism of Sang Hungyang, successfully enriched the Emperor's treasury for his extensive wars, but was rescinded because it ended in a near rebellion; the second, under the usurper Wang Mang, ended when the usurper was overthrown. That Wang Anshih failed now in the fourth experiment is, therefore, no surprise. But in each of these four great new experiments, the idea started from an original thinker who was willing to make a complete break with the past and who combined the strength of his convictions with great determination of character. It is an interesting fact that Wang Anshih was an admirer of the fascist philosopher Shang Yang and wrote a poem pleading for a better understanding of this man. At the same time it must be noted that never was a totalitarian theory advanced, in ancient or modern days, without the basic appeal that it was for the good of the state and of the common people. How many political crimes have been com-

mitted in history in the name of "the people", the modern reader can well appreciate.

Wang Anshih was a curious man, extraordinary in mind and character. He was an industrious student, a good scholar except in his abominable philology, and certainly a major poet. Unfortunately, he combined a Messianic sense of mission with a deplorable lack of tact and inability to get along with anyone but himself. He was at the same time unquestionably an unpractical idealist. If by idealist we mean a man who was negligent of his food and appearance, Wang Anshih was certainly one. He achieved a certain notoriety by his dirty dress and his unshaved and unkempt appearance. Su Shün characterised him in a rhetorical flourish as "dressed in a barbarian's robe and eating the food of pigs and dogs", and said that "he discussed history and poetry with a convict's unshaven head and unwashed face." Whether Wang Anshih loved that distinction or not we do not know, but it is easy to believe that a man so absorbed in his ideas was naturally negligent of his external looks. The story is told that he never changed his gown. One day some of his friends went with him to a bath-house at a temple. The friends stealthily left a clean robe while he was in the bath and wanted to test whether he would find out his dress had been changed. Wang Anshih came out of his bath and put on the new robe, totally unaware of what his friends had done. Anyway, he had put on *a* robe.

Another day, his friends reported to Wang Anshih's fat wife that her husband loved shredded venison.

"I don't believe it," said his wife, greatly surprised. "He never pays any attention to his food. How could he suddenly love shredded venison? What makes you think so?"

"We know because at the dinner he did not take food from the other dishes, but finished all the shredded venison."

"But where did you put that dish?"

"Right in front of him," was the reply.

The wife understood, and said to his friends: "I tell you what. You have some other kind of food put in front of him tomorrow and see what happens."

The friends, therefore, changed the position of the dishes the next day and put the shredded venison away from him and watched him eat. Wang Anshih began to take food from the dish next to him and did not know that the deer meat was upon the table.

The story is also recorded how Wang Anshih studied all night when he was serving on a magistrate's staff at Yangchow. The chief magistrate then was Han Chi, who later became premier. Wang would read all night and doze off in the chair towards dawn. On waking up he would find that he was late and then rush to the office without

washing his face or combing his hair. Han Chi noted his appearance and, thinking that he had indulged himself all night with women, gave him a piece of advice.

"Young man," he said, "I should advise you to make the best use of the years of your youth and apply yourself to studies."

Wang Anshih stood there without giving any explanation, and on departing told his friends that Han Chi did not appreciate him. Later, as Wang's fame as a scholar steadily grew, Han changed his opinion of him and accepted him as a follower, which Wang rather resented. As it happened, the year Wang accepted a high office at the capital was the year in which Han Chi quitted his office as prime minister. Wang also diligently kept a diary, running to seventy volumes, and in this diary he often put in the remark that "there is nothing to Han except his fine looks".

But there is more to this strange man than his unkempt appearance. For about two decades before his rise to power, what made him most talked about was his repeated refusal to accept promotion to an office at the court. It is hard to believe that he did this for the sole purpose of earning fame, for from his twenty-first year, when he passed the examinations, to his forty-sixth, when he came into power—that is, during the most active years of his manhood, a period of twenty-five years—he steadily declined appointments and always preferred to serve as a minor magistrate in the outlying provinces. It was during the reign of Jentsung, a very good period when all distinguished talents who could do so gathered at the court. The more Wang Anshih refused an offer of a good post, the more his fame grew. Finally it got to the point where all the officials at the court were dying to have a look at this man. For besides distinguishing himself by his literary compositions, he had proved himself an able administrator as a magistrate. He had built dams, reformed schools, established loans for the farmers, and put into practice some of his new social ideas. It was a good administrative record and the people liked him. Enticements for him to come to the capital were without avail, and it was not until he was offered a job on the board of finance that he was attracted to the capital, in 1060. It is clear that this man was primarily interested in economics and finance and felt he could do most for the country along this line. Then his mother died and he had to retire; but even after the mourning period was over, when he was called to the court again, he refused the offer and remained away at Nanking.

This period of his self-imposed obscurity is difficult to understand, for the man certainly believed that he had great things to do for the country when the time came, and it would have been logical for him to have built up his official career during the period of his manhood. Perhaps the competition of great scholars at the capital was too great

for him, for there were certainly older, better, and sounder scholars, such as Fan Chungyen, Szema Kuang, Ouyang Shiu, Tseng Kungliang, and others, who were inclined to look askance at any radical reforms and who commanded sufficient popular prestige to discourage any young man with newfangled ideas. Wang Anshih bided his time. But I think psychologically there was another reason. A man of Wang's temperament had to be the boss wherever he was, and when serving as a magistrate in an outlying district, he was the big frog in a little puddle. Again and again, when he was in the capital holding some office for a short time, he quarrelled with his colleagues and upset everything. He wanted to change the rules and run things in his own way. Wu Kuei and Chang Fangping both recalled such experiences of difficult co-operation with him as a colleague or even as a junior official.

In 1060, therefore, he had come to the capital as a rather strange phenomenon. He had written good prose and poems. He had original ideas and was a good talker. The high-ranking old officials such as Fu Pi and Wen Yenpo had the best opinion of him, and even Ouyang Shiu liked him. Here was a singular man beneath whose strange appearance lay talents and character the officials could not quite fathom. Among the few people who saw through Wang Anshih's character and considered him a great danger to the country were Su Shün and his old friend Chang Fangping. The latter had worked with him as a colleague in supervising certain local examinations, had dismissed him and never talked with him again. He must have told Su Shün about his experiences with Wang in his early days. The two, therefore, intensely disliked Wang, the more for what they considered his affectations in dress and habits. Ouyang Shiu had introduced Wang to Tungpo's father, and Wang himself was desirous of making the acquaintance of the Sus, but Su senior refused to see him. When Wang's mother died, of all the invited guests, Su Shün refused to attend the funeral and wrote the famous *Pien Chien Lun,* or "Essay on the Hypocrite", one of the most popular essays for school reading today.

In this essay Su Shün started by pointing out how difficult it was to know a man's character and how often even clever people were deceived. Only the quiet observer could see through a man's character and foretell his future development. He quoted an ancient scholar who was able to foretell about Wang Yen when the latter was a brilliant young man distinguished for his appearance, and another great general who was able to foretell about Lu Chi, who was more or less responsible for bringing an end to the Tang dynasty. Lu Chi was a scheming person of great ability but so fearfully ugly that, in receiving him, the host had to dismiss all his female entertainers for fear that the

women would be shocked or would offend him by ill-concealed titters But, says Su Shün, each of these separately would not have been enough of a personality to ruin an empire, had it not been for the weak-minded emperors under whom they came into power. Now however, a man had appeared who combined the ugliness and scheming ability of a Lu Chi and the eloquence of a Wang Yen. "Here is a man who discourses on Confucius and Laotse and lives the life of the famous recluses, who associates himself with disgruntled persons and establishes a group for mutual admiration which declares to the world: 'A sage has arrived!' His cunning and his dark scheming mind lead him towards strange ways." Such a person could deceive the most discerning ruler and be a great danger to the state if he should ever come into power. "It is natural for a man to want to wash his face when it is dirty and to send his filthy garments to the laundry. Not so with this man! He wears a barbarian's robe and eats the food of pigs and dogs and discusses poetry and history with a convict's unshaved head and unwashed face. Now is this natural? A man who does not act according to common human nature must be a great hypocrite and a scheming intriguer." Su Shün hoped that his prophecy was wrong, that he could be like a good general who defeats an enemy before the battle. But, he said: "If my prophecy goes wrong, people will think that these words are exaggerated and the man himself will complain of his fate. Nobody then will be aware of the calamity he could have brought upon the nation. But if these words come true, the country will be plunged into a dire calamity, and I shall be honoured as a wise prophet—a sad consolation indeed!"

Whether Wang's strange habits were an affectation or not it is impossible to decide; but when a person overdoes a thing, people are inclined to suspect there is an element of conscious self-advertisement in it. If we may believe Shao Powen, Emperor Jentsung had the same suspicion. One day, at an imperial dinner given for the ministers, the guests were to catch their own fish for dinner from a pond. Before the dinner, fish-bait, in the form of little pills, was laid out on gold plates on the table. Wang was not interested in fishing and began to eat the fish-bait from the table and finished the plate. The next day, the Emperor said to the prime minister: "Wang Anshih is a fake. A person may well eat one pill by mistake, but no one will in a state of absent-mindedness finish them all." According to the story, that was the reason why Jentsung never liked Wang. In Wang's private diaries, he was also particularly hard against Jentsung.

In view of later developments, Su Shün was right. Somehow in all countries, cranks and crackpots and schizophrenics have always believed that slovenliness is the mark of genius and that the best assurance of immortality is the refusal to dress like a gentleman. There is

also a curious notion that filth and squalor imply contempt for material surroundings and therefore high spirituality, the logical conclusion of which is that heaven must reek with stinking angels.

When this essay was written, Su Tungpo said that both he and his brother thought the condemnation too extreme. Only Chang Fangping heartily approved. However, very soon Su Tungpo's contemporaries were to find out how true the prediction was; and the essay survives to this day, revealing the uncanny insight of the old father.*

Very soon after he assumed office on the board of finance, Wang Anshih tried to test the political ground under him. Emperor Jentsung was ruling at this time, and Wang submitted to him a long memorial on governmental policies, running to about ten thousand words. In this document he enunciated the basic principles of his financial reform, the principles of "using the nation's power to produce the nation's wealth, and using the nation's wealth to provide for the nation's expenditure". He said that since the beginning of the dynasty, the government had suffered from insufficient revenue, and this resulted from the lack of a good financial and economic policy. Such a policy had not been thought of only because there were no men great enough to deal with the problems. The men in power at the time, he said, were not "great" enough for this job, nor did he think that there were other talents in the country who could be called into power. He cleverly pointed out that in making radical reforms, one should connect them with the practices of the ancient kings so that people would not regard them as a radical departure from the past. But then, he said, in following the tradition of the past, one should not copy the methods of the ancient kings, but rather their intentions, which were, after all, only for the good of the people, no matter how the policies differed. On the whole, it was a very well-written and well-organised treatise on political reforms, covering every aspect of government, including finance, civil service, and even education.

If Wang Anshih wanted to test his political ground, he found that the ground yielded under his feet. After reading the long memorandum, Emperor Jentsung laid it aside and let it sleep. During the short four-year reign of the following emperor, Ingtsung, Wang was once recalled, but again he declined office. Historians usually give the reason that he felt uneasy because he had advised against the nomination of Ingtsung as successor to Jentsung, who had died without an heir.

Meanwhile, Ingtsung's son, who was to succeed him, was living at

* Incorporated in a tomb inscription of Su Shün, written by Chang Fangping. Some scholars who wish to defend Wang Anshih try very hard to prove that this piece was a forgery, by pointing out that it was not included in Su Shün's works. Su Tungpo's own testimony, however, confirmed its genuineness.

the capital as crown prince; he later became the emperor Shentsung, under whose regime Wang Anshih came to power. While he was the crown prince, Han Wei, a great admirer of Wang Anshih, was his secretary. Han would express certain views on government, and whenever the Crown Prince liked them, he would say: "This is not my own opinion, but that of Wang Anshih." The Crown Prince, therefore, developed a very high opinion of Wang, and hoped one day he would be able to utilise his great political talents. In 1067, as soon as he ascended the throne at the age of twenty, he had Wang appointed chief magistrate at Nanking, and in September again promoted him, to the rank of a *hanlin* scholar. Wang was in constant communication with his friend and was convinced that now his opportunity had come. Contrary to his previous practice, he accepted the post at once. But he delayed coming to the capital for seven months.

"This Anshih has always declined an appointment and refused to come to the capital in the previous reigns," said Emperor Shentsung. "Some people thought he was impudent, and now again he does not come, giving illness as his excuse. Is he really ill, or is he fishing for a better post?"

At this time there was great jealousy between two veteran officials, Tseng Kungliang and Han Chi. The latter had served successively as premier and privy councillor under three emperors and was becoming too powerful. In his endeavour to shake Han Chi's position, Tseng Kungliang hoped to find in the person of Wang Anshih a powerful ally for himself. He assured the Emperor that Wang had the true calibre of a prime minister and that His Majesty should believe in him. On the other hand, another high official, Wu Kuei, who had known Wang Anshih intimately, warned the Emperor that if Wang should ever be given power he would plunge the whole country into chaos.

Finally, in April, 1068, Wang Anshih, having been assured of the Emperor's attitude, appeared at the capital and was ordered to go into imperial audience with special permission to "speak out of rank"; i.e., without observance of protocol.

"What is the most important thing to do in a government?" asked the Emperor.

"To choose the right policy," answered Wang.

"What do you think of Emperor Taitsung of Tang?" asked the Emperor again, referring to the most beloved emperor of that dynasty.

"Your Majesty should take the Emperors Yao and Shun, and not merely Tang Taitsung, as your standard. The principles of Yao and Shun are really very easy to put into practice. Because the scholars of the latter days do not really understand them, they think that the

standards of such a government are unattainable." (Yao and Shun were the emperors idealised by Confucius, ruling China in the semi-legendary era of the twenty-third and twenty-second centuries B.C.)

The Emperor said with some satisfaction, but modestly: "You are expecting too much of me. I am afraid I cannot live up to your high expectations."

But then there came a time for Wang Anshih to have a private audience with the Emperor alone, when the other officials had been dismissed. Here was a great chance for Wang Anshih.

"Sit down," said the Emperor. "I want to have a long talk with you." His Majesty then began to ask him why two famous emperors, one of them Tang Taitsung, had to secure two famous scholars as their premiers to run the government. One of the two premiers mentioned was none other than Chuko Liang, probably the most renowned and capable administrator in history. Again Wang Anshih brought the discussion around to the topic of the legendary emperors of three thousand years ago. Wang said that he preferred to talk of the able assistants of the emperors Yao and Shun. "Chuko Liang is not worth talking about in the opinion of the best minds." Chuko Liang's political genius consisted in proceeding step by step towards a definite goal, which hardly suited the impatient, self-confident wizard of finance.

"Your Majesty," continued Wang, "is now reigning over a vast empire with a huge population. After a century of peace, with so many scholars all over the land, is it not strange that no worthy men have arisen to assist Your Majesty in the government? The reason must be that Your Majesty has no decided policy and has not shown confidence in men. Though there may be great talents living at present, like those who assisted Emperors Yao and Shun, they will soon lay down their office because of obstruction by petty politicians."

"There are petty politicians in every regime," said the Emperor. "Even in the reigns of Yao and Shun there were the famous Four Evil Monsters."

"Exactly," Wang agreed. "It was because the emperors Yao and Shun knew the four wicked ministers for what they were and had them killed that they were then able to accomplish what they did. If the four evil ministers had remained at court to carry on their machinations and intrigues, the good and able ministers would have left, too."

Shentsung, the "Divine Emperor", was duly impressed. He was only twenty, and like all young men was very ambitious and wanted to make his country strong and prosperous. He was a good and just man and he had a round and well-proportioned face, like those of his imperial ancestors. It was not until after Shentsung that the emperors

of the Sung dynasty began to show distinctly degenerate traits in their physiognomy. His young enthusiasm was fired by the high expectations that Wang Anshih had entertained of him, and from that conversation on, the young emperor was ready to go through fire and water to carry through this man's political doctrines, even if it cost him all the other ministers—which was what happened. Somehow images of the "Four Evil Monsters" appeared in the young emperor's mind whenever the wise old ministers offered counsel and advised caution against Wang Anshih's proposed reforms.

In February, 1069, when the Su brothers arrived at the capital, Wang Anshih was appointed a vice-premier. The next two years were to see an exodus of all the old ministers from the court, the purging of the imperial censorate and the packing of it with Wang Anshih's own underlings. No sooner had Wang assumed office than he began to sweep the whole governmental household with a wide new broom. Protest followed protest and the whole officialdom was thrown into a deep turmoil. There was great and outspoken opposition from all ministers of proved ability and respected character. The young emperor could not understand it. Wang Anshih managed, however, to make him see the turmoil and the uproar in the light of a desperate struggle between the Emperor himself and the wicked ministers who dared to oppose his will.

"Why all this hubbub?" asked the Emperor. "Why is it that all the great ministers, censors, and scholars of the court are lined up against the new reforms?"

"You should understand," said Wang Anshih, "that Your Majesty is trying to follow the great teachings of the ancient emperors, but in order to do this you have to overcome the reactionaries. It is inevitable, therefore, that there will be a struggle for power between Your Majesty and the reactionaries. If they win in the struggle, the government will be in their hands, and if Your Majesty wins, then the power of the government will rest in the hands of Your Majesty. These selfish men are trying to obstruct the will of Your Majesty in carrying out the great teachings of the ancient emperors. That is why there is all this hubbub."

Given the earnest desire of an ambitious young ruler to make his country powerful and strong, and a premier who had an overweening confidence in his own political and financial theories, the stage was set for launching the radical reforms of Wang Anshih. The motives of such reforms cannot be questioned. It is perfectly true that the Sung dynasty, coming after fifty years of disunity and internecine strife, had never known a strong government. Besides, the Shishias, the Kitans (later called the Liaos), and the Kins had been making constant inroads into China's northern border. Brief wars with these

northern tribes were followed by temporary treaties of uneasy peace. The terms of the treaties were humiliating to a Chinese emperor, for while some of these kingdoms acknowledged the emperor, it was not they but the emperor who had to give annual contributions in silver and silks to the northern tribes, running anywhere from a hundred thousand to a quarter of a million dollars a year. This acted as a tremendous drain on the imperial treasury. The domestic administration had always been lax, and the government was constantly running into financial deficits. Wang Anshih believed that he was a great financial wizard who could raise money for the imperial treasury by juggling with the systems of taxation and conscription. I believe that the desire to build China into a powerful state and to increase the prestige of the empire through wars of conquest in the north-west were prime factors in influencing the young emperor Shentsung in Wang Anshih's favour, for Wang's administration was characterised by several wars started by China with the northern tribes, some victories and one disastrous defeat. In order to carry on wars, the Emperor needed money, and in order to have money, the country's financial system had to be reorganised. Yet, without ever questioning the sincere motives of the reformer, we shall see how these reforms, financial and economic in character, produced the most grievous consequences of a different nature.

Soon after Wang Anshih had arrived at the capital, Szema Kuang had an argument with him in the Emperor's presence which seems to sum up the fundamental opposition of the two sides. The imperial treasury was actually impoverished at this time, and during an important ceremony at the worship of Heaven in spring, the Emperor wished to dispense with the customary gifts of silver and silks to the officials, thus saving some money for the imperial household. This started an argument between Szema Kuang and Wang Anshih. Wang Anshih maintained that the national treasury was impoverished only because the officials did not understand finance.

"What you mean by finance," countered Szema Kuang, "is only increase of taxation and levies from the people."

"No," said Wang Anshih. "A good financier can increase the government revenue without increasing taxation."

"What nonsense! After all, a nation possesses a definite amount of wealth, and this wealth is either in the hands of the people or in those of the government. No matter what measures you carry out or by what names you call them, they can only mean taking away part of the wealth of the people and giving it to the government."

The Emperor was inclined to agree with Szema Kuang, and for a month or two the measures were held in abeyance.

Without being an economist, one is safe to accept the general thesis that the two factors in a nation's wealth are production and distribution. To increase a nation's wealth, one must increase its productivity or have a better distribution of goods. In Wang Anshih's day, however, increase of production was out of the question, since there was no means of industrialisation. Therefore, all that a financial wizard could do would be in the line of distribution. Since Wang was primarily interested in enriching the national treasury, increase of the nation's wealth strictly meant the increase of the government's revenue. Wang saw clearly that the rich merchants and landlords were making money in a system of free enterprise, and he could not see why the government should not take away the profits from free enterprise and run business and make the money itself. The conclusion was inevitable. The terms he used were actually strikingly modern. He wanted to stop "monopoly" (*chienping*) by capital; he wanted to equalise wealth by "taking it away from the rich and giving it to the poor"; he wanted to prevent the peasants from borrowing from landlords at high interest. It would be a great and charitable measure on the part of the government to lend money to the peasants during spring planting and have them return the money when the crops were harvested. Wang Anshih was able to convince the Emperor that all these measures were "for the good of the people"; but history records that, after a period of hesitancy, the thing that decided him on launching the loans was the argument of a certain minor official that with an investment of half a million dollars the government stood to earn a quarter of a million dollars in interest per year, since there were two crops and the twenty or thirty per cent interest could be collected twice a year.

Without going too much into the details of the various reforms, which were started in 1069 and ended disastrously about eight years later when both Wang Anshih himself and the Emperor were thoroughly sick of them and of each other, we may give a brief summary of these measures.

The most important and the best known were nine in number, which I have for the sake of convenience arranged in three groups. There were three state capitalist enterprises, three new taxes, and three systems of registration for a complete regimentation and control of the people. The three state capitalist enterprises were: a government bureau for national trade, a bureau for government stores in retail trade, and the famous loans to the farmers with an official interest of twenty per cent and an actual interest of thirty per cent (i.e., plus application and registration charges). The three new taxes were the draft exemption tax, the excise tax, and the income tax. The systems of registration were the organising of all citizens into groups of ten families for military draft (the *paochia*), and the re-registration of

land and of horses. In general, all these measures suggest the tendency to economic collectivism of modern days.

The state capitalist enterprises began in July, 1069, with the establishing of a bureau for national or interprovincial wholesale trade. Convinced of the great profits to accrue to the government, the Emperor allocated a sum of five million dollars in cash and thirty million bushels of rice as capital with which the government would take over the interprovincial trade in goods and raw materials. Immediately this system ran into practical difficulties. In February of the same year a bureau of economic planning was established, charged with the duty of studying the plans and programmes before promulgation. Among the staff of the planning bureau was Su Tungpo's brother, Tseyu. In his memorandum Tseyu pointed out that when the government took over the national trade, free enterprise would at once be paralysed, for local dealers would be handicapped in competition with the government. It was inevitable that the government and the business-men would be treading on each other's toes. Moreover, he denied that the imperial treasury stood to gain. While private business worked through an established system of credits and other arrangements, the government lacked these facilities. It must first set up a big staff with high salaries and beautiful office buildings. It would not be doing business according to supply and demand but instead would make transactions on the merit of commissions, distributing favours and contracts according to personal connections. Tseyu argued that, short of forcing down the price of its purchases by official pressure, through sheer bureaucratic incompetence the government would buy at a higher price than independent business-men were able to get. Therefore it stood to lose.

This so-called government wholesale trade was, therefore, stopped for a year's further study; then the government came out with a modified programme under a new name. The division between wholesale and retail was not a hard and fast one, and trade bureaus in charge of the large government-run stores were established in big cities such as Chengtu, Canton, and Hangchow Another government grant of a million dollars from the national treasury and $870,000 in the local currency of the capital was allocated for the development of these trade bureaus. The reasons advanced for their establishment were that "the country's goods had fallen into the hands of capital monopolists" and that "the prices of goods fluctuated from time to time because of capitalist manipulations; in order to rule the country peacefully, one should take away the wealth from the rich and give it to the poor". A very capable official was put at the head, and the more profits he was able to report to the government, the more capable he was considered to be. This Lu Chiawen became a kind of trade dictator of the country, having monopoly control of the small business-men. The rules

of the trade bureau at the capital, for instance, were that the small traders were to become affiliated members of the bureau; that these small traders could pool their goods with the bureau's assets, or that the government would provide the capital for purchasing stocks for the stores run by them; that in case traders wished to liquidate their business and hand over the goods to the government bureau they would be permitted to do so; that they could use part of their goods as security for cash advances from the government, for which they were to pay an interest of ten per cent per half year or twenty per cent a year; that others not connected with the bureau would also be permitted to sell their stocks to it at prices fixed by the government; and that, finally, all imperial purchases, by whatever department, would be transacted through the trade bureau.

The government's absorption of small business was one of the worst features of the regime, and private business came almost to a standstill. In a few years trade and commerce actually decreased so that the government revenue was affected to an alarming degree, in spite of the theoretical high profits. The Emperor found himself, to his great disgust, degenerating in the eyes of the people into a petty pedlar selling fruits, ice and coal, calendars, and straw mats. In the end it was the scandal connected with the trade bureau at the capital and the excise tax that reached the ears of the imperial household and caused the Emperor to put a stop to the most unpopular features of the reform.

But the most widely known of the new reforms in this regime was the farmers' loans, and to this day when people speak of Wang Anshih's reforms they always think first of these loans. It was a measure tha affected every village of the empire and precipitated the biggest political battle among the ministers at the court. In itself the plan was good and sound, suggesting the idea of a farmers' bank. While serving as a young magistrate, Wang Anshih had made loans to the farmers during spring planting and collected them with interest when the harvest was in. He had found that this was a real help to the farmers because in a local administration he could see to it that the farmers came to borrow money only in actual cases of need, and upon proper personal investigation. In Shensi the local authorities also tried this scheme with success, and it was from the practice started in Shensi that the farmers' loans received their Chinese name of "seedling loans".

In a good year, when the authorities were sure of good crops, they made loans to enable the farmers to purchase equipment and seedlings for their wheat-fields; and when the harvest came, they were able to collect grains for the army with an advantageous interest. In the words of the bureau of economic planning: "It is proposed that the money and grain from the price equalisation granaries be loaned to people upon application, following the example of Shensi province. They may

be asked to pay an interest of twenty per cent, which they will pay together with the capital during the collection of the summer and autumn taxes. People who wish to repay the loans in cash in place of grain may be permitted to do so. In case of natural calamities, they may be permitted to delay the repayment until a good year comes. Thus not only will the people be able to tide over famine and drought, but through these loans they will be spared the necessity of borrowing from the rich exploiters at double interest before their harvest is in. Besides, the stocks of wheat and grain are now usually kept in the price equalisation granaries for a long time and sold to the people only when the prices have gone up, and this system benefits only the idle rich who live in the cities. It is proposed now that such sales and purchases be organised and unified within each province, so that price stabilisation may be better carried out and the farmers enabled to plant their farms without being exploited. All this is for the benefit of the people and without profits to the government. It is in accordance with the principles of the ancient kings in giving money to the people and assisting the farmers."

How such a beautiful and innocent plan turned out to harass and destroy the lives and homes of the farmers for whose benefit it was conceived, we shall see later. It should be explained, however, that this new measure started as a continuation of the old system of the price equalisation granaries and gradually replaced it. From the very beginning of this dynasty, such granaries had been maintained in different districts by the government to stabilise the price of grains. In years of good crops, when low prices hit the farmers hard, the government bought up the surplus wheat and rice. Conversely, in bad years, when the prices of grain went up, the agencies poured the grain into the market to force the prices down. It is true that the agencies were not always kept up to their highest efficiency, for many officials did not bother to buy up grain when it was cheap. But even in 1066 the published figures of the price equalisation granaries showed that they had bought from the people 5,014,180 bushels of grain and sold 4,711,570 bushels during that year. Now, when the money and stocks of the granaries were used as capital for the farmers' loans, the normal operations of the granaries were naturally stopped.

The heart of the matter was that the subscription of the loans inevitably became compulsory. Intolerant of opposition, Wang Anshih had to succeed. He had to show the Emperor that the loans were a great success and were welcomed by the people. He would not hear of slackness in selling them. He could not understand why the farmers should not want the loans, and when loans were not sold up to the quota, he flew into a rage. He began to promote officials who showed a good record, and to punish the slackers. As each official was looking

out for his own career, his most important concern was to make a good report. The incentive for personal competition was very much like the selling of government bonds in modern days. When the officials knew that they would be cashiered and degraded for "blocking reforms" if they did not sell up to their quota, it was inevitable that loans began to be allocated by official pressure, by what Wang was pleased to call the "energetic" officials. Every family had to borrow from the government, and everybody had to pay thirty per cent interest for a period of three months. There were good officials who knew what harm these loans were causing the poor people and the certainty of their being put in jail for failure to repay capital and interest. These took the government at its word and announced to the public that these loans, according to the imperial decree, were strictly "voluntary"; and they were prepared to be degraded for "blocking reforms" when the day of reckoning came.

In the draft exemption tax also, there was a great discrepancy between official intentions and actual practice. This was probably the best reform put through by Wang Anshih, and it was this measure which Su Tungpo alone defended against his own party, when the latter was in power and was determined to wipe out each and every one of Wang Anshih's reforms.

For a long time the people of China had been subjected to conscription for military service. The proposal was that the people should pay a tax in place of the conscription. In other words, it meant replacing a military draft system by a standing army of hired and paid soldiers. However, from a careful study of the rules of this draft exemption, one cannot escape the conclusion that the government was primarily interested in the revenue from the tax, and whatever benefit it had in relieving the people from military draft was nullified entirely by the *paochia* system, which was even worse as a form of compulsory draft. After careful deliberation for over a year, the regulations were published. They provided that families which had been exempt from the military draft were also compelled to pay the draft exemption tax; for example, widows, families without children or with only one son or with children not of age, and nuns and monks were compelled to pay the tax under a different name, called "the draft-aid tax". Moreover, twenty per cent was added to the regular tax over and above district draft quotas, nominally to provide against the bad years when the people might not be able to pay. With the money collected from this tax, soldiers and other employees of the government were to be hired. Just as Su Tseyu had pointed out in the case of the farmers' loans that the people would be put in prison and whipped for default, so Szema Kuang pointed out now exactly what happened later, that people who had no cash to pay this tax in autumn and summer—when all the

other taxes came—would be compelled to sell their grain, kill their cows, and cut down trees in order to obtain the cash. Moreover, in the preceding system of military draft, the people took turns serving for a period of years, whereas in the new system the people were compelled to pay for exemption every year, including years when they would not have to serve.

Together with the new excise tax and the income tax, this draft exemption tax must be viewed principally as a new means to raise revenue from the people, rather than to relieve them of the draft for service, since the people were drafted for military training under another name, the *paochia*. The excise tax was a tax on the profits of business-men, based on an examination of their books. The income tax was not an income tax in the modern sense. I call it income tax here because it was a system of compulsory registration of a citizen's income and property as a basis for allocation of the other taxes. It was like the income tax also in the sense that the people had to make returns of their income and property, under pain of defrauding the government. In the fight over this reform it was stated that after the order was issued, there was "not a chicken or a pig on a farm, or an inch of soil, or a beam or rafter in a roof" that was not reported and registered with the government. This last measure, instituted in 1074, was short-lived because Wang soon went out of power; and even before its suspension Su Tungpo refused to enforce it in the district under his control on the ground that it was illegal.

What gave the lie to Wang Anshih's desire to relieve the people from military draft, professed in the preceding draft exemption tax, was the *paochia* system. This is clear because both the new *paochia* system and the draft exemption tax were promulgated in the same month, December, 1070. The government took away the burden of military service from the people with one hand by making them pay for the "exemption", and put it back on the people with the other. The *paochia* was a system for collective guarantee under the law of families living in the same neighbourhood. Each ten families were organised into a *pao*, and each fifty families formed a great *pao*. The members of a *pao* were to be collectively responsible in cases of harbouring criminals and thieves; and in cases of such crimes as murder and rape they were bound to report the circumstances to the court. Able-bodied persons in each great *pao* were to be organised into a company for military drill and training, a family with two able-bodied males contributing one, and a family of more than two males contributing more in proportion. These were to leave their farms for drill every fifth day, the five-day period being the ancient equivalent of the week, dividing a month conveniently into six periods. Thus instead of taking the sons of the families to the army as in the regular draft system, this reform brought

the army right into the village. But Wang Anshih was a great propagandist; he knew that by giving a thing a new name, he made it cease to exist. "Conscription was abolished."

Besides this collective registration and regimentation of the people, there was also a new and compulsory registration of the farmers' lands as a basis for the new taxes, and a system of farming out the government's cavalry to be cared for by the farmers. Like all other collectivistic systems, Wang Anshih's administration could not leave the people alone. In its anxiety to take good care of them, the government had to know exactly what the people did and what they possessed. Like all other collectivistic systems also, this regime found it impossible to govern without secret agents, which were instituted in the year 1072, luckily after Su Tungpo had left the capital. Nor was it able to operate without bringing under control the imperial censorate, the equivalent of the modern press, and packing it with the party's underlings who were willing to follow strictly the party line. Again, Wang Anshih considered it necessary to control the thoughts and ideas of the scholars. Like Wang Mang of the ancient days, and like the modern Hitler, he had the idea of one state, one belief, and one leader. Like Hitler, he exploded in fits of temper when he encountered opposition; modern psychiatrists might classify him as a paranoiac.

What showed the "paranoid" character of the man, and what all historians and critics agree to have been his one inexcusable act, was not any of his political or socialistic ventures, but his setting up himself now as the one and only interpreter of the classics. As Wang Mang re-edited and falsified the ancient classics, so now Wang Anshih wrote his own interpretation of three Confucian classics and made it the official guide to thinking, to replace all the great commentators of the past. Wang was a fairly good scholar, but not good enough to replace the great masters of the past, such as Cheng Shüan, Ma Yung, Lu Tehming, and others. To do this was both an abuse of his official power and an insult to scholarship. The examination papers were usually upon passages from the classics, and candidates' interpretations had to conform. Setting up this new standard, therefore, meant that every scholar of the land had to study and absorb what Wang Anshih said on every topic, from principles of government and Buddhist-coloured Confucianism to the etymology for "quail", "owl", and "pheasant". After leaving the capital, Su Tungpo had once to supervise a local examination, and wrote a poem recording his disgust with the deadening uniformity of thought and ideas expressed by the candidates in the papers.

Like his philology, Wang's *New Commentaries on the Three Classics*, often savouring of Buddhist ideas, showed more originality than sound scholarship. He believed, however, that in the interpretation of the

ancient ideas and political systems, whatever he thought was so must therefore be so. These *Commentaries* were so bad that they were soon forgotten after his death, and no copy has been preserved. But while he was in power, they were the bible of the scholar candidates at the examinations; the slightest variation from the interpretation of the premier was enough to disqualify a paper. Particularly it showed offence to scholarship to have the compilation of the *Commentaries* made in only two years; the work was formally started in March, 1073, with the help of his young son and a political henchman, and published in June, 1075. This hurried piece of work was set up as the orthodox interpretation of Confucianism, and as Wang changed his mind about the interpretations, new versions were published for the benefit of the scholar candidates, who knew their lives depended on keeping abreast of the revisions.

This is not the place to discuss Wang Anshih's scholarship, a subject rather painful for Su Tungpo because he was by far the sounder scholar. But it may be mentioned that Wang Anshih's "etymology" was indescribably funny, as all amateurish etymology is. Besides the *Commentaries on the Three Classics,* the great rage among the scholars of the time was the fashion for discussing etymology started by Wang Anshih. This "etymology" was really a study of the structure and origin of the written characters, not by the comparative method, but by the lively use of one's fancy. Wang believed this to be his most original and lasting contribution to learning and continued to work on it in his old age, completing it in twenty-five volumes. Western scholars can understand how easy it is to compose twenty-five volumes on etymology once the scholar lets his imagination go without checking it by scientific methods—the methods used, for instance, by Han and Ching dynasty scholars. For "fanciful etymology" can be spun out of pure fantasy at the rate of a dozen a day. It was easy and it was a great deal of fun to try to read into the composition of a Chinese character all sorts of reasons why a particular combination of certain components should come to be the symbol for a certain meaning. Some fifty items of Wang Anshih's etymology have survived to this day, chiefly as after-dinner pleasantries. Many jokes that passed between Su Tungpo and Wang Anshih hinged on these "etymologies".

Su Tungpo loved to use the method of *reductio ad absurdum.* There is a Chinese word meaning turtledove. It is composed of two elements, "nine" and "bird". Clearly the element "nine" is phonetic, because both "nine" and "turtledove" are pronounced *chiu.* Wang Anshih, however, ran riot over the phonetics of the elements in his desire to make something interesting out of their meaning. Su Tungpo one day, in the course of a chat, asked Wang Anshih: "By the way, why is the word turtledove written with the elements nine and bird?" Wang was

stumped. "I can tell you why," said Su Tungpo. "The Book of Poetry says [in a poem of satire]:

'O turtledove! O turtledove!
He has seven young.'

The seven young, plus their two parents, make nine, don't you see?"

The character for "waves" or "ripples" is written with the classifier radical designating water, and a phonetic component which happens to denote skin. It struck Wang's fertile imagination that the character for ripples was so constructed because "ripples were the skin of water". Su Tungpo met him one day and wittily remarked: "If so, then the word for *slippery* must be constructed that way because it means the *bones of water.*" (The phonetic component in this case happens to mean bones.) Wang Anshih violated the very elementary principles of the structure of the Chinese literary symbols. The way he mutilated a "root", riving it in half and misconnecting it with another component, as he did in the character for "rich" (*fu*), would make any philologist weep.

Some Chinese scholars of later days, following Western ideas of collectivism, have tried to rescue Wang Anshih from historical infamy and revise his reputation upward by showing that his ideas were essentially "in conformity with modern socialism".* Among those who took up the defence of Wang Anshih was a great modern scholar, Liang Chichao. It would be possible to argue the pros and cons of Wang's socialistic ideas, but Wang's socialistic regime must be judged by its results. The facts are that in place of "private monopoly" the state set up its own monopoly; small business-men were thrown out of jobs, and farmers, unable to repay the compulsory loans or keep up the interest, sold their wives and children or fled, and their neighbours who were made guarantors of the loans fled with them or sold or mortgaged their properties. The country jails were full, every district government found thousands of closed mortgages and confiscated properties on its hands, and lawsuits filled the courts. It was a misrule that would have ruined any dynasty, even if there were no foreign invaders. In 1074 an imperial edict said that business was at a standstill and people were thrown out of their jobs; and another edict in 1076, which stopped the loans, said that many were jailed and flogged for failure to repay them. In a memorandum sent in June, 1090, some twenty years later, when he was trying to salvage the economic wreckage left of the countryside and begging for restoration of con-

*For the argument advanced in defence of Wang, see brief statement in Section K, Bibliography.

fiscated properties and forgiveness of all debts of the poor, Su Tungpo wrote:

"Since the order to return the confiscated properties, the people are overjoyed. They have said to me that since they were driven out from their homes and business, parents have been separated from their children and wives from their husbands, living the life of homeless, wandering refugees. Since the establishment of the trade bureaus and government stores, all means of livelihood of the people have been taken over by the government. The small traders, deprived of their normal trade, were forced to join up with the government trade bureaus and compelled to mortgage their goods and properties to obtain immediate cash at a high interest. When the loans matured and they were not able to repay, they were fined double interest. Gradually their debts piled higher and higher, and more and more people were put in jail together with their families."

For the first few years, however, Wang Anshih was able to keep the Emperor in the dark about the terrible conditions by adroit propaganda, insisting he had the "people's support" for his "agrarian programme" and painting a totalitarian regime as a "democracy"—a confusion of terms strangely reminiscent of modern days. Then as now, whether a people love a regime or not can be judged only when a despotic regime is no longer in power. Sincere in his desire to learn the truth, the Emperor sent out his own reporters. But knowing that the reforms were popular with the Emperor himself, the eunuchs and dishonest reporters always reported to the Emperor that the people loved the reforms, and that upon the arrival of the tax commissioners, the "people cried with joy", which was literally true, as far as a staged reception was concerned. The terrible conditions of the people after a few years of Wang Anshih's regime were at last revealed to the Emperor in the form of pictures submitted by a curious, obscure palace gatekeeper, a very daring man.

Standing at the gate, this official, Cheng Shia, saw the hordes of refugees who had fled from the north-east and were swarming the streets of the capital. Knowing that pictures spoke louder than words, Cheng Shia conceived the idea of making pictures of these poor farmers and presenting them to the Emperor. Here was a picture of the refugees, half clad and starving, travelling on the highway in a blinding storm. There was a picture of half-naked men and women eating grass roots and tree bark, and others working in chains carrying bricks and firewood to sell to pay the taxes. Upon seeing the pictures, the Emperor shed tears. It was this dramatic presentation, which we shall come to later, coupled with the appearance of a spectacular comet and a landslide on a sacred mountain, that made the Emperor suspend many of the "reforms".

Chapter Eight

THE BULL-HEADED PREMIER

A POLITICAL storm now blew and started a conflagration that burned down the house of Sung. It started with a fight between the state capitalist Wang Anshih, the "Bull-headed Premier", and the opposition, which comprised the entire officialdom, a generation of men selected and nurtured for government leadership in the atmosphere of intellectual freedom under the wise emperor Jentsung. It is necessary to understand the nature of the political battle because the party strife shadowed Su Tungpo's entire life.

One of the earliest extant copies of Chinese vernacular literature, presaging the advent of the novel in China, was a short story entitled "The Bull-headed Premier" (*Yao Shiangkung*). It is a collection of short stories in the vernacular of Sung dynasty times, recently discovered, and it shows that soon after Wang Anshih's death he was known by this nickname in folk literature. The tragedies of the political strife arose from the defects of character of a man who was unable to take good advice and unwilling to admit a mistake. Friends' opposition to Wang Anshih only increased his determination to carry through his policy. Determination of character, we are told, is a great virtue, but a qualification is necessary: so much depends upon what a man is determined to do. It is entirely possible that Wang Anshih, remembering the homely adage he had heard as a schoolboy that determination was a key to success, mistook mulish obstinacy for that desirable virtue. In his lifetime Wang Anshih was known among the *literati* as a man of "three not-worths"—"God's anger is not worth fearing, public opinion is not worth respecting, and the tradition of the ancestors is not worth keeping." It was a label given by Su Tungpo.

The "Bull-headed Premier" brooked no opposition from any quarter, friends or foes. Being a good talker and able to persuade the young emperor of his programme for building up a strong state, he was determined to carry his socialistic programme through. This implied the silencing of opposition in general, and the silencing in particular of the imperial censors, whose official duty was to criticise the policies and conduct of the government and act as the "channel of public opinion". It was the basis of Chinese political philosophy that a good government "kept the channels of opinion open" and a bad government did not. It was therefore natural that, having begun with questions of the new measures themselves, the fight very soon surged around a more fundamental issue, the issue of freedom of criticism and dissent.

It was a fight in which Wang the premier won the first bout; but from then on, all the officials of the country were lined up in two camps, locked in party strife which went on until the end of the dynasty. The reform measures were modified or suspended after only a few years, but the schism which developed had far graver consequences for the country.

In this political battle at court the issue was known as a fight between "reactionaries" and "progressives", terms which appeared again and again in the literature of that period and which Wang Anshih was very fond of using. For him, anybody he disliked or anybody who disagreed with him was a "reactionary" (*liushu*, conservative philistine), while he and his followers were the "progressives" or "reformists" (*tungpien*). The premier charged all critics with malicious intent to block his reforms. On the other hand, the opposition charged that he "regarded the fair criticism of people as reactionary and all who differed from him as corrupt". As Liu Chih formulated it: "One party regards the other as 'reactionary' and the other regards the ruling party as 'rebels against all established values'." As the premier began to purge all the imperial censors who spoke up against him, the more important charge of the opposition was that he wanted to "shut up the mouths of all people"; i.e., muzzle all free criticism of the government.

The Chinese Government had never perfected a machinery of party rule with recognised rights and responsibilities of the party in power and the opposition. There was no counting of votes, show of hands, yeas and nays, or any other form of establishing majority opinion. The Chinese at any meeting merely discussed matters and somehow agreed upon a decision. In principle and practice, criticism of government policy was allowed and encouraged. The opponents might overthrow the cabinet, or might beg to retire. When a bitter factional feud took place, it was the custom to send the opponents away from the court to hold different posts in the country. Even under Jentsung and Ingtsung, famous leaders of government like Fan Chungyen and Ouyang Shiu had been dismissed to temporary obscurity, and had then returned to power. In this way one party came to power and another went out.

The bickerings and dissensions at the court now were increased by the peculiar Sung system of government, which centred no clear-cut responsibility on one man as prime minister. The cabinet was more like a state council, with the emperor holding the balance of power. The government consisted of a complicated, cumbersome system of interlocking departments with duplicating functions, so that the final decision always rested with the emperor himself. The so-called "premier" (*shiang*), a social term, went by the complicated title of "General Control Head of the Chancellery and the Imperial Secre-

tariat", and there might be two vice-premiers. The general set-up was as follows:

	Two Councils	*Three Departments*	*Six Ministries*
STATE COUNCIL	PRIVY COUNCIL (military) (*president* and *vice-president*)		
	ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL (*premier* and *vice-premier*)	1. Chancellery, or Premier's Office (*chancellor*)	
		2. Imperial Secretariat (*chancellor*)	1. Civil Service 2. Interior
		3. Executive Board (*chancellor*)	3. Education 4. Army 5. Justice 6. Public Works

The board of finance was entirely separate, directly responsible to the emperor. There was an independent imperial censorate, besides the censors within the three departments, as well as other various boards and bureaus useful chiefly for conferring nominal titles. Usually the "premier" was concurrently head of the chancellery and of the imperial secretariat. The heads of the three departments and of the military privy council together formed the state council and were called state councillors (*chihcheng*). Later Shentsung tried to simplify the system by drastic changes aiming at better-defined functions: the imperial secretariat was to *deliberate,* the premier's office (chancellery) to *promulgate,* and the executive board to *execute* government orders; but the same confusion and divided responsibility continued to exist.

Wang Anshih was at first only a vice-premier; but, backed by the Emperor, he went ahead with his programme over everybody's head and made all decisions at home with Lu Huiching and Tseng Pu. This seemed an ideal situation for embroiling the state councillors before the Emperor. The issues were mainly two, the farmers' loans and freedom of criticism by the censors. On one side were all the veteran officials, men of tried ability, constituting a majority so overwhelming as to suggest unanimity, and on the other, one man, Wang Anshih, backed by Emperor Shentsung, and a rather curious conglomeration of new and unknown petty, ambitious, energetic but scheming politicians. For convenience of reference, and in order not to encumber the text with too many names, the following table of the more important personages

in the conflict, showing the amazing alignment of forces, may be useful:

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

IN POWER

WANG ANSHIH, "the Bull-headed Premier"
SHENTSUNG, an ambitious emperor

Two Henchmen

TSENG PU, energetic politician
LU HUICHING, a notorious character who double-crossed WANG

Four Rascals

LEEDING, a man who concealed his mother's death; later, court prosecutor of SU TUNGPO
DUNQUAN, great turn-coat, served HUICHING and WANG alternately
SUDAN, with DUNQUAN, impeached SU TUNGPO
WANG FANG, son of WANG ANSHIH

Great Horde of Office-Seekers
(As in any other age)

SHIEH CHINGWEN, brother-in-law of WANG ANSHIH
TSAI PIEN, son-in-law of WANG ANSHIH
CHANG CHUN, later enemy of SU TUNGPO
LU CHIAWEN, trade dictator in WANG'S regime

THE OPPOSITION

Elderly Statesmen (ex-premiers, privy councillors, etc.)
SZEMA KUANG, leader of the opposition, great historian
HAN CHI, veteran leader
FU PI, old minister
LU HUEI, fired first shot
TSENG KUNGLIANG, weak character
CHAO PIEN
WEN YENPO, friend of everybody

Su and Close Friends

CHANG FANGPING } elderly statesmen, like "uncles" to SU
FAN CHEN
OUYANG SHIU
SU TUNGPO
SU TSEYU, Tungpo's brother
FAN CHUNJEN, a great man
SUN CHUEH, tall, fiery
LI CHANG, stocky
LIU SHU, quick-tempered

Wang's Former Friends

LU KUNGCHU, called "Handsome Beard", brilliant scholar
HAN WEI, from powerful Han family
CHENG HAO, neo-Confucianist, elder of the famous "Cheng brothers"

Wang's Two Brothers

WANG ANLI
WANG ANKUO

Independent Critics

LIU CHIH, later enemy of SU
SU SUNG } "three secretaries of Shining"
SUNG MINCHIU }
LI TALIN }
Other Censors
CHENG SHIA, "the little man with the big role", small gatekeeper who overthrew WANG ANSHIH

The highly unbalanced alignment of forces is both tragic and amusing. Looking down the list, one cannot help wondering at the unhappy knack of Wang Anshih for alienating his own friends, and the heavy price the Emperor was willing to pay to keep Wang in power, since all those in opposition were cashiered, dismissed, and punished. In the end, Emperor Shentsung had to dismiss Wang Anshih, Lu Huiching, and Dunquan, too. His dream of a strong, powerful state vanished, and he was content to govern in a vacuum of mediocrities. If good judgment of men is an attribute of divinity, it would seem that the posthumous title of the emperor, *Shentsung,* or "Divine Ancestor", was a gross misnomer.

The tragedy of Wang Anshih comes from the fact that he was not in any way self-indulgent or corrupt himself, and that his hand was forced. To carry out anything so radical as his state capitalism programme, he knew he had to override all opposition. Perhaps that was why he had bided his time so long. He had a vision, and his wagon was hitched to that starry vision, not of a happy, peaceful and prosperous nation, but of a rich, strong, and powerful state, expanding its borders north and south. God had willed that the Sung dynasty was to be great and expansionist, like the Hans and the Tangs, and he, Wang Anshih, was the manifest Man of Destiny. But there is not one "Man of Destiny" who does not appear slightly pathetic in the contemplation of future historians—a man caught in the prison of his ambition, a victim of his own dream, which grew and expanded and then burst like a bubble.

Despising all the "conservative philistines", he not only alienated the good old ministers, but even lost Han Wei and Lu Kungchu, who were his best friends. Han Wei, we remember, was the friend who had turned Shentsung's heart and hopes towards Wang Anshih when the former was crown prince. When these friends disagreed with him on the manner in which he carried out his projects, he had no hesitation in banishing them from the court. Deserted and alone, he took in and

promoted unknown and unqualified men who were smart enough to agree with him and use him for their own purposes. To make it easier to distinguish the three notorious characters, I have given them a more familiar spelling: Leeding, Sudan, and Dunquan. Leeding was a man who concealed the news of his mother's death to avoid going out of office, a daring offence in Confucian society. Dunquan is remembered by posterity as the author of the famous saying: "Let them all laugh who want to laugh; a good official post is mine." But the arch supporters of Wang Anshih were two extremely active and persuasive talkers of great scheming ability, Tseng Pu and Lu Huiching, particularly the latter, who eventually double-crossed Wang Anshih in an effort to supersede him. The collapse of this eight-year regime was summarised by a contemporary as follows: "Huiching sold out Wang Anshih, Wang Anshih sold out the Emperor, and the Emperor sold out the people." When Huiching stooped to publishing Wang's private letters to alienate him from the Emperor, Wang was overthrown, and in his old age he used to spend his fury over the turn-coat friend by scribbling the word "Fukienite" a few times every day, Fukien being the province from which Huiching came. When Su Tungpo met Wang Anshih in Nanking after the regime was over, and rebuked him for starting wars and persecuting scholars, Wang replied that Huiching was responsible for all the doings. This is hardly a plausible defence, since it was Wang himself who insisted on dealing harshly with all opposition, and since the institution of espionage at the capital against critics of the government was established during the period when Huiching was in retirement in mourning for his father, between April 1071 and July 1073.

Otherwise, the two leaders of the opposite factions, Wang Anshih and Szema Kuang, while uncompromising in their fight over government policies, were both sincere in their convictions and above reproach in their private lives. Neither was ever accused of corruption in money matters or of looseness of morals, while Ouyang Shiu was at least alleged to have had some affairs in his private household.

Once Wang Anshih's wife, Wu, had bought a concubine for her husband. When the woman was presented, Wang asked, in surprise: "What is that thing?"

"The Madame has asked me to serve you," replied the woman.

"But who are you?" asked Wang again.

"My husband," replied the woman, "was working with the army in charge of a boat-load of government rice. The boat sank and he lost the whole cargo. We sold all our property to restore the loss but still could not make up the amount. And so my husband sold me to pay for the balance."

"How much were you sold for?" asked Wang.

"Nine hundred dollars."

Wang Anshih sent for her husband and bade the woman go back to him, telling him to keep the money:

The same thing happened to Szema Kuang, for he, too, had a concubine against his wish. In his younger days he was serving as a deputy magistrate and his wife had not yet produced a son for him. The chief magistrate's wife presented him with a concubine, but Szema Kuang ignored her. Thinking that it was because of her own presence, his wife one day asked the girl to wait till she was out of the house and then dress up and go into his study at night. When Szema Kuang saw the girl appear in his room, he said in surprise to the girl: "How dare you come here? The Madame is away," and he sent her away. Both men were more interested in carrying out their policies than in personal power, and Wang Anshih certainly had no regard for money. While he was premier, as soon as his salary was received, he turned it over to his brothers to spend it any way they liked.

Szema Kuang, who towered intellectually and morally above his generation, fought a clean-cut battle of principles from the beginning to the end. He and Wang Anshih stood at opposite poles on government policy. In the words of a contemporary: "Wang Anshih refused to be premier unless the new policies were carried out, and Szema Kuang refused to be vice-privy-councillor unless the new policies were abolished."

Not only did Szema Kuang rank with Fan Chungyen as one of the two most respected prime ministers of Sung dynasty; he was, besides, author of the monumental comprehensive history of China up to the Sung period, the *Tsechih Tungchien* or *Mirror of History,* in 294 volumes, with thirty volumes of appendix on sources and comparative material, a work sound in scholarship and masterly in judgment and style, which became the pole star to which all history writing in China after him must be orientated. The first draft (*changpien*) was several times the number of volumes. He used to work at it steadily, filling ten feet of paper copying notes every day, and his manuscripts were said to fill two whole rooms. The gigantic work occupied the author for twenty-five years.

What started the final fight was the issue of the farmers' loans. After months of deliberation by the bureau of economic planning, the "Regulations for Seedling Loans" were promulgated in September 1069. Forty-one high commissioners were sent out to the provinces to push through the new plan. It soon became apparent that the loans could not be voluntarily sold to the people as had been intended. The question for the high commissioners, then, was whether they wanted to come back and report that their mission had been a failure or to

force the loans on the people and report a great success. The government preferred to lend money to the rich for better guarantees, but the rich were not in particular need of money. Some poor people were in need of money, but the government had to have guarantees of their ability to repay. Some of the commissioners therefore devised a system of allocating the loans to the people according to their financial standing, down to the poorest farmers. But the poor can be too poor to borrow; only the rich can borrow money, which is the essence of sound modern banking and finance. To make sure that the loans were repaid, the government made their richer neighbours stand guarantors for the poor. One of the commissioners reported that the people "cried for joy" when they were offered the loans. Another commissioner, who was not willing to force the measure on the people, came back with a different report. Censors impeached the successful commissioner for "forcing" the loans on the people, which was clearly against the intention of the original edict. Wang Anshih went to the censorate office and said to the officials: "What are you people trying to do? You impeach one commissioner who is energetic in carrying out the reforms, while you say nothing of the other who is slack in his duties."

Han Chi, who was serving at Tamingfu as governor of Hopei, had seen how the loan plan worked in the country, and he submitted a memorial which gives the best picture of how the loans were being distributed. In contrast to Su Tungpo's vehement outburst, here was a well-considered and well-worded, matter-of-fact report to the Emperor by a retired premier who had served the country in the highest capacities. In the paper he said that even the poor people of the lowest class were assigned a denomination, while the richer classes were asked to subscribe more. The so-called farmers' loans were also enforced among the city people and were sold among the landlords and "monopolist exploiters" whom it was the intention of the new measure to supplant and suppress; the loans were, therefore, defeating their own purpose. For every dollar borrowed, the people had to pay back $1.30 after a few months. However energetically the government denied that it was lending money for profit, people would not believe it. Han pointed out that it was impracticable to prevent the forcing of loans and depend on voluntary subscription, for the rich would not borrow and the poor, who would, could not offer guarantees; therefore, in time, it would be necessary to make the guarantors pay for the loans. And since the high commissioners were anxious to please the authorities at the court, while the lower officials dared not speak up, so Han said, he found it incumbent upon him as an old faithful servant of the court to bring the facts to the Emperor's attention. He asked for the suspension of the new measure, the recall of the tax commissioners, and the

restoration of the price equalisation granaries on the old basis.

"Han Chi is a faithful minister," said the Emperor, discussing this memorandum with Wang Anshih. "While serving in the country, he still has not forgotten about the imperial house. I thought the loans were for the benefit of the people and did not realise that they were doing so much harm. Besides, these seedling loans were intended for the farming districts. Why do they sell them in the cities?"

"What's the harm?" replied Wang Anshih quickly. "If the people in the cities want the loans, why not let them have them?"

There was, therefore, a long exchange of letters between Han Chi and the court, and the retired premier specifically pointed out that what the state-capitalist of the Han dynasty had done in squeezing the life blood of the people in order to fill the emperor's war chest could hardly be considered a measure to "enrich the country".

This shook Wang Anshih's position, and the Emperor began to think of suspending the loans. Wang Anshih heard about it and asked for sick leave. In referring to Wang's request for leave, Szema Kuang used the phrase, "the scholars are in a boiling rage and the people of the country are in an uproar". The high ministers discussed this situation, and Chao Pien, who was still for Wang, said that they had better wait until Wang's leave was over. That very night Tseng Kungliang, a cabinet member, had his son tell Wang Anshih secretly of the impending change, and asked Wang to cancel his leave. Following Tseng's secret tip, Wang did cancel his leave and appeared at the court again, and was able to persuade the Emperor that the opposition was merely trying to "block His Majesty's reforms".

Not knowing what to think, the Emperor now sent two eunuchs to the country to report on the situation. The eunuchs, however, knew on which side their bread was buttered, and came back with the report that the loans were "popular" with the people and that "there was no compulsion". Wen Yenpo, an old official, objected and said to the Emperor: "Do you believe two eunuchs, but will not believe Han Chi, who has served as a premier in three successive regimes?" But the Emperor believed his own reporters and was strengthened in his determination to go through with the new measure. How often a few irresponsible or ignorant reporters who do not understand what they are talking about can affect the development of events and influence the national policy of a country! If the castrated men had had the manliness to tell the truth, the course of the Sung dynasty would have taken a different turn at this time. What happened to those two eunuchs when the truth was revealed to the world we do not know. They had reported what the Emperor wanted to hear. When times changed and it was no longer the fashion to talk about these wonderful "agrarian reformers", they could keep sheepishly quiet.

Szema Kuang, Fan Chen, and Su Tungpo carried on their fight together. Szema Kuang had had a good opinion of Wang Anshih, and he enjoyed the great confidence of the Emperor. When the Emperor asked him about Wang Anshih, he said: "People's criticism of him as a hypocrite is perhaps extreme. But he is unpractical and terribly stubborn." However, he had had a hot debate with Wang Anshih's henchman Huiching during a class in history for the Emperor, so much so that the latter had to break up the dispute and tell the parties to calm down. Wang Anshih had therefore begun to dislike Szema Kuang as opposed to his policies. Now while Wang was so briefly on sick leave, the Emperor wanted to make Szema Kuang vice-president of the privy council. Szema Kuang declined the office, saying that his personal position was of no concern whatsoever, and that the important thing was whether His Majesty was going to stop these new policies. Nine times Szema Kuang submitted these memorandums. The Emperor replied:

"I am asking you to be a privy councillor in charge of military affairs. Why do you keep on declining the office and talking about these things which have nothing to do with the army?"

"But I have not yet accepted the military post," replied Szema Kuang. "So long as I am in the imperial secretariat, I must bring these things to your attention."

When Wang cancelled his leave, his position was strengthened and he degraded Szema Kuang into the position of a treasurer in the secretariat. Twice Fan Chen rejected the imperial edict carrying this new appointment, and the Emperor, thus being defied, with his own hand handed the edict to Szema Kuang. Upon this, Fan Chen begged to resign his position in the imperial secretariat and was permitted to do so. With the restoration of Wang Anshih to power, Han Chi also begged to resign as governor of Hopei, retaining only his district office as magistrate at Tamingfu. Naturally, this also was granted.

Su Tungpo was getting hot under the collar. He had so much to say and he had to say it. As may be expected, he was much more forthright than the others. He was then only thirty-two, and his position in the department of history was a low and strictly literary, non-administrative post. He wrote two letters to the Emperor, in February 1070, and February 1071. The letters were long, exhaustive, eloquent and minced no words. They were like those occasional modern editorials which arouse immediate national attention. He opened his first letter with a direct attack on the farmers' loan. He told the Emperor that the entire nation was turning against him, and warned him not to rely on power to suppress the people. Quoting Confucius, he said:

"If the people of the country are rich, does a ruler ever have to worry about his private wealth? . . . I do not know, when Your Majesty speaks about enriching the country, whether you are speaking about enriching the people or enriching your own purse.

"In all things, great and small, one should not depend on force, but must observe reason and the nature of things. For in all things done according to reason one is bound to succeed, and in all undertakings against reason one is doomed to fail. Now Your Majesty has compelled the farmers to pay you high interest, and you have entered into competition with business-men for profits. Is this in accordance with nature, and do you wonder that it has failed? . . . If Your Majesty has the welfare of the people truly at heart, the people would show confidence in you despite all rumours; but if you are going only after revenue, the people can hardly be convinced by words. If a judge receives presents from a defendant and lets himself be influenced in his decision, people will say that he has been bribed; and if a man takes what does not belong to him people will call him a thief. That would only be calling a thing by its right name. Now, you are receiving twenty per cent interest from the farmers' loans, yet you insist that you are not making these loans for interest. How are the people to believe you? . . . A man is condemned by his acts and not by what he professes to do. . . . All this commotion is because the whole country is coming to believe that Your Majesty is looking for the revenue, while you maintain that you are working only for their good. While you insist that you are totally disinterested, the whole world thinks that you are avaricious."

He advised the Emperor on a course of caution.

"Sometimes a man falls from a horse in his youth and never dares to ride again all his life. . . . Bent on a mad rush for drastic reforms, you have started the farmers' loans, instituted the draft exemption tax, started the national trade bureau, shifted the army units. You are determined to carry these through against all criticism, but should you find out the error, then, when you have good policies to carry out in the future, you will have lost all self-confidence. . . . Your Majesty started the reign with the high hopes of youth, gifted with high intelligence and determination, and if your ministers should fail to advise you now to take the path of steadiness and caution, you would be like a man dashing over dangerous terrain in a light coach on a dark night with the coachman lashing the horse. Might it not be far better if Your Majesty would ease the reins, feed the

horse, and wait patiently till the dawn, when you could travel on safe highways in broad daylight?"

The Emperor was greatly mistaken, Su Tungpo warned, if he thought he was going to succeed by reliance on his arbitrary power. Officials had been degraded and dismissed; there was talk of restoring severe punishment by bodily mutilation. He went on:

"Now the court is torn by dissension, for which there must be a cause. Instead of seeking the cause, Your Majesty intends to overcome opposition by force. But since history began, force has never been able to suppress the people. In ancient days, scholars were threatened with knives and saws in front and the boiling pot behind, but that did not stop them from voicing their convictions. Your Majesty has not yet killed any minister. So far you have only dismissed those who oppose your policy. I hardly think Your Majesty will have the heart to imitate the example of the Chin dictator and kill men for gossiping in the streets, or revive the party inquisitions of Han. Do you suppose scholardom will be frightened and silenced? The more men you banish from the court, the more will rise in protest. . . . If Your Majesty intends to change the code of punishment and do the extreme, how will you prevent a rebellion?

"There is not a man in the country whose heart is not turning against the government, and not a tongue which is not talking ill of the regime. Does this sound like the beginning of a great reign when the Emperor and his ministers work in complete harmony for the good of the state? The ancient saying has it: 'A hundred people cannot be wrong.' Now it is not only a hundred people, but the entire nation which is voicing the same opinion, and yet Your Majesty persists in your course against the opposition of the entire nation. I really do not know what to say. The *Book of Songs* says:

'Like unto a drifting boat,
None knows where it is heading.
Restless I lie upon the pillow,
For my heart is bleeding.'

I hope Your Majesty will consider these humble words of mine, although I know I am courting death by this memorial.

Your humble servant,
Su Shih"

The issue that deeply stirred all officialdom was Wang's purge of the censorate. From the very beginning, Wang Anshih frightened the

entire court, not so much by his drastic and extensive economic plans and policies as by his arbitrary habit of cashiering all censors who criticised them. The right to criticism of public policies was challenged. The foundation of the governmental structure was being undermined. A sensitive spot in the body politic had been touched. All officialdom was dismayed, and friends began to desert him.

The issue of the purge of the censorate was in itself enough to cause the withdrawal of support and the resignation of the government leaders. The imperial censorate was an old institution in the Chinese government, whose purpose was to represent public opinion and constantly check and criticise the ruling regime. It was held as essential to a good government that free criticism should be made readily available to the emperor so that the state of public opinion could be properly reflected. In consequence of its position, the censorate had tremendous powers and responsibilities and could overthrow an administration when the censors attacked it hard enough. It was a somewhat lax and not too well defined method for bringing about changes in the government personnel and policies, acting in somewhat the same way as the modern press. The difference in ancient China was that there was no legal protection for the censorate or for the rights of the opposition, but only the established tradition that a "good" emperor should be liberal towards criticism; whether he cared for such a good reputation was up to the emperor himself. If he did not choose to exercise moral restraint, he could constitutionally degrade, punish, torture, or kill the censors and their entire families. Many did so. The censors were placed in the impossible position of having the official duty to admonish both the government and the emperor himself without any constitutional protection of their personal liberties. But as in modern times there are always editors with a sense of responsibility to the public who are brave enough to defy a totalitarian regime at the risk of imprisonment and death, so there were always censors who braved corporal punishment, flogging, and even death to carry out their duties to the people. This is particularly true of the Eastern Han and the Ming periods, when there were censors who, having written their protests against a vile premier and knowing that they were only courting death, hanged themselves before they sent in their letters of protest. These censors went up to battle like soldiers; as soon as one fell, another rose to take his place. Good emperors who loved a good name would be careful in their treatment of these censors, earning great fame and popularity for themselves, but bad administrations were anxious to silence the censors just as modern dictators find it necessary to muzzle the press.

Wang Anshih had started his administration with great expectations from the elder statesmen.

Huei fired the first shot at Wang Anshih, describing him as "a hypocrite and a sinister character destined to bring the country to the brink of catastrophe", even Szema Kuang was surprised. As they walked together to a class in classics to be given to the Emperor, Lu revealed to Szema Kuang what he was going to do that morning, and showed him the memorial concealed in his sleeve.

"But what can we do? He is so popular," said Szema Kuang.

"You, too!" replied Lu Huei, shocked.

Lu Huei was dismissed from his post, and the purge began.

Now a spark set the court politics on fire. There was the case of a woman who had attempted murder of her husband but had only succeeded in wounding him. The woman had confessed her intent of murder, and the highest officials disagreed on the proper punishment. The case had therefore been standing for over a year. Szema Kuang wanted to settle it one way, and Wang Anshih wanted to settle it the other and insisted on carrying it through. The punishment was embodied in an imperial decree, but the censor, Liu Shu, rejected it for reconsideration, as the imperial censors often did. A second censor defied Wang's will, and Wang impeached him through one of his underlings. This then brought the fight into the open.

The imperial censors were aroused. The question was whether they were to be free to prosecute their duties, or whether one by one they were to be politically disposed of. Several of the censors sent a joint impeachment of Wang Anshih and asked for his recall. Wang Anshih was angered and wanted to put them in jail. Szema Kuang and Fan Chunjen opposed this on principle, and eventually six censors were sent out to distant provinces to sell wine at the government stores. Upon this, Fan Chunjen took up the fight. He demanded that the order dismissing the censors be rescinded—and was dismissed himself. The next to fall was Tseyu, Su Tungpo's brother, who had consistently opposed the farmers' loans and the national trade bureau. Two months later the good old premier Fu Pi resigned, warning that in any political fight the good men were bound to lose, while the bad politicians were bound to come out on top. For good men fought for principles and bad men fought for power, and in the end both would get what they wanted, by the good men's quitting and the bad men's staying. He predicted that with this trend of affairs, the country would soon be plunged into chaos.

The court was now thrown into an uproar. The bureau of economic planning was instituted in February 1069, the national trade bureau in July, and the farmers' loans in September. In the course of a few months public opinion towards the new administration changed from great expectations to doubt, doubt gave place to confusion, and confusion to anger and fear.

Things were happening fast now. The months of March and April 1070 saw a wholesale purge and packing of the censorate. The two censors who fell next were Wang's personal friends, men who had helped him to power and on whom he had depended for support. Tall, fiery, eloquent Sun Chueh, who was also Su's lifelong friend, had challenged Wang on his claim that the currency bureau of the Chow dynasty, established in the twelfth century B.C., had lent money to people at the rate of twenty-five per cent interest. Still hoping for his support, Wang sent him out on a court investigation, again demanded by the Emperor, into the persistent rumours that the loans were being "forced" on the farmers even in districts close to the capital. Sun came back and honestly reported that there was compulsion, which Wang regarded as a "betrayal" of friendship—so Sun was dismissed. The more important case was that of "Handsome Beard" Lu Kungchu, son of a premier, and a man of great learning but few words. In their earlier days Wang and Lu had divided literary honours and the admiration of scholars. Lu had helped Wang to power, and in return Wang had made him chief of the censorate. Now Lu asked in a petition to the Emperor, somewhat too pointedly for Wang's comfort: "How is it that all public opinion has suddenly become 'reactionary', and how is it that the great and able ministers of yesterday have suddenly become the 'corrupt' men of today?" Wang drafted the edict of dismissal himself in words which showed something of the temperamental character of the man. In their days of friendship, Wang Anshih had said to the Emperor: "A man of Lu's ability simply has to become a prime minister some day." Now he compared Lu to one of the "Four Evil Monsters" under the ideal emperors Yao and Shun.

What alienated his former admirers more was that in the same month Wang appointed two disreputable characters to replace the censors he had dismissed. The appointment of Leeding as a full-rank censor aroused a great fury in the censorate. Leeding had neither passed the official examinations nor acquired the necessary civil service standing, and he was known to have concealed the news of his mother's death and failed to observe the rites of mourning. In Chinese eyes, this is tantamount to degenerating into a beast. Wang promoted him to this post because Leeding had come up from the country and had reported that the farmers' loans were "extremely popular" with the people; Wang had introduced him to the Emperor to make the report in person. This aroused the ire of the censors. At the same time Wang made Shieh Chingwen, his brother-in-law, also a censor. To secure promotion, Shieh had married his sister to one of Wang Anshih's brothers. Three imperial secretaries rejected the edict of appointment—which brought about the dismissal of these three from their office. The other remaining censors then took up the issue. Chang Chien

demanded the recall to power of the dismissed censors and the cashiering of Leeding and Huiching, known as the power behind Wang Anshih. When Chang Chien went up to the premier's office to press his case, he found Wang Anshih in a curious state of mind. The latter listened to him without saying a word, but was laughing behind a fan held before his face.

"I do not doubt," said the censor, "that you are laughing at me for my stupidity. But you should be aware that there are many more people in the country who are laughing at you."

Another important censor to fall at the same time was Cheng Hao, the elder of the two "Cheng brothers", great neo-Confucianist philosophers of the Sung dynasty. Cheng Hao had co-operated with Wang intimately in the early days of the reforms. Now he also went to the premier's office to fight the case out with Wang personally. The latter had just read his memorandum, and the caller found him in a state of uncontrollable rage. Philosophically, the neo-Confucianist said: "Look here, my friend, we are not fighting over personal or family affairs; we are discussing the affairs of the country. Can we not talk in a calm and dispassionate manner?" By all Confucian standards, Wang lost face and felt ashamed of himself.

Within a few weeks the purge of the censorate was complete. With the six censors who had been cashiered in the previous year, the total of dismissed censors was now fourteen, eleven in the censorate and three in the palace. Szema Kuang warned the Emperor in unmistakable terms. Only three persons, Wang, Tseng Pu, and Lu Huiching, were for the new reform measures, and the entire court was against them. "Is His Imperial Majesty going to make up the government and the nation with these three persons?" Han Chi and Chang Fangping had quit in February; Szema Kuang had refused a post as privy councillor and was degraded in the same month; Fan Chen had left in anger. In September the vacillating Chao Pien, the cabinet minister who had for a time been inclined to favour the new regime, now decided to resign. He to pointed out that "the farmers' loans and the appointment of tax-commissioners are by comparison small matters, but the choice of the right men to assist the Emperor in his government is a matter of far greater consequence." A few months later, aged, fatalistic, imperturbable Tseng Kungliang, who had ascribed Wang's rise to power to "God's will", resigned in disgust, giving old age as his excuse, but in reality partly under fire from the critics. By December 1070, Wang Anshih was formally made premier and was placed in an unchallenged position at the head of the whole government. In June of the following year Ouyang Shiu resigned all his posts in the government and went to live in retirement.

* * * * *

Su Tungpo now wrote his famous nine-thousand-word letter to the Emperor, and was prepared to be dismissed. He and Szema Kuang and Fan Chen had carried on the fight together, but Szema and Fan had quitted in disgust and anger. Fan Chen, later related to Su Tungpo, had served in the imperial secretariat under the last two emperors. Fat and soft in appearance, he had the strength of steel in his character. When he left, he said in his letter of resignation: "Your Majesty is disposed to take frank criticism, but your minister obstructs it; Your Majesty loves the people at heart, but your minister is oppressing them in practice." The Emperor showed this letter to Wang Anshih during a court audience, and Wang's face blanched. Some of those close by reported that they saw his hands holding the letter shaking with rage.

Szema Kuang had been sent to an outpost in Shensi in September 1070. He had been slow to give up. It was after three exchanges of earnest if bitter letters with Wang that the complete break came. The Emperor was still hoping for him to return to the court, for he had repeatedly told the other ministers that he felt safe from committing bad blunders so long as Szema Kuang was by his side. Again and again the Emperor called him to the capital, and Szema Kuang refused. He had said enough. If the Emperor could not be dissuaded from riding on the stubborn mule to perdition, his duty was done. When he decided to quit altogether and live in retirement, his anger was unrestrained. He wrote to the Emperor: "Whoever agrees with Anshih is right, and whoever disagrees with Anshih is wrong. Those who lick Anshih's spittle are the 'loyal ministers', and those who oppose his policies are the 'scheming intriguers'. . . . I have disagreed with Anshih, and am therefore both wrong and a 'scheming intriguer' in Your Majesty's opinion. I ask for your decision. If my crimes are like those of Fan Chen, allow me to lay down my office as you allowed Fan Chen to do. If my crimes are worse, exile or sentence me to death, and I will gladly accept my fate."

From now until the Emperor's death, sixteen years later, Szema Kuang was to shut himself up completely to devote himself to the monumental history already begun nine years before. Later, when Emperor Shentsung had dismissed Wang Anshih and wanted to call Szema Kuang back to power, his one reply was still, was the Emperor ready to reverse his economic policies? Thus the two poles of political thought stood, each unmoving and immovable to the end. Yet in the first year of the next emperor, when Wang Anshih died and Szema Kuang was on his death-bed, the order he gave as premier then was: "Wang Anshih was not too bad a person. His only fault was his stubbornness. Let him be buried with all the honours the court can give."

Su Tungpo's nine-thousand-word letter to the Emperor is important as embodying his political philosophy, and as indicative of his personal

temperament and style, a mixture of wit, learning, and intrepid courage. Angered polemics alternate with cool, lucid reasoning. Now he was despondent, bitter, sharply critical and uncommonly forthright; now he was arguing, citing examples, quoting from Mencius, Confucius, and the histories to bolster his thesis. Adroit, sincere, and convincing, it was written with profound emotion and sorrow at the state of affairs. In his audience with the Emperor in January, His Majesty had praised a memorial by him on educational reforms and asked him for "straight criticism . . . even of His Majesty himself". Su Tungpo took him at his word. It was his last desperate effort to make the Emperor change his mind, when all high officials had left and all chances were against him. He knew that he would be dismissed, if nothing worse happened.

The two most important points for the modern reader are the Mencian principle that the ruler derives his power from the people, and the defence of free criticism on the principle of dissent in politics. Su Tungpo warned the Emperor, a ruler is ruler, not by virtue of a mythical "divine right" of kings, but by the support he derives from the people. Let the king beware!

> "It is said in the *Book of History,* 'In ruling over the people, I feel as if I were holding six horses with worn-out reins.' This means that no one in the nation is in a more precarious position than the emperor himself. When the emperor and the people come together, they are ruler and subjects; when they detest each other, they become foes. But the line of division, determining whether the people go with the ruler or against him, is extremely tenuous. He who is able to command the support of the millions becomes a king, while he who alienates their support becomes a solitary private individual. The basis of the ruler's power lies, therefore, entirely in the support of the people in their hearts. The relation of the people's support to the ruler may be likened to that of the roots to a tree, oil to the lamp, water to the fish, rice fields to the farmer and capital to the business-men. A tree dries up when its roots are cut; the lamp goes out when the oil is gone; fish die when they leave the water; farmers starve when deprived of their rice fields, and merchants go bankrupt when they have no more capital. And when an emperor loses the support of the people, it spells his ruin. This is an inexorable law from whose consequences no ruler can hope to escape. From ancient times such has been always, the danger confronting a ruler."

But how was the ruler to obtain the support of the people unless he permitted the free expression of opinion? Su Tungpo went on to

develop what I consider the most important point in the memorandum. This was the principle of disagreement in politics, as embodied in the system of the imperial censorate. For, according to Su Tungpo, the maintenance of a good regime depended very much upon the healthy operation of political opposition. Democracy itself is predicated upon the principle of disagreement among parties. In modern times I am sure Su would have opposed the principle of unanimity in the United Nations Security Council as being essentially antidemocratic. He knew that at least since Chinese Adam no two persons have ever completely agreed, and that the only alternative to democracy is tyranny. I have never yet found an enemy of democracy who is not a tyrant in the home, in the country, or in world politics. Su Tungpo went on:

"Sun Pao has well said: 'The Duke of Chou was a great sage and the Duke of Shao was a great genius, and yet history records they seldom agreed with one another at court.' There was, too, Wang Tao of the Chin dynasty, who may be considered truly a great minister. But when at dinner the guests approved of whatever he said, Wang Shu was displeased. 'No one is a sage; you cannot always be right,' said Wang Shu, and the minister thanked him for the advice. If Your Majesty wants everybody to think the same thought and express the same opinion and the whole court to sing the same tune, everybody can do it. But should there be in the government unprincipled men serving along with the rest, how will Your Majesty expect ever to find it out?"

No one, I believe, stated the reasons for the existence of the censorate and the principles underlying it so clearly as Su Tungpo in this letter. The issue of a free, unfettered, fearless censorate was the issue of a free public opinion.

"It appears to me that when the atmosphere for free criticism prevails, even mediocre people will be encouraged to speak up, but when such freedom is destroyed, even the best people will be inclined to hold their tongues. I fear that from now on the pattern may be set and the censors will become no more than the flunkeys of the cabinet ministers, with the result that the Emperor will stand in complete isolation from his people. Once the system has been destroyed, anything may happen. . . . One cannot, furthermore, escape the conclusion that when there are no fearless critics of the government in times of peace, there will also be no national heroes willing to die for the country in times of trouble. If you do not permit your people even to put in a word of criticism, how do you expect them to die for the country when trouble comes?"

He compared the state of public opinion of the present with the past.

"I remember hearing in my childhood from the elders that the censors always reflected faithfully the public opinion of the country; what the public praised, the censors also praised, and what the public disliked, the censors condemned. . . . Now the country is in an uproar and grumblings are heard on every side; it should not be difficult for Your Majesty to gauge what the state of public opinion is like."

Su developed the *raison d'être* of the censorate by a comparative study of different systems of government in the different dynasties. Here he showed himself as a great advocate, scholarly in manner, cogent in reasoning, penetrating in insight.

"From a study of the governmental systems of the ancient times, we see that there was always the question of balance of power between the central and the provincial governments. In the Chou and Tang dynasties the system inclined toward decentralisation, while in the Chin and Wei it inclined toward centralisation. The result of over-centralisation was that a few corrupt men close to the court were able to make the emperor their tool for power, while the result of over-decentralisation was that the provincial governors became too powerful and sometimes raised the banner of rebellion. A great statesman shows foresight by providing against the causes of corruption and decay while a country is yet at its height of prosperity. . . . In comparison with the other dynasties, it [the present dynasty] may be described as inclining towards a centralised system of government. I do not presume to know what the founders of this dynasty, the Imperial Ancestors, had in mind as the means to check the dangers of over-centralisation. But it seems to me the establishment of the Imperial Censorate was meant as such a safeguard. . . . Since the founding of the Sung house, never has an official censor been severely punished. . . . When there was important information concerning the country, everyone was free to speak up, regardless of his rank. If it concerned the personal character and morals of the emperor, he always listened with attentive respect; if it concerned important government policies, the cabinet ministers held themselves ready for questioning. This was carried to such an extent in the regime of Jentsung that it was derisively said of the cabinet ministers of the time that they were merely servants of the censorate carrying out their orders.

"Now there is a deep purpose in the establishment of the system of the censorate, of which people are not usually aware. It is true that what the censors suggest may not be always right, but it is of the

greatest importance that these critics should be given complete freedom and great responsibility, not merely as a matter of form, but for the very definite purpose of checking the rise of selfish men to power and of safeguarding against the danger always inherent in a strongly centralised government. Before a bad minister comes into power, it is a comparatively easy thing for the censors to stop him; but after he is entrenched in his position, it may take an army to overthrow him, and then it may not always succeed. . . . I hope Your Majesty will ponder deeply the purpose and meaning of this institution of government critics, and keep it alive for the protection of Your Imperial Descendants. There is in my mind nothing more important for maintaining the proper functioning of the government than this institution."

Su Tungpo warned the Emperor against reliance upon his power to cow the people into submission. Again he referred to the growing rumour of restoration of punishment by bodily mutilation. Hundreds of years earlier, various forms of mutilation had been used in the punishment of criminals, including branding, cutting off noses, cutting off legs, and castration. These inhuman punishments were abolished after the second century B.C., except castration, which was abolished around the year 600 A.D. It is to the credit of Su Tungpo that he prevented the restoration of such cruelties by these two letters. The gossip was increasing.

"Even Your Majesty and the few ministers close to you have heard of these rumours. You have disregarded them by saying: 'Why should I worry about these rumours when there is no basis to them?' While it is true that such rumours may not all be correct yet they must have sprung up for good reasons. A man must be greedy before he is accused of being a thief, and a man must be loose in his morals before he is accused of immorality with women. . . ."

Business had been paralysed, Su pointed out, and prices had gone up; from the near-by provinces to distant Szechuen, rumours were rife and the people were in an uproar; even deep in the mountainous districts a wine monopoly had been established; monks and nuns had been arrested and deprived of their property, and soldiers' and officials' pay had been cut.

"You have established the bureau of economic planning, which is for the purpose of securing revenue. You have sent out over forty tax commissioners, whose evident objective can only be to raise money for the government. It is useless for a man to ride out to the

forests with a pack of greyhounds and announce to the world: 'I am not going hunting,' or for a man to go with a fish-net to the lakes and declare: 'I am not going fishing.' It would be much better to stop the rumours by throwing away the fish-nets and sending home the hunting dogs."

He trusted that the Emperor would be able to see clearly for himself that there was dissension and strife in the country. He should be able to deduce from the resignation of all the able ministers what the state of public opinion was like. After repeating most of the arguments against the current reforms, he drove home the idea that in carrying out these economic policies, the Emperor had already forfeited the people's support and public opinion was against him and against the regime.

The letter was received in silence. In March, Su followed up with a third letter. The Emperor had in the interim issued an edict forbidding compulsory allocation of loans, but he was not ready to put a complete stop to these measures. Quoting Mencius, Su said this was like a chicken thief who said he was now ready to reform, and would steal only one chicken per month. What aggravated the situation was that in his capacity as magistrate at the capital, an office he had held since January 1071, he gave out as subject for the local examinations "On Dictatorship", which angered Wang Anshih greatly.

Promptly, Su Tungpo was cashiered. Just as he predicted, although the Emperor might take his advice kindly, the politicians could get him in trouble by some framed-up charge. The brother-in-law and flunkey of Wang Anshih, Shieh Chingwen, set the wheels of the law moving against Su Tungpo. There was now a rumour that while he was carrying his father's coffin home in the long voyage back to Szechuen, he had made unwarranted use of government guards and had bought furniture and porcelain and possibly smuggled salt for profit. Officials were sent out to the different provinces along the route which the Su brothers had travelled to collect data from boatmen, soldiers, and custom officers. Su Tungpo probably did buy a lot of furniture and porcelain, but there was nothing illegal about it. The couriers came back and reported that they could not find anything, and they certainly would have if they could.

In his letter to his wife's brother, who was at this time living back at Szechuen, Su wrote: "Miss Twenty-Seven [Mrs. Su] is doing well and recently a son has been born to us. . . . I have been a thorn in the sides of the authorities for a long time. Let them investigate all they want. I know they will only make fools of themselves. You may have heard of the rumour, but do not worry on my account."

When Szema Kuang was in the capital before proceeding to his home in Loyang, the Emperor said to him:

"It seems to me Su Shih has not a good personal character. Perhaps you have made a mistake in your high opinion of him."

"Are you referring to the charges against Su?" replied Szema Kuang "I know the man better. Your Majesty is aware that this Shieh Chingwen is a relative of Anshih and the charge was instigated by Wang himself. Besides, though Su Shih may not be perfect, is he not better than Leeding, the beast who concealed his mother's funeral?"

According to his official standing Su should now have been made a full magistrate, which the Emperor had intended to do. Wang Anshih and Shieh Chingwen objected and made him deputy magistrate in a near-by district; however, the Emperor changed it and appointed him deputy magistrate of the beautiful city of Hangchow. Against the charge of the censor Su Tungpo did not even bother to write a defence. He let the investigators do their work, while he proceeded with his family to Hangchow.

Chapter Nine

THE EVIL THAT MEN DO

THERE was peace at the court now, the peace of death. By the time Su Tungpo left the capital with his family, all the brilliant scholars of the famous reign of Jentsung had been disposed of and had dispersed out into the country. Ouyang Shiu was living in retirement at Fouyang in Anhuei. The great friend of the Su family, Chang Fangping, was living at Huaiyang, in Honan.

Tseyu, the year before, had been appointed a teacher in the district college at the same place. There is something curious about Tseyu; less headstrong than his brother, he had always, without compromising his integrity, nevertheless been able to look out for himself and to choose a safe and obscure position, living in the company of some great scholar. Later, when Chang Fangping retired and moved to Shangchiu, then called Nanking, or "Southern Capital", Tseyu had himself appointed to a post there also, and in the following years Su Tungpo always stopped at Chang Fangping's house on his way to and from the capital, asking and getting advice from him as from an uncle. Szema Kuang and Lu Kungchu were now to spend the following years in quiet retirement at the "Western Capital" in Loyang. Lu Huei fell ill and was about to die, but before he died, he sent a conundrum for the Emperor to solve.

"Your Majesty:

"Since my departure from the court I have fallen ill. There was really nothing wrong with me, but I had a bad doctor, and was forced to take all kinds of drastic medicines and strange prescriptions. In time I developed a paralysis of the limbs, and my movements are no longer free. But I suspect there is deeper trouble at the heart of the whole system, for I feel a revolt from within. Now the disease has developed to such a point, what can I do? Although my own person is not important and I do not mind dying, still I am mindful of the fact that I am a member of a house, entrusted with the duty toward my ancestors, and I am greatly worried about my descendants."

The good old premier Fu Pi was not yet able to live quite at peace. He had been degraded to a magistracy at Pochow, and had not been dutiful in selling the loans to the farmers. Besides, he had the audacity to write to the Emperor that "if this state of things keeps on, soon wealth will be concentrated at the top and the people will be scattered below." It was a great chance for one of Wang Anshih's men,

Dunquan, who now suddenly sprang into great activity, to serve his master. Dunquan proposed prosecuting Fu Pi for blocking reforms, and the old minister was deprived of his high ranks and transferred to another district as magistrate. But Wang was dissatisfied and said to the Emperor that Fu Pi had committed crimes similar to those committed by the Four Evil Monsters, and if he were merely deprived of his ministerial honours, how could other traitors be warned and stopped from following in his footsteps? The Emperor refused to listen to Wang's advice, and permitted Fu Pi to keep his small job. On the way to his new appointment Fu Pi passed the Southern Capital and called on Chang Fangping.

Regretfully the old premier said to Chang: "It is so difficult to know a man's character."

"You mean Wang Anshih?" replied his friend. "I did not think it was so difficult to know *him*. I once served with him on the board of a local examination and he started to upset everything. I dismissed him from my staff and never talked with him again." The old premier felt ashamed of himself. He went on his way, and in his old age he used to gaze at the roof and sigh in silence.

Just before Su Tungpo left, there was a riot at the capital. The *paochia* system had been enforced during the previous winter. Military training of the conscripted men was going on in the villages. Suspicious of this training, and thinking that the conscripts would soon be taken from their homes to fight wars with the northern tribes, the villagers near the capital staged a demonstration. The trouble also arose from the fact that the farmers were asked to provide their own military equipment, which really consisted only of bows and arrows. Fathers and sons wept together, and there were villagers who chopped off their fingers or their wrists in order to evade the draft. Through this riot Wang Anshih was to lose his last remaining friend, Han Wei, for as magistrate of the district he reported the riot and asked that the military training be delayed till late winter when the farmers would no longer be busy with their crops. For this even Han Wei was dismissed.

It took a visible demonstration of God's anger and the curious gatekeeper of the palace to put Wang Anshih out of power. In 1073 there was a landslide on the sacred mountain Huashan. Thrown into consternation, the Emperor, according to custom, moved to another palace as a sign of respect for God, and ordered poorer food to be served for his dinner. Besides, from the summer of 1073 to the spring of 1074 there had been no rain; the Emperor was deeply worried and did not know what to do. He questioned Wang Anshih about it, and the latter replied:

"Floods and droughts are natural calamities; they occurred even in

the regime of the ideal emperors Yao and Tang. All we need to do is to carry on with a good government."

"That is exactly what I am afraid of," replied the Emperor, "that we have not been carrying on a good government. I hear so many complaints about the excise tax. Everybody at the court has heard about it, including the Empress and the Empress Dowager."

Another cabinet minister, Feng Ching, was present, and he said: "So have I heard also."

"Why, I've never heard anything," replied Wang Anshih. "Mr. Feng hears all about these grumblings because all the disgruntled persons flock around him."

Now the little man destined to play the big role appeared. It was Cheng Shia, the gatekeeper who had made paintings of the refugees.* Along with these paintings of the victims of the administration working in chains to cut down trees and obtain cash to pay back the government loans, he now sent a brief note to the Emperor.

"Your Majesty:

"It has been the custom after the successful completion of military campaigns to have paintings made to celebrate the victories. No one, however, has submitted to you paintings of the hardships and sufferings of the people, paintings that would show families being separated and refugees roaming over the countryside. Your servant has stood at the Anshang Gate and daily watched these scenes, and has had a panoramic picture made of them. These show only one hundredth part of what I saw, but I know that even you will shed tears when you see them. Imagine, therefore, those who see the reality in the provinces! If Your Majesty will look at these pictures and take my suggestions for abolishing reforms, if it does not rain within ten days, you can behead me on the execution ground outside the Shüanteh Gate as a punishment for lying to Your Majesty.

"Your humble servant,

"Cheng Shia"

The Emperor took the scroll of paintings to his sleeping quarters. He showed them to the Empress and other members of the royal household. It was the Emperor's grandmother† who first spoke:

"I hear that the people are suffering from the draft exemption tax and the farmers' loans. I do not think that we should change the tradition set by the ancestors."

*See page 87.

† It was the rule that when an emperor's grandmother was living, she, rather than the emperor's mother, was the empress dowager. In relation to the emperor's mother, she was mother-in-law, and in relation to the imperial household, she was the eldest. This empress dowager was the wife of Jentsung, not of Ingtsung.

"But these are for the benefit of the people and were never intended to oppress them," replied the Emperor.

"I know that Wang Anshih has great ability," said the Empress Dowager, "but he has made too many enemies. For his own good I think you had better temporarily suspend him from office."

"I find," replied the Emperor, "that among all the courtiers only Wang Anshih is willing to shoulder all the responsibilities."

The Emperor's brother, Prince Chi, was standing by. He said: "I believe you should think over what Grandmother has just said."

His Majesty flew into a rage. "All right, all right!" he cried. "I don't know how to run the government. You take over."

"I didn't mean that," said Prince Chi.

For a moment there was an awkward silence. Then the Empress Dowager said: "Wang Anshih has brought on all this trouble. What are you going to do about it?"

The next morning Wang Anshih was dismissed, although Huiching and Dunquan remained. The Emperor decided to suspend the excise tax, the farmers' loans, the draft exemption tax, the *paochia* system, and the registration of land, a total of eighteen measures in all.

It began to rain. Truly God was pleased!

But Wang Anshih's hour was not yet over. There was a technicality by which the gatekeeper was impeached. When he first submitted the scroll through the regular channels, the palace officials had refused to accept it on the ground that, as a minor official, he had no qualifications to communicate with the Emperor. Cheng, therefore, had gone to an imperial courier station outside the capital and, telling the courier that it contained urgent military business, had asked him to dispatch it immediately on horseback. On this technicality of illegal use of the courier system, Cheng Shia was tried at the censor's court.

History does not record the result of the trial. But we find that in January of the following year Cheng Shia sent up another painting album to the Emperor, entitled *The Story of Righteous and Corrupt Ministers*. It was the story of certain famous good ministers and evil geniuses of the Tang dynasty, and while no direct reference was made to the men of the present regime, the story of what these evil geniuses did in a previous dynasty bore unmistakable resemblance to the acts of the men in power. If there was any possible ambiguity, the legend in the paintings had provided against it. Along with the album, Cheng also submitted a memorial recommending a good man to be the prime minister, since Wang Anshih had already been dismissed. Huiching was now in power, and Dunquan had already switched his allegiance from Wang Anshih to him. The two, therefore, succeeded in banishing Cheng Shia to remote Kwangtung.

Before his departure a certain censor came to visit him and said: "It is

wonderful of you to keep up the fight when all the censors are gagged. It almost appears that the censorate's responsibility for criticising the government has now devolved upon the shoulders of a palace gatekeeper." Thereupon the censor handed him a package of two volumes of collected reports against those in authority that had accumulated in the office of the imperial censorate, saying: "I consign these data to your care." But Huiching obtained this news through his efficient spy system, and now he sent Sudan to overtake Cheng Shia on the way and search his baggage. With the two volumes of reports which contained all the names of people who had ever criticised the administration, Huiching, Dunquan, and Sudan proceeded systematically to prosecute these critics, one by one, and put them in jail. Huiching wanted to sentence Cheng Shia to death, but was prevented by the Emperor, who said: "Cheng Shia is not thinking of himself but of the country. I admire his courage and honesty. He should not be punished too severely." So Cheng Shia was permitted to go on to his place of exile.

A certain Huang, after Su Tungpo was dead, obtained a wonderful manuscript by Su Tungpo, which contains one of his famous sayings. "It is easier to stand poverty than success, easier to stand hard work than leisure, and easier to stand a pain than an itch. If a man can take success well, be happy in leisure, and stand an itch, he must indeed be a man of great principles." Every revolutionary party shows its best strength and unity before it comes to power, but after achieving power and weeding out opposition, it begins to crumble and split from internal strife. There is no question that the desire to overthrow someone in power brings out some of the best instincts in human nature and the power to rule others brings out the worst. As long as things were going well and everybody had a good job, Dunquan and Huiching and Tseng Pu were too busy to quarrel among themselves. As soon as Wang Anshih was out of power and things began to go wrong, the gang soon fell out with one another.

Long before this happened, the seeds of internal decay had been planted. Wang Anshih's son hated Huiching and Huiching hated Tseng Pu. Dunquan, who ran with the hare and hunted with the hounds, was going to have a very busy time. Wang Anshih was unfortunate in his one remaining son. Brilliant, erratic, and cruel, the son was responsible for many of the mischiefs of this administration.* Now that he was grown up, he had taken charge of the family's finances and his uncles could no longer have a free time with Wang Anshih's money. The arrogant son of an all-powerful premier, he

* He also suspected his wife and believed that his son was not his own. Wang persecuted his wife and she died very young.

thought he could achieve distinction by abominable manners. There is a story that once the neo-Confucianist philosopher Cheng Hao was having a conference with Wang Anshih at his home in the early days of the reform. The son appeared with dishevelled hair and bare feet and carrying a woman's scarf in his hand, walked right up to his father and asked what they were talking about.

"Why, I am discussing with Mr. Cheng the new measures which are being criticised by the other ministers," Wang replied.

The son plumped down on the mat where they were sitting and said with a laugh: "All we need to do is to cut off the heads of Han Chi and Fu Pi, and there will be no more opposition."

How much Wang was to suffer for his son we shall see soon. It was not a very pleasant household, for there were the two uncles who had all along disapproved of Wang's doings and who had particularly warned Wang against the double-crosser, Huiching. Confucius once said that one should "banish the lewd music of Cheng and keep away from the fawning flatterer." So one day when Wang Anshih was having a conference with Huiching and his brother Ankuo was playing a flute outside, the premier shouted to his brother: "Will you banish the lewd music of Cheng?" His brother shouted back: "Will you keep away from the fawning flatterer?"

Now the clique was worried about the future. Huiching, however, had not given up all hope, and he now saw his chance to rise to power in Wang's stead. There are certain people in this world who can turn on the tears at will, and Huiching and Dunquan went to the Emperor and "wept before him" in the most touching manner. The thought of what was going to happen to the country gave them great distress. With their gift of persuasion they were able to turn the Emperor back on his old course, and Huiching was made the prime minister.

Now the quarrelling really began. The trade dictator of the country, Lu Chiawen, was at this time impeached. Reports of the abuses and extortions of the trade bureau had of course reached the Emperor's ears, and he asked Wang Anshih, who was still in the capital, about the matter.

"Chiawen has always followed the official regulations rigorously, and therefore he has made many enemies. That is why he is being attacked," Wang Anshih replied.

"But," said the Emperor, "the government receives actually very little revenue from the excise tax. Besides, I don't like the idea of selling fruit and ice and coal. It is undignified for Our Imperial Government."

"Your Majesty," said Wang Anshih, "should not bother yourself about such trifles. These are things for the small officials to worry about. You should concern yourself only with the major policies of the government."

"Even so," replied the Emperor, "why is it that everybody at the court regards it as an oppressive measure?"

"Please give me the names of those persons," Wang Anshih replied.

We need not go into the details of this dirty squabble. What happened was that the trade dictator in his powerful position had begun to defy the board of finance and had insulted one Shüeh. Tseng Pu began to side with the latter and attacked the trade dictator, who was removed from office. Huiching and Tseng Pu were appointed to investigate his case. The two men had always heartily disliked each other, both being in a position relative to Wang Anshih similar to the position of Stalin and Trotsky under Lenin. In the course of the investigation Huiching began to attack Tseng Pu, and Tseng Pu began to attack Huiching, and Tseng Pu was overthrown.

This was only the beginning of the trouble. Huiching was left the sole head of the government. He not only took the occasion of Cheng Shia's case to dismiss Wang Anshih's brother Ankuo, but with the help of the ubiquitous Dunquan tried to implicate Wang Anshih himself in a local rebellion in Shantung, motivated by a prince. Wang Anshih was charged with complicity in the plot because he was a friend of one of the members of the rebellion. There was another cabinet minister, also nominally a premier, who could not get along with Huiching, and he hoped to get Wang Anshih back to the court to check Huiching. He sent a secret message to Wang Anshih, besides asking the Emperor to cashier Huiching and make Wang Anshih prime minister once more. The charge of rebellion was a serious one, and Wang made the trip from Nanking to the capital in seven days.

Wang Anshih had really nothing to do with the plotting of the rebellion, and he was again made premier in February 1075. It was a little awkward for Dunquan, who now lost no time in turning against Huiching and coming over to Wang Anshih's side. In order to bribe himself back into Wang's favour, he decided to sell out Huiching. Without the knowledge of Wang Anshih himself, Dunquan plotted with Wang's son to prosecute Huiching for extortion of 5,000,000 cash from a merchant at Huating; and the court had Huiching dismissed and appointed a magistrate. Dissatisfied with the easy escape of Huiching, Dunquan and the trade dictator, Lu Chiawen, reopened the prosecution and had Huiching detained in the prison of the imperial censorate awaiting trial.

One after another the members of the once powerful administration fell into disgrace. Dunquan was no exception. Still as energetic as ever, he had seen that Huiching had fallen and observed that the Emperor was growing tired of Wang Anshih himself. With his great genius for scheming, he thought the next men to serve would be Wang Anshih's son and son-in-law. He submitted a petition to the Emperor asking for

their promotion. But both Wang Anshih and the Emperor were tired of Dunquan's turn-coat tactics, and instead of being grateful, had him dismissed from the court. Dunquan began now to "lose faith in human nature"!

It was then that Huiching, while awaiting trial, dealt the final blow to Wang Anshih. He had kept all these years some private letters of Wang for blackmail purposes, and now he submitted these to the Emperor, accusing Wang of plotting behind the Emperor's back, for several of the letter contained the words: "Do not let His Majesty know about this." The Emperor was thoroughly sick of the whole mess, and now the revelation of these private letters made him really angry with Wang for the first time. Wang scolded his son severely for recklessly attacking Huiching without his knowledge. The son evidently did not know that Huiching had kept these letters and had a secret hold on his father. Regretting his rash step, and mortified at being scolded by his father, the son fell ill and soon developed a malignant ulcer on his back. Wang Anshih had always been a believer in Buddhism. He tried monks as well as doctors, but was not able to save his son's life. Fang's death was a deep blow to the old premier. Thoroughly disillusioned politically and about human life in general, he felt tired and begged to resign. The Emperor allowed him to retire from his office in October, 1076, but retaining some of his highest ranks. He was by no means in disgrace. Years later, he was seen in the Nanking countryside, riding his donkey and mumbling to himself.

Chapter Ten

THE TWO BROTHERS

SU TUNGPO left the capital with his family in July 1071, to take up his post in the beautiful city of Hangchow on China's south-east coast. For the next eight or nine years he served successively at Hangchow, Michow near Tsingtao, and Suchow in Kiangsu. This was the period of his great activity as a poet, and he wrote beautiful songs, songs of sadness, of humour, and of anger. Innocently and with a carefree, almost childish abandon he sang of what he felt in his heart, and in the end it was these songs of sadness and of anger against the ruling authorities that brought him into trouble.

His brother Tseyu was working as a poor college professor at Chenchow, then called Huaiyang, a city lying about seventy or eighty miles to the south-east of the capital and on the direct route of Su Tungpo's journey. As he always did later, he took this opportunity to spend as much time as he could with his brother and he stayed over seventy days. His son was twelve years old and he had a baby of one year, but his brother had a big family with many children. The quiet Tseyu just kept on producing children until he had three sons and seven daughters, whom Su Tungpo helped to marry off. Su Tungpo gladly agreed with his brother's plea to stay with them until the mid-autumn festival was over. Tseyu was very poor and they were living in a small low building, and Su Tungpo used to make fun of his brother's height.

> "Bending his head, he reads the classics and history,
> Straightening, his solid head strikes the roof."

Their old friend Chang Fangping, the retired elderly official, was living in the same city and they had frequent wine dinners together. Chang was a great drinker, his capacity being one hundred cups. According to himself, Tungpo had a much smaller capacity, but he felt that was no reason for his abstaining from wine. Ouyang Shiu, too, was a great drinker—but Chang Fangping was able to outdrink him, for when Chang began to drink, he did not say to his guests how many cups they were going to drink, but how many days. "Yet," says Su Tungpo, "I don't envy the great drinkers. I get drunk after a couple of cups, but don't I enjoy it just as much as you people do?"

Enjoying these months of leisure and family reunion, the two brothers often went boating on Willow Lake or walking in the suburbs of the city, discussing politics, domestic affairs, and their future. One day

when they were walking together in the country and discussing the political condition of the country, Tseyu gave his elder brother a piece of advice. Su Tungpo's one great fault was his habit of always speaking his mind before guests or in writing. The times were bad, and Tseyu knew his brother all too well. As he did later after Tungpo's release from confinement, Tseyu put his hand across his mouth, which was to tell him to keep still henceforth.

The two brothers were different in temperament and appearance. Tseyu was taller, and had a plumper, rounder face, with plenty of loose flesh round his cheeks, while Su Tungpo had a more muscular build, with the right proportion of bone and muscle. As far as we can judge from his portraits, he was about five feet seven or eight, had a big face with very prominent cheekbones and an imposing forehead, extremely long, brilliant eyes, a well-proportioned chin, and a beautiful, tapering, long, mandarin beard. The most revealing was his sensitive, mobile, full-powered lips. It was a face which flashed and glowed with human warmth, quickly changing its expression from hearty fun to a pensive look of thought-drunk fantasy.

"I know," said Su Tungpo to his brother, "that I am always careless of my speech. When I feel something is wrong, it is like finding a fly in my food, and I just have to spit it out."

"But you've got to know the people you are talking to," said his brother. "Some people you can trust, and some you cannot."

"That's my weakness," Su Tungpo agreed. "Perhaps I am too confiding in nature. Regardless of whomever I am talking with, I like to unburden my whole inside."

He told his brother that when he had sent the letter to the Emperor, he was truly afraid for his life. One of his friends, he said, was also worried. This was Chao Tuanyen,* who had come to visit him, and who, having passed the examinations in the same year with him, was often referred to as of the "same class", in the same sense as modern college graduates of the same year.

"But I told Chao I had passed the special examination under Emperor Jentsung," Su Tungpo went on, "and that I was at once regarded by the high officials as a friend. And the Emperor had accepted my advice. If I did not speak up now, who would? I told Chao that what I was really afraid of was that I might be killed. Chao remained silent and looked very grave. Then I said to him: 'It's all right. If the Emperor wants to kill me, I shall take it without regret. But there's one thing, I don't want to give you the pleasure of seeing me dead.' And we both laughed."

"Do you know something?" said the younger brother. "Do you notice that when one has a day of leisure, it seems twice as long as other days?

* Father of Chao Puchih, who became Tungpo's disciple.

Therefore, if a man can spend all his days in leisure during a life of seventy years, he will practically have lived one hundred and forty. That's an easy way of achieving long life."

While the two brothers always agreed in their political viewpoints, and had taken an identical stand in politics, their characters were really different. Tseyu was steady, practical, reserved, and given to few words; Tungpo was volatile, expansive, loquacious, naïve and inclined to disregard the consequences of his actions. Tseyu was considered dependable by his friends and associates, while Tungpo often frightened people by his outspoken genius and his fun and frivolity. Among his close associates, Tungpo bubbled, joked, and made atrocious puns. He gave the practical people of the world the nervous feeling that at any moment he might tell the truth—as if a thing's being true were enough reason for telling it!

In literary style, too, there was a difference—the difference suggested by that between Henry and William James, Tungpo being William and Tseyu being Henry. By all the indications of their separate genius, William James should have written novels and Henry James treatises on psychology and philosophy. Nevertheless, the world stands to gain by the injection of William James's brilliance and humour into the usually dull textbooks on psychology and philosophy, and by the solid structure of Henry James's thoughts and observations on human nature in the field of fiction. Tseyu had not half the brilliance of his brother, but his writings had enough substance and depth to make him a major writer on his own merit.

Tungpo knew that his brother's advice was right, and if he had had the quieter temperament of his younger brother, he would have followed it. But it was not a question of what he thought, but what he felt. It is difficult to avoid the term *ch'i* when we discuss the character of Su Tungpo, for every critic of the poet mentions this Mencian word when he comes to summarise Su Tungpo's character. *Ch'i* is a common word meaning gas, air, atmosphere, spirit, force, drive, stored-up anger. In Mencius it was a philosophic notion akin to Bergson's *élan vital*, the vital, impelling force in a human personality. What distinguished greater personalities from lesser people was often the difference in the energy, drive, dash, and vivacity of such men. In Mencian philosophy it means the great moral impetus, or, more simply, the noble spirit of man that makes for good and righteousness, a spirit inherent in all men, either nourished and grown strong or weakened as one gets along in life. In the case of Su Tungpo it was synonymous with a great spirit, the spirit of man raised to the *n*th degree, big and strong and impetuous, demanding expression by its own vitality. It was this something tremendous in his spirit, a big, booming force, that Su's critics and admirers constantly spoke of. Mencius felt this force in himself,

and described it as a spirit which, when sustained by justice and truth, fears nothing in the universe.

"What do you mean by the vital spirit?" one of the disciples of Mencius once asked.

"It is very difficult to describe," Mencius replied. "This spirit is tremendous and strong. If unobstructed and properly nourished, it will fill the whole universe. But it requires for its growth the steady pursuit of the sense of justice and truth. For without the sense of justice and truth, the spirit of man withers."

Given this vital, expansive spirit so characteristic of Su Tungpo's bubbling personality, he was constantly confronted with an ethical conflict, the duty to remain himself and keep up the fearless spirit born in man, and the other equally important duty of self-preservation. At different times in Su Tungpo's career the conflict became acute and usually the duty to remain himself won. I do not think it ever was very much of a struggle for Su Tungpo. The vitality of his great genius constantly demanded free and unfettered expression.

"Beautiful lines come and will not be denied.
How can I alter them as favours to friends?
The apes and wild geese cry on mountaintops,
Unaware of passers-by in the valley below."

So Tungpo spent the mid-autumn festival with his brother's family. It was a memorable mid-autumn, one which he recalled later with fond regret, and the only one which he could spend with his brother for the next six years. The parting was hard and Tseyu decided to accompany his brother as far as Yingchow (modern Fouyang), eighty miles down the river, where they again spent over two weeks together in the company of Ouyang Shiu. Still, the parting had to come. The night before Tungpo was to sail the two brothers spent together in the boat on the Ying River, sitting up all night discussing politics and writing poems to each other. The conclusion of their discussion on politics was summed up in a poem which Su Tungpo wrote and sent to Tseyu on his arrival at Hangchow.

"One can see that further opposition is useless,
And to repay the Emperor's favour is beyond one's power now."

A thought by Mencius came aptly to the brothers' minds: "To expect the highest of the ruler is to show the highest respect; to guide him with good advice and keep unprincipled men away from him is in accordance with duty; but if the ruler will not take the advice, he

becomes a thief to his country." In fact, they realised the full truth of what Mencius said in that whole passage:

> Goodness of heart alone is not enough to govern a country, and laws alone without good men cannot be properly enforced. . . . Therefore it is said that to reach a high position, one must go up a hill, and to go down a valley, one must follow the stream. In the governance of a nation, it would be foolhardy indeed to depart from the principles of the ancient kings. Therefore only the kind-hearted man should be appointed to a high office; for an unkind man to assume a high position is merely to reveal his wickedness to the world. When a ruler does not follow the ancient tradition, the ministers upset the law, the court has no respect for truth, and workmen no longer follow the squares and compasses; when educated people violate their own principles, and the common people violate the laws, it will be sheer good luck if such a country can continue to exist. Therefore, I say, it is not a national calamity when the city walls are not fortified and the army is not properly equipped; it is not a national calamity when the farms are not cultivated and there is no financial reserve; but when educated people lose their manners and morals and the common people are not educated, then destroyers of society will arise and the country will soon perish.

That night Su Tungpo wrote two poems which reveal his state of mind:

> "The western wind fills the boat sails
> And my parting tears drop into the Ying.
> I know it is useless to delay the parting;
> Let's make the best of the remaining hours.
> Three times have we been parted in this life,
> But this parting is the hardest of all.
> You are so much like our deceased father,
> Quiet, reticent, but inwardly strong.
> To have few words is evidence of the blessed man,
> And inward possession [*kai-shek*] gives wisdom and strength.
> Among all the scholars of the land,
> You were the first and quickest to resign.
> Alas, I have been like a crazy man,
> Walking straight toward an unfenced well,
> Like a drunkard who totters and tumbles,
> But luckily wakes before the fatal fall."

In the second poem he writes:

"For a short parting, I can bear it well,
But for a long parting, tears wet my breast.
When we do not see one another,
Distances great and small are all the same.
Without parting in this human life,
Who would guess how much one really cares?
When I first arrived at Huaiyang,
You tossed the children who clung to my gown.
You knew then the sorrow of parting
And asked me to stay until the autumn came.
The autumn wind has now arrived and gone,
But this remembrance will always remain.
You asked when I would be coming back,
And I said: 'It will be three years from now.'
So parting and reunion go in a cycle,
And joys and sorrows pursue our way.
Talking about this I draw a long sigh,
For my life is like a spikelet in the wind.
With many sorrows, my hair turns white early.
Say farewell to the 'Six-One Old Man.'"

"Six-One Old Man" is the literary title of Ouyang Shiu. The image of the reed flower being blown about by the wind is a fit symbol of Su Tungpo's life, for, from now on, he was to be the stormy petrel of politics and was never to remain in one place for more than three years till the end of his life.

Early at dawn the next morning the brothers said farewell. Su Tungpo's deep attachment to Tseyu was really extraordinary. Later, in a poem he wrote to one of his best friends, Li Chang, he said: "Alas, I do not have many brothers; in all the world there is only Tseyu." When his three-year term of office at Hangchow was over, he asked to be transferred to Michow, just because Tseyu was then serving at Tsinan, which was close by in the same province of Shantung.

Chapter Eleven

POETS, COURTESANS, AND MONKS

HANGCHOW, then as now, was a magic city, sometimes called "Paradise on Earth". It was to be almost like a second home to Su Tungpo, who wrote upon his arrival:

> "Come, take from time the leisure's share you will.
> Semi-retirement is retirement still.
> Where better could I settle and find a home
> Than such a place with peerless lake and hill?"

It was like a second home to him not only because of the beauty of its hills and forests and lake and sea and its busy streets and magnificent temples, but also because he was very popular with the people and spent some of his happiest days there. The people had the gaiety of the south, with its songs and its women, and they loved this young famous poet just as poet, with all his dash and verve and insouciance. His mind was inspired by the beauty of the place, and his heart was soothed by its pliant charm. Hangchow won his heart and he won the hearts of the people of Hangchow. During his term of office as an assistant magistrate he was not able to do much for the people, but for them it was enough that he was poet; when he was arrested, the common people of the city set up altars in the streets to pray for his release. After he left, the soft beauty and warmth of the south continued to haunt him in his dreams. He knew he would go back. When he went back eighteen years later as governor of the province, he did so much for the city that he left a permanent halo around his memory at Hangchow, and it claimed him as its own. Today, almost a thousand years after the poet lived and sang there, as you go on the lake or mount the top of the Kushan Island or the Phœnix Hill or have a sip at one of the lake-shore restaurants, you hear your host, who is a native of Hangchow, repeating frequently the name "Su Tungpo—Su Tungpo." If you point out that the poet came from Szechuen, he will not like it. Why, he thought Su was born here and never went anywhere else in China except to the capital!

Su Tungpo and West Lake make a perfect combination in mood, vagrant charm and love and laughter. The poetry of the region and the poetry of the poet found in each other a perfect expression. It is not an easy thing for a town to find its poet, who can discover the living, changing, complex individuality of the locality and in a verse of four lines compress and express the essence, the spirit, and the beauty of the region. In what is justly considered the best poem on West Lake, Su

compared it to the beauty of the days of Mencius; a "Miss West", who was just as beautiful when she was in a morning negligée, at home and familiar, as she was in full make-up. Both clear and rainy days added their charm to the immortal lake:

> "The light of water sparkles on a sunny day;
> And misty mountains lend excitement to the rain.
> I like to compare the West Lake to 'Miss West',
> Pretty in a gay dress, and pretty in simple again."

That was of course merely a figure of speech. "Miss West" looked at any time prettier with painted eyebrows than without them. It was Su Tungpo who embellished the fringes of the lake and gave them little touches with consummate art to make them natural. Today the Su Embankment stretching across the lake, the reflections in water of the enchanted isle, called "Three Ponds Reflecting the Same Moon", and the willow-fringed shore line bear testimony to his skill as a landscape architect. The West Lake of Hangchow and the "Little West Lake" of Yangchow are two places where the profound landscaping genius of China found perfect expression, where human art and skill improve but do not spoil. The artist first seized the natural design of the locality and saw it as a whole in its natural structure and composition. He merely added a few touches to tighten or smooth out, or to emphasise a contour here and there, and nothing more.

Su Tungpo arrived at Hangchow with his wife and children on November 28, 1071. The residences of the magistrates were situated on top of the Phœnix Hill, enjoying a full view of the Chientang River with its great fleet of seafaring ships on the south, and the West Lake, surrounded by cloud-capped mountains, dotted with temples and rich men's villas, on the north, while the waves of the bay lashed its shores on its east. There were two deputy magistrates at Hangchow besides the chief magistrate, for Hangchow was a big metropolitan city. The Su family occupied a building on the north side of the compound, which was the lake side. Immediately below the Phœnix Hill, and lying on a strip running north and south between West Lake and the Chientang Bay, was the city itself with its high walls, its bridges and canals. Mrs. Su was transported when she opened the window in the morning and saw beneath her the beautiful placid surface of the lake reflecting moving clouds and mountain-tops and villas. Before the day was well advanced, pleasure-seekers' boats filled the lake, and at night from their house on the hill she could hear the sound of flutes and songs. Certain sections of the city were more brilliantly illuminated than others, for there were fairs open every night until two or three in the morning. For the wife, particularly, there was an exciting variety of fancy foods, silks, embroideries, and fans, and for the children a great variety of

candies and toys and rotating lanterns. The candy sellers of Hangchow in Sung times resorted to strange advertising tactics to attract the attention of the public. There were candy sellers who sold their wares on the roulette principle, others who dressed as white-bearded old men, and those who wore masks and danced and sang. Some sold candy floss, some blew candies into shapes of different animals, and some made "sand sugar", which is like maple candy. There is a book about the city life of Hangchow written at the end of the Sung dynasty about a hundred years after Su Tungpo and a hundred years before Marco Polo visited it, giving fascinating details of the streets, canals, the lake, the foodstuffs and popular amusements, and providing a more detailed picture of the city life of those times than is made in Marco Polo's description of the city. While Marco Polo mentioned the hunting of princes and the bathing of princesses on the lake shore and the great merchant fleets that plied between Hangchow ("Kinsai") and Chuanchow ("Zayton"), he was not familiar with the names of the sweetmeats, fancy bakery, and popular amusements. The long and almost old-womanish lists of fancy delicatessen food recounted again and again on the pages of this book by Wu Tsemu can drive any reader crazy.

Su Tungpo half believed that he had lived here in his previous incarnation. This is recorded in his own poems and in the journals of contemporaries. One day he was visiting the Shoushing Temple, and the moment he entered the gate he felt the scene was very familiar. He told his companions that he knew there were ninety-two steps leading up to the Penance Hall, which they found to be correct. He could also describe to his companions the buildings, court-yards, and trees and rocks at the back of the temple. We do not have to believe these stories of reincarnation, but when society believes in ghosts or in reincarnation, there are always many such first-hand stories and, like ghost stories, they cannot be conclusively proved or disproved. In Su Tungpo's time the belief in a person's previous existence was general and such stories were not uncommon. There was a story about the previous existence of Chang Fangping. One day he was visiting a temple and told people that he remembered he had been abbot at this place in a previous life. Pointing upstairs, he said that he recalled being occupied in copying a certain Buddhist classic in the attic, a work which was left unfinished. He and his friends went upstairs and found indeed an unfinished manuscript in a handwriting bearing a striking resemblance to Chang's writing. He took up his brush and began to copy from where he was supposed to have left off in his previous life. There was also the story told of one of Su Tungpo's best friends. Huang Tingchien, the great poet, told people that in his previous life he had been a girl. He suffered from body odour in one of his armpits. One night when he was

magistrate at Fouchow, a little below Chungking in Szechuen, a girl appeared in his dream and said to him: "I am your previous self and I am buried in a certain place. The coffin is decayed and on the left side there is a big ant nest. Please have it removed for me." Huang did so, and the body odour in his left armpit disappeared thereafter.

As an assistant magistrate Su had no great responsibilities except presiding at court trials. This was something he heartily disliked, knowing that the people who had been arrested were chiefly those who had violated laws of the new regime, laws that he disapproved. Yet there was the law and he could not alter it. It is perhaps easiest to understand the mind and heart of Su Tungpo at this period by reading the poem he wrote on New Year's Eve when he had to try prisoners arrested for salt smuggling. The government monopoly had taken over the trade in salt, but the traders in the salt-producing area around Hangchow Bay refused to be driven out of business. The complete situation of salt smuggling was embodied in a letter by Su Tungpo to a cabinet minister. We are not concerned here with the objective conditions, but rather with the poet's attitude towards his fellow-men, for he saw no difference between himself and those on trial.

"On New Year's Eve, I should go home early,
But am by official duties detained.
With tears in my eyes I hold my brush,
And feel sorry for those in chains.
The poor are trying to make their living,
But fall into the clutches of the law.
I, too, cling to an official job,
And carry on against my wish for rest.
What difference is there between myself
And those more ignorant than I?
Who can set them free for the time being?
Silently I bow my head in shame."*

To Tseyu he wrote more intimately: "There are certain things which used to shame me, but of which I am no longer ashamed now. I sit facing the ragged prisoners and witness their flogging. When I talked with my superiors, my mouth said 'yes' but my heart said 'no'. What is the use of occupying a high position, while degrading one's character? My vital spirit has shrunk and withered, no longer what it used to be."

In another poem he spoke about the sufferings of the people under the *paochia* system, and described how the people screamed when they were whipped, and how even men's wives and children were put in jail.

* A facsimile of the original of this poem in the poet's own handwriting is reproduced in the beginning of this book.

It was the steady accumulation of lines like these which later, when he was arrested and tried, established his guilt as one trying to destroy confidence in the regime.

Meanwhile he enjoyed himself when and where he could. He tried to escape to nature, and nature was there at its best at his feet. His poetic spirit feasted upon the beauties of the neighbourhood. For not only the city itself and West Lake, but all the mountains within ten or fifteen miles of Hangchow became his favourite haunts. Starting from West Lake, the traveller could go in all directions, either following the north bank to the famous Lingyin Temple and reaching the top of Tienchu, or starting from the south bank, he could go to Kehling, stop over at Hupao, famous for its spring water, have his tea there, and return by following a beautiful winding mountain brook. In the city and the suburbs there were three hundred and sixty temples, usually on mountain-tops, where he could while away a whole afternoon chatting with the monks. An outing to these hills usually took a whole day, and he reached home late at twilight, when the street lights were already on. Passing the crowded and illuminated night fair at Shahotang, he would come home drowsy and half drunk, thinking up poetic lines and forgetting half of them.

"Suddenly rubbing my sleepy eyes,
I saw the brilliant lights of Hotang.
The milling people were clapping their hands,
And frolicking like young deer in the wilds.
I realised then that the simple joys of life
Could be enjoyed only by the simple men.
What is happiness in human life?
My ways, I fear, are all wrong."

Hangchow was gay and West Lake was enticing. The southern climate invited one to spend one's time outdoors in all seasons. In spring and autumn all Hangchow played on the lake. Even in winter on a snowy day there were pleasure-seekers who went out in boats to enjoy the landscape in snow. Particularly on great festivals, like the third day of the third moon, the fifth day of the fifth moon, the mid-autumn festival, the ninth day of the ninth moon and the birthday of a local god, the eleventh day of the second moon, the lake was filled with holiday-makers, and one had to engage a boat on the previous day. It was not necessary to bring food along because everything, including cups, saucers, spoons, and chopsticks, was provided by the boatmen. There were also boatmen who caught fish and sold them to people who could put them into the water again as a way of "accumulating

merit" or laying up treasure in heaven for having saved living creatures, according to Buddhist teachings. It was quite possible that one and the same fish could save three lives from Hell, if he were caught three times and loosed three times.

Su Tungpo participated fully in the life on the lake. There were two kinds of parties, families enjoying themselves and others with sing-song women. The lake was a place where the wives looked at the sing-song women with fear, and the sing-song women looked at the wives with envy. The sing-song women wished from the bottom of their hearts that they could be "liberated" and have homes of their own with growing children around them, like those wives. Su Tungpo sometimes went with his wife and children, and sometimes with his drinking official friends. He was versatile. He had at his command a pen which could produce such skilful, ornate, and technically excellent lines that they compelled admiration from fellow scholars, and he could write simple effortless lines that stuck in one's memory. With his family, he could sing:

> "The sound of chopping fish comes from the bow,
> And the fragrance of cooking rice issues from the stern."

With his fellow officials he wrote lines that delighted them in their gaiety:

> "The pleasure boats with oars of Wu have been painted,
> The dancing dress of new Yueh gauze is first being tried."

As soon as they arrived at the lake shore, the boatmen crowded around them and each asked them to take his boat. They would choose a small one, seating four or five people, or sometimes when there was a bigger party, one large enough to set a dinner-table in, and have food prepared by the boatwoman, who was usually an expert cook. These houseboats were elaborately carved and had gargoyles at the bows. On the lake there were other boats catering to the holiday-makers. Some boatmen sold chestnuts, melon seeds, stuffed lotus roots, sweetmeats, roast chicken, and fresh sea-food. Other boatwomen specialised in serving tea. Some boats carried entertainers who customarily drew up to the tourists' boats and entertained them with songs, light acrobatics, and provided slings and other shooting games.

Around them all lay the clear blue waters of the lake with a circumference of about ten miles, and in the distance beyond, clouds nestled against the mountain-tops, half concealing and half revealing them. The clouds gave variety to the mountains by lending them a changing shape, and the mountains housed the clouds by providing them a home

of rest. Sometimes the air felt as if it were going to snow, and a low haze covered the foothills. Behind the haze, the pleasure-seekers could see here and there glimpses of pagodas and towers and catch the faint outlines of the distant hills. Or on a sunny day, the water was so clear they could count the fish in the water. In two delightful lines Su Tungpo gave an impressionistic colour picture of the boatmen's yellow turbans moving against the background of the green hills.

"Against the hills yellows turbans bob on gargoyle-head boats.
Along the streets blue smoke rises from sparrow-tail lamps."

Going ashore towards the mountains, they could hear the birds calling to one another in the deserted woods. A lover of travel, Su often roamed alone over the mountains, and scribbled poems on the rocks at the highest mountain-tops or near the head streams seldom visited by other tourists. He became a great friend of the monks in the temples, which he frequently visited. An old monk told the story after Su Tungpo's death that when he was a young boy serving at Shoushing Temple, he used to see Su come up the hill on foot alone on a summer day. There he would borrow a monk's couch and move it to a selected place under the near-by bamboo grove. Totally devoid of any sense of official dignity, he took off his jacket and shirt and slept bare-backed on the couch during an afternoon. The young acolyte peeped at the great scholar from a respectful distance, and saw something that nobody had been privileged to see. He saw, or thought he saw, seven black moles on the poet's back, arranged like the constellation of the Dipper. And that, the old monk said, was an evidence that he was a spirit sent down from the heavenly sphere to live merely as a temporary guest in this human world.

In a poem which he sent to Chao Tuanyen after he left Hangchow, Su Tungpo made a good summary of his habit of travel. Chao was going then to Hangchow as a commissioner, and Su Tungpo advised him what to do.

"The landscape of West Lake tops the world.
Tourists of all classes, intelligent and otherwise,
Find and appreciate each what he wants.
But who is there that can comprehend the whole?
Alas, in my stupid honesty,
I have long been left behind by the world.
I gave myself completely to the joys of hills and water—
Is it not all determined by God's Will?

Around the three hundred sixty temples,
I roamed throughout the year.
I knew the beauty of each particular spot,
Felt it in my heart but could not say it in my mouth.
Even now in my sweet sleep,
Its charm and beauty remain in my eyes and ears.
Now you come as a commissioner;
Your official pomp will insult the clouds and haze.
How can the clear streams and the purple cliffs
Reveal their beauties to you?
Why not dismiss your retinue
And borrow a couch from the monk,
Read the poems I inscribed on the rocks,
And let the cool mountain air soothe your troubled soul?
Carry a cane and go where you like,
And stop wherever seems to you best.
You'll find some ancient fishermen
Somewhere among the reeds. Talk with them,
And if they say wise things to you,
Buy fish from them and argue not about the price."

It seems from the literary records that Su Tungpo's preoccupation at Hangchow was with religion and women, or rather with monks and courtesans, and the two are more closely related than we think. In Su Tungpo the life of the senses and the life of the spirit were one, co-existing without conflict in a poetic-philosophical view of human life. With his poetry, he loved this life too passionately to become an ascetic or a monk, and with his philosophy, he was too wise to give himself up to the "devil". He could no more renounce women and song and pork and wine than he could renounce the blue waters and the purple mountain-sides, and at the same time he was far too profound to put on the garb of a shallow, cynical fop.

The best illustration of the attitude of the young and fun-loving poet is the story of how he tried to bring an austere priest and a courtesan together. Abbot Tatung was a severe old man of saintly character, and it was said that people who wanted to see him in his retreat had to take a ceremonial bath. Women were of course forbidden his chamber. Su Tungpo was one day visiting the temple with a party in the company of a show-girl. Knowing the priest's habits, the party stopped outside. Su knew the old priest well and felt a devilish urge to bring the woman in and break his monastic rules. When he went in with the show-girl to pay their respects to the old abbot, the latter was visibly displeased at the young man's impudence. Su said he would write a song of apology and make the show-girl Miaochi sing

it, if the abbot would permit her to borrow the clapper used for beating time during the singing of litany. So Tungpo gave the girl these lines to sing:

"Holy Father, I do not know what to say,
Being not conversant with your way.
May I borrow the door rapper and litany clapper?
Kindly take this in a spirit of fun.
A maiden's stolen glance should cast no blemish,
Please, Your Reverence, be not so squeamish.
For if you were my age, I might be all your rage.
As it is, no harm is done."

It was strictly a one-man comic opera, and even the austere Tatung laughed. Su Tungpo came out with the girl and boasted to the others that they had learned a great "lesson in the mysteries".

It is not possible to separate monks from women, at least not in Chinese literature. The stories of monks are often stories of women and the stories of women are often stories of monks. For East and West, there is a secret grudge among lay people against a special class of celibates who announce to the world that they have no sex life and are different from the generality of mankind, and it is this secret grudge against celibates that underlies the popularity of the stories of Boccaccio. Besides, a monk's affairs with women make a better story than a business-man's.

As a judge, Su Tungpo had once to adjudicate a case involving a monk. There was a monastic brother at the Lingyin Temple, by the name of Liaojan, who frequented the red-light district and fell madly in love with a girl named Shiunu. In time he spent all his money and was reduced to rags, and Shiunu refused to see him any more. One night in a drunken fit he went to call on the girl again, and being refused admittance, he forced his way in, beat the girl, and killed her. The monk was therefore being tried for murder. In examining him the officers found on his arm a tattooed couplet: "May we be born together in Paradise, and not suffer the love pangs of this life!" After the completion of the investigation the evidence was submitted to Su Tungpo. Su could not resist writing the sentence in the form of a light verse:

"Away from here, you bald-head daisy!
In vain you took the vow of celibacy,
Reduced yourself to this ragged shape
By your unmonkish profligacy.
By your cruel fists you killed your love.

What's illusion now, and what reality?
Your arm bears witness to love's longing,
This time you shall pay love's penalty."

The monk was sent to the execution ground and beheaded. Comic poems, such as the two above, written in the language of the day, quickly passed from mouth to mouth and added to the current gossip about this eccentric genius.

Among such stories there was a small collection of tales about Su Tungpo and his friend the pleasure-loving monk Foyin. At this period Su Tungpo had not taken up Buddhism seriously; it was only after he was forty, during his period at Huangchow, that he began an intensive study of Buddhist philosophy. But some of the monks of Hangchow became his best friends, and in time he gathered more and more friends among the monks of Chinkiang, Nanking, and Lushan as well. Among them, two at least, Huichin and Tsanliao, were poets and scholars worthy of respect. From the literary records, Foyin was not important. But he cut a romantic figure, and in popular literature he, rather than Tsanliao, became most frequently talked about as the friend of Su Tungpo.

Foyin had never intended to be a monk. Furthermore, he came from a wealthy family. According to one curious story, he was born of the same mother as Leeding. Apparently the woman was a loose character and had married three times, having three sons by three different husbands—quite a record in those days. When the Emperor gave an audience to Buddhist believers as a gesture towards Buddhism, Su Tungpo presented this man at court. Foyin tried to impress the Emperor with his ardent conviction in the Buddhist faith. The Emperor looked at him and saw a tall, handsome man with an unusual face, and graciously said that he would be glad to give a monetary grant, the so-called *tutieh*, to endow him in a monastery if he would join the church. Finding himself in a quandary, he could not but accept the Emperor's suggestion, and thus he had to enter a religious order. While he was living in Hangchow, legend says he used to travel with a whole retinue of servants and pack-mules, in a far from ascetic way of life.

Foyin was quite a wit. One of the better stories with a philosophic point told about these two men runs as follows. Su Tungpo was one day visiting a temple with Foyin. Entering the front temple, they saw two fierce-looking giant idols who were conceived as conquerors of the evil spirits and were placed there to guard the entrance.

"Of these two buddhas," asked Su Tungpo, "which is the more important?"

"The one who has a big fist, of course," replied Foyin.

Going into the inner temple, they saw the image of the Goddess of Mercy holding a rosary in her hand.

"Since the Goddess of Mercy is a buddha herself, what is she doing there telling the beads?" asked Su Tungpo.

"Oh," replied Foyin. "she is only praying to buddha like all the others."

"But which buddha?" asked Su Tungpo again.

"Why, the buddha, the Goddess of Mercy herself."

"Now what's the meaning of that? She is the Goddess of Mercy; why does she pray to herself?"

"Well," said Foyin, "you know it's always troublesome to beg from others—it is always easier to depend on oneself."*

They saw then a Buddhist prayer-book lying open on the altar. Su Tungpo found that a prayer read thus:

"A curse upon all poisons!
By the help of the Goddess of Mercy,
May those who use poison on others
Take the poison themselves."

"This is utterly unreasonable," said Su Tungpo. "Buddha is kind. How can she be expected to avert trouble from one person in order to give it to another? If that is so, then Buddha is not Love."

Asking permission to have the prayer corrected, he took up a brush and crossed out some of the lines to make it read:

"A curse upon all poisons!
By the help of the Goddess of Mercy,
May both the users of poison
And the intended victims be spared."

Many of the stories of clever repartee between Su Tungpo and Foyin were based on puns and are untranslatable. There is, however, the following.

The word "bird" had a dirty meaning in Chinese slang, and Su Tungpo thought to make fun of his friend with it. "The ancient poets," said Su Tungpo, "often placed *monks* opposite *birds* in a couplet. For instance, there is a couplet: 'Hearing a *bird* pecking at a tree, I thought it was a *monk* knocking at the door.' Again, another couplet says: '*Birds* perch on trees beside the pond, and a *monk* knocks at the gate under the moon.' I always admire the wisdom of the ancient poets in placing monks against birds."

"That is why," said Foyin, "I, as a monk, am sitting opposite you."

* The original word *chiu* means both "to beg" and "to depend."

These stories always show the monk as outwitting the poet. I have a suspicion that Foyin himself was the author of the stories.

The institution of courtesans in China dated back, according to known records, to Kuan Chung in the seventh century B.C., who regularised it in order to entertain soldiers. Even in Su Tungpo's time, there were state-owned courtesans, who continued to be known as "barracks entertainers", and others who were independent But a peculiar tradition had developed so that the higher-class courtesans, as distinguished from the common prostitutes, made their mark on literary history, some by being poets themselves, and some by being closely associated with the lives of the literary men. As a class, they were closely connected with the history of song and music and therefore with the changing forms of poetry. After a period of servile imitation at the hands of the scholars, when poetry had become no more than a string of outworn clichés, it was always the courtesans who introduced new forms and gave poetry a new lease of life. Music and song were their special domain. Inasmuch as the playing of musical instruments and singing were deprecated among family girls, the songs also tended to concentrate almost entirely on love and passion, which in turn was considered detrimental to the virtue of adolescent girls. The result was, the tradition of music and dance was carried through the centuries almost entirely by the courtesans.

In the life of the times of Su Tungpo, mixing with courtesans at wine dinners and official functions was a part of an official's life. No more opprobrium was attached to it than to the presence of Aspasia at men's parties in the time of Socrates. The courtesans were entertainers who poured wine for the guests and sang for the company. Many of them were gifted, and those who understood reading and writing and were accomplished in music and song were very much sought after by the scholars. Because women were excluded from the social parties of men, the desire for female company made the men seek gaiety in the company of the professional artists. Sometimes the flirtations were innocent, carried on in the teasing, suggestive atmosphere of a modern night-club, with the courtesans singing light, sophisticated, and genuine or fake songs of love, and making concealed or brazen insinuations about sex. The higher-class courtesans resembled the modern night-club artist also in that they had complete freedom to choose their men friends, and some had fabulous establishments of their own. Emperor Huitsung was known to leave his palace and woo such a courtesan at her home. However, the attitude towards courtesans was much more lax than it is today. The poets of Manhattan do not write love poems to chorus girls, at least do not publish them, but the poets of Hangchow did. The practice of writing poems in honour of certain

courtesans was quite common, even among highly respected gentlemen. In this period we find that not only Han Chi and Ouyang Shiu left poems about courtesans, but even the austere premiers Fan Chungyen and Szema Kuang wrote this type of sentimental poetry. The great patriot general, Yo Fei, also wrote a poem concerning female singers at a certain dinner.

Only the strict, puritanical neo-Confucianists, whose code of life was summed up in the one word *ching* ("reverence", an equivalent of "fear of God"), highly disapproved. They had a more stringent code of morals, and a greater respect for the devil. Cheng Yi, who was Su Tungpo's political enemy, used to warn Emperor Tsehtsung, when the latter was only a child of twelve, about the lascivious charm of women. The young child was so sick of such warnings that when he reached eighteen, one woman alone convinced him that she was right and the puritan was wrong. Once one of Cheng Yi's disciples wrote two lines on his "dreaming soul going out of bounds" and visiting a woman in his sleep, and Cheng Yi cried in horror: "Devil's talk! Devil's talk!" Chu Shi, the great neo-Confucianist of the twelfth century, had the same horror of the seductive power of women. Once a good man, Hu Chuan, wrote two lines on the occasion of his pardon after ten years of exile: "For once let me get drunk to celebrate the pardon, with a girl's sweet dimpled face by my side." Chu Shi was moved to express himself as follows:

> "Despite ten years' exile and tribulation,
> The sight of a dimple caught him unaware.
> Nothing should be more feared than this damnation.
> How many lives are wrecked by woman's snare!"

In contrast, Su Tungpo took a more humorous view of sex. In his *Journal* he wrote, later, at Huangchow:

> "Yesterday I went to Ankuo Temple with chief magistrate Tang Chuntsai and deputy magistrate Chang Kungkwei, and in the conversation we talked about the art of prolonging life. I said: 'All is easy except continence.' Mr. Chang said: 'Su Wu was a great man. He went to Mongolia, lived like a Mongolian, and went through all hardships without a grumble. He was quite a philosopher, wasn't he? Yet he could not help marrying a Mongolian woman and having children by her. It must be, therefore, more difficult to practice continence even in marriage. This thing is really difficult to overcome.' We all laughed at the remark. I am putting this down because there is a lot of sense in it."

All his life Su Tungpo took part at courtesans' dinners, and nine times out of ten had to write poems on shawls or fans by request of the entertainers.

> "Oh, hush the night, each minute an ounce of gold,
> While faintly floats the music of flute and song.
> So fragrant the air, so cool the moonlit courtyard,
> While darkly glides the silent night along."

Su wrote many sentimental poems about women, but he never wrote erotic poetry, as his friend Huang Tingchien did.

The Sung courtesans had popularised a new form of poetry, the *tse,* and Su Tungpo mastered it and transformed it from a metre for sentimental poetry of the lovelorn into a vehicle fit to express any thought or sentiment in his breast. One of his best *tse* was on the "Red Cliff", whose theme was the passing of great ancient warriors. Li Po and Tu Fu had sung three centuries earlier, and by their genius had made the Tang quatrain and double quatrain the regular verse patterns for a distinguished host of imitators. But these quatrain forms, uniformly of five or seven words to the line, with the inevitable two couplets in the middle, had become stereotyped. Every poet tried to evolve a new style. But the last nuance in observation of a waterfall or an egret or the shadows of willow trees had been discovered, and somehow the richness and emotional intensity of the Tang poets were gone. What was more serious, even poetic diction had become a repetition of hackneyed metaphors. Some of them were bad in themselves to begin with. Su Tungpo wrote in a preface to one of his poems on snow that he was determined not to use the word salt. After all, snow was a better word. The themes of Tang poetry had been overplayed, and the language too often deliberately harked back to lines by other poets, giving a secret delight to the learned reader who knew where that particular twist of thought and expression came from. It was the tracing of the expressions to their obscure sources that gave the greatest opportunity for the "commentators" to display their pedantry. As a rule, writers of the so-called commentaries on collected poems did not consider it part of their duty to elucidate the meaning or judge the quality of the poem, but contented themselves with pointing out the source of a particular expression.

The liberation of poetry from decadent inertia always came from the growth of a new form of poems popularised by the courtesans. The language was fresh and new, the Sung *tse* was closer to the vernacular than Tang poems, and the later Yuan drama was still closer to the vernacular than Sung *tse*. The *tse* was nothing but a song written to a given piece of music. People did not "write" *tse,* they "filled in"

the words to a known melody. Instead of lines of a uniform number of syllables of Tang "regulated verse", there was a rich variety of long and short lines, strictly conforming to the requirements of the song.

In the time of Su Tungpo this new form of poetry was at the height of its popularity. Through Su Tungpo, Chin Kuan, Huang Tingchien and others of his generation, like Yen Chitao and Chou Pangyen, it became *the* poetry of the dynasty. Su Tungpo, discovered it in Hangchow, fell it love with it, and from his second year in Hangchow began to write a great number of verses in the metres of the songs. But the *tse* had been strictly a form for sentimental love verse. Such poems invariably sang of "fragrant perspiration", "gauze curtains", "disordered hair", the "spring night", "warm jade", "sloping shoulders", a "willowy waist", "tapering fingers", etc. When and where such sentimental poetry bordered on the licentious depended entirely on the poet's handling of the material. The difference between passion and love is as difficult to establish in poetry as in real life. Invariably also, like modern cabaret artists, the poets preferred to sing of heartbreak and the pangs of love and the longing of the unrequited lover. They sang of a woman secluded in her chamber, sadly longing for the absent one, fondling her belt silently, or keeping lone company with the candlelight. In fact, the whole feminine appeal was built around woman's helplessness, her sallow cheeks, her silent tears, her *ennui*, insomnia, "broken intestines", lost appetite, general lassitude, and every form of physical and mental misery, which, like poverty, sounds poetic. It would seem the word *suyung*, "lassitude", was almost voluptuous. Su Tungpo not only became one of the acknowledged few great *tse* masters of this dynasty; it was to his credit that he freed it, in his own practise at least, from sentimental drivel.

There is no record that Su Tungpo became enamoured of any of the courtesans. He enjoyed the gay parties and "fooled around" with women enough to be a "good fellow", not enough to take a mistress. Two of the women were especially close to the poet. Chintsao, a gifted courtesan, was persuaded by him to free herself and become a nun. Chaoyun, who became later his concubine, was then a girl of twelve. We shall come to her later.

Today there is a Sung rubbing of a stone inscription in the handwriting of Su Tungpo which records a poem written by a courtesan. It is called "The Dark Clouds Script" from the first words of a poem. It tells the story that once a state-owned courtesan, Chou Shao, was present at a dinner. She used to hold tea contests with the great tea connoisseur and calligraphist Tsai Shiang, and won them. When Su Sung passed through the town, the chief magistrate Chen Shiang gave him a party with Chou Shao present. During the party Miss Chou

begged to be released from her profession, and the guest asked her to write a quatrain. The courtesan wrote the following, comparing herself to a caged parrot (the "snow-dress maiden").

> "See her turn her head and her sad feathers preen,
> Dreaming of her old nest where a home had been.
> Open the cage and set the snow-dress maiden free!
> She will say her whole life, 'Blessed be Kuanyin!' "

The other scholars also wrote poems about the occasion. Su Tungpo adds that the woman was then wearing white in mourning. Everybody was touched and she was released.

An official life such as this demanded a great deal of trust and understanding from the wives of the officials. However, the problem of being a good wife is principally the problem of finding a good husband, and conversely the problem of being a good husband is principally the problem of finding a good wife. Having a good wife is the best guarantee against a husband's going wrong. Mrs. Su knew she had married a popular poet and a genius, and she certainly did not try to compete with him in literary honours. She had made up her mind that her best job was to be a wife, a good one. She had now two babies of her own, and as wife of a deputy-magistrate she had a comfortable home and enjoyed certain social honours. She was still very young, between twenty-three and twenty-five. Her husband was brilliant, big-hearted, fun-loving, and—what a scholar! But he had so many admirers, men *and* women! Did she not see those women on the south side of the compound and those dinners at Wanghulou (Lakeview House) and Yumeitang? The new chief magistrate, Chen Shiang, a good scholar who arrived the year after them, certainly attended to a magistrate's social duties well, and the state courtesans were at their beck and call. There were Chou (Pin) and Lu (Shaoching), not really desirable company for her husband. The courtesans were accomplished, could sing and play stringed instruments, and some of them could write verse. She herself could not versify, but she understood these songs. They were growing familiar to her, for she heard her husband humming them. She would die of shame to sing them, for no respectable lady would. She felt really much more comfortable when her husband went to see the bare-footed monks, Huichin, Pientsai, and others, those old men with their adorable long beards.

It took her some years to know the depth of his character, a character with so many facets, so easy-going and yet at times so intense and strong-willed. She had learned by now one thing, that he could not be influenced, and certainly there was no way of arguing with him. On

the other hand, if he wrote poems to courtesans, what of it? He was expected to. He had not taken fancy to any of the professional artists, and she had heard he had even converted one of the most famous courtesans, Chintsao, to become a nun. Chintsao had really remarkable intelligence, and from poetry to religion was only a short step. He really should not have quoted Po Chuyi's lines about the end of a courtesan's life to Chintsao. With her good sense and tact, Mrs. Su was not going to push her husband into a courtesan's lap the wrong way. Besides, she knew her husband was a man not to be stopped by wife or emperor. She did the smart thing—she trusted him.

As daughter of a *chinshih* scholar, she could read and write, but she was not an "intellectual". Instead she cooked the Meichow dishes and ginger tea that he loved. And how he needed attention when he was ill! If poet husbands sometimes were unusual, that was their privilege. The husband knew there were books to be read, thousands of them, and the wife knew there was a home to be built, children to be brought up, a life to be lived. For that, she was willing to put up with his famous snore in bed—especially when he was drunk.

Apart from that, he was certainly a curious man for a bedfellow. She must not disturb him in bed when she lay awake listening to his snoring. Before he fell asleep, he was fussy about tucking himself in properly. He would turn about and arrange his body and limbs and pat the sheet until he was well-placed and nice and cosy. If any part of his body was stiff or itchy, he would gently rub and massage it. But after that, order was established. He was going to sleep. He closed his eyes and "listened" to his respiration, making sure that it was slow and even. "And then I lie perfectly still," he said to himself. "Even when some part of my body itches, I do not make the slightest move, but overcome it by will-power and concentration. Thus, after a short while, I feel relaxed and comfortable down to the toes. A state of drowsiness sets in and I fall into sound sleep."

This really had something to do with religion, Su claims. The freedom of the soul does depend so much upon the freedom of the body. Unless one controls one's mind and body, one cannot control one's soul. This was to be a great part of Su Tungpo's occupation. After describing his way of sleeping to his two disciples, he continued: "Try my method, and you will find how good it is, but don't tell it to everybody. Remember this, wisdom comes from self-control. The awakening of the divine spark in men and knowledge of buddhahood begin with self-discipline. No one who does not achieve control of his mind can ever understand God."

Later Mrs. Su was to discover more variations of her husband's habits at night and dawn. Combing his hair with a fine comb and taking a bath were among the important occupations of the poet's life. For

if there was one man in that period thoroughly devoted to speculation about the body and its internal functions and the study of medicinal herbs and teas, it was Su Tungpo.

She was sane and she was steady, which a poet usually is not. Her husband was often impatient, despondent, and moody. In contrast, Mrs. Su once said on a moonlight night in spring: "I like the spring moon much better. The autumn moon makes one too sad, while the spring moon makes everybody happy and contented." A few years later, at Michow, when they were very poor and Su Tungpo was greatly angered at the introduction of the new income tax, he was once annoyed by his children tugging at his gown and bothering him.

"The children are so silly," said Su.

"You are the silly one," replied his wife. "What good will it do you to sit around and brood the whole day? Come, I will make you a drink."

In a poem recording this incident, the poet said that he felt ashamed of himself, and the wife began to clean the cups and prepare warm wine for him. This, of course, made him very happy and he said that she was much better than the wife of the poet Liu Ling, who asked her husband not to drink.

But there was one corner of Su's heart, hidden from most, which Mrs. Su must have known about. That was his first love for his cousin, who to us, unfortunately, is nameless. Being the confiding soul he always was, Su Tungpo must have told his wife about it. His deep affection for the cousin afterwards lay buried in two poems that passed unnoticed by all students of the poet's works.

Su Tungpo did not stay all the time at Hangchow but took frequent trips south-west, west, and north. From November 1073 to March 1074, he went up to the neighbourhood of Shanghai, Kiashing, Changchow, and Chinkiang, which in the Sung dynasty were parts of the province of Chekiang. His cousin-sister was now married to Liu Chungyuan and living in the neighbourhood of Chinkiang. He remained in his cousin's home for three months, and although he versified a tremendous lot on this trip and wrote and travelled constantly in the company of his cousin's father-in-law, Liu Chin, he never once mentioned his cousin's husband or wrote a poem to him. He also wrote a poem about a family dinner at his cousin's home, and two poems on calligraphy to his cousin's two boys when they came to ask for his autograph. Su Tungpo had great respect for Liu Chin as a poet and as a calligraphist, and also thought a lot of his cousin's children. But the complete silence about the cousin's husband during this trip is hard to explain.

Two poems, written during this trip, suggest this special relationship with his cousin. One was a poem he wrote to Tiao Yueh, and the subject was declared to be reminiscent of a certain flower he had seen at the palace. It contained the following two lines:

"Tired of seeking new beauties in the company of youth,
I sit facing the palace flower and recognise its old fragrance."

He was not exactly sitting opposite that flower at that moment, for he was not in the palace. He was obviously describing himself when he said he was tired of youth's company; and as "flower" was the regular symbol for woman, the "old fragrance" could be a reference to an old love.

The reference is clearer in another poem, one he wrote to the chief magistrate of Hangchow, Chen Shiang. The subject stated was that by returning so late in spring he had missed the flowering season of the peony. (Titles of poems indicating the occasions were sometimes quite long.) It was true that by the time of his return to Hangchow the peony season would be over. Nevertheless, the references to a girl now married and become a mother are unmistakable, and there was no reason why in a poem on peonies he should make two clear references to belated courtship. In order to understand the references, it must be explained that there was a girl in the ninth century who wrote the following poem at the age of fifteen:

"Spare not, my friend, the gold-embroidered gown,
Miss not the years of youth—enjoy them now.
Come, pluck the flower while to pluck is good,
Wait not until you pluck the empty bough."

To "pluck the empty bough" was therefore to miss the courtship of youth. Furthermore, Tu Mu, a contemporary of this girl, wrote as follows:

"It is my fault I should have missed the spring,
Yet shall I fret because the flowers are gone?
Late storms have blown the petals far away,
On leafy bending boughs rich fruits are borne."

Ever since Tu Mu wrote this poem: "On leafy bending boughs rich fruits are borne" has become a common expression for a woman become a mother of many children, particularly because in the Chinese language the same word (*tse*) is used for "fruit" and "sons".

In his poem, where the thoughts seem to be disconnected, Su Tungpo

specially used the phrases, the *gold-embroidered gown,* the *leafy boughs bearing fruit* and *plucking an empty bough.*

"I'm ashamed to come home for I missed the spring bloom;
See the generous green of the fruit-laden tree.
If I'm lonely and changed, think kindly of my age;
With your poems, I have passed this year's spring happily.
I am now no more drunk in the morn in jade halls;
But in gold-braid dress celebrate still the bare bough.
From now on every year let us meet without fail,
While I learn the fine art of the spade and the plough."

The song was neither appropriate to Chen Shiang nor to the peony, and on close examination bears no relation to the subject. A fruit-laden bough is hardly appropriate for the peony. There was no reason why he should ask Chen Shiang to "think kindly" (*lien*) of his age. The pledge to see each other "from now on" was written for parting, not for one returning to see a colleague; and Su certainly had no idea of settling on a farm to live as Chen's neighbour. Above all, the reference to belated courtship of a mother of children must be considered strange, if it was really meant for Chen Shiang. It is true that in a Tang poem of this kind, where the middle two pairs are always couplets with nouns, adjectives, etc., in one line balanced by the same class of word in the other, sometimes such pairs in the middle are decorations for the verse, with the first and last couplets bearing the poetic message; nevertheless, a skilfully constructed Tang poem should have complete unity. Rarely would Su Tungpo write such a badly constructed poem with lines made merely to fill a vacuum. On the other hand, read as a message composed for his cousin, the poem has a unified thought and theme. The first line says he was ashamed to come home because he had missed the spring bloom, or the girl's youth. The second line makes a clear reference to her having children now. The third line asks for her sympathy and expresses his feeling of loneliness. The fourth line expresses the thought that he has had a happy spring this year, in her company. The third couplet then clearly expresses his regret at the belated courtship. The fourth couplet becomes easily intelligible. Su Tungpo at this time wrote a poem expressing his desire to settle at Changchow, which was not very far from the Lius' home. He did carry out his plans to buy a house and farm at Changchow, and it was here that he died.

I know that admirers of Su Tungpo will take issue with me for thus suggesting that he had a secret love for his cousin. Whether it casts a slur on his character or not, however, is a matter of opinion. Su Tungpo would have been condemned by the neo-Confucianists if it

had been true and known. But cousins have often fallen in love since time began. Su Tungpo did not and could not defy the conventions by marrying his first cousin on the father's side who bore the same clan name, Su.

One poem which he scribbled on the wall of the monastery at Chiao-shan, during the trip to Chinkiang, is of particular interest to Western readers. Su Tungpo should have known of the Cinderella story, with the step-mother, step-sisters, missing slipper and all, which was contained in the writings of a ninth-century Chinese author.* But as far as I know, he was the first to put in writing the story of how an old man arranged his beard when he went to bed.

In a simple rhyme he told of a man with a long beard who never gave a thought of how he should arrange his beard in bed. One day someone asked him where he put his beard during sleep. That night in bed he became conscious of his beard. He first put it outside his quilt and then inside, and then outside again, and lost sleep the whole night. The next morning he got so restless that he thought the best way would be to cut it off. From the text of the poem, this seems to be a popular tale, not an invention of the poet himself.

It may be appropriate to mention here that Su was the originator of the parable of "The Blind Man's Idea of the Sun", written at Michow. Albert Einstein somewhere quoted this parable to illustrate the average man's idea of the theory of relativity.

> "There was a man born blind. He had never seen the sun and asked about it of people who could see. Someone told him: 'The sun's shape is like a brass tray.' The blind man struck the brass tray and heard its sound. Later, when he heard the sound of a bell, he thought it was the sun. Again someone told him: 'The sunlight is like that of a candle,' and the blind man felt the candle, and thought that was the sun's shape. Later he felt a [big] key and thought it was a sun. The sun is different from a bell or a key, but the blind man cannot tell their difference because he has never seen it. The truth (*Tao*) is harder to see than the sun, and when people do not know it they are exactly like the blind man. Even if you do your best to explain by analogies and examples, it still appears like the analogy of the brass tray and the candle. From what is said of the brass tray, one imagines a bell, and from what is said about a candle, one imagines a key. In this way, one gets ever further and further away from the truth. Those who speak about *Tao* sometimes give it a name according to what they happen to see, or imagine what it is like without seeing it. These are mistakes in the effort to understand *Tao*."

* See *Wisdom of China and India*, page 940.

Curiously, this fable was used as testimony at his court trial. The charge was that he was ridiculing the scholars of the time for following blindly the commentaries of Wang Anshih on the classics.

Su Tungpo was too complex a character, too many-sided, to be understood easily. While he was too good a philosopher to be a puritan, he was also too good a Confucianist to be just a drunk. He understood life too well and valued it too highly just to squander it with wine and women. He was a poet of nature, with that peculiar wholesome mystic view of life which is always associated with a deep and true understanding of nature. No one, I believe, can live in close touch with nature and its seasons, its snows and rains, its hills and dales, receiving its healing powers, and have a warped mind or a warped view of life.

On the ninth day of the ninth moon, 1073, he refused to go to the drinking parties usually held on such a festival. Running away from his friends, he took a boat all by himself. Getting up before dawn, as was the custom on this festival, he went out to the lake and called on the two priests at Kushan. That night he sat alone in a boat on the lake, watching the lights from the windows of Yumeitang on the top of the hill, where his colleagues were enjoying themselves at one of those usually boisterous wine dinners. Writing to a colleague, Chou Pin, he said:

"The high note of your poems suggests the mountain clouds.
You would not fall drunk on a woman's breast!
If you won't pierce the country green with your sandals,
Why not watch the boat cut ripples on the blue?
I remember the gambling and shouting of Yuan Yentao;
But where is the angry, cursing General Kuan? *
The sunset and the breeze are nature's free gifts,
Come to the lake, and share the cool evening air!"

* Allusions, not to contemporaries, but to historic characters.

Chapter Twelve

POETRY OF PROTEST

IT is well to remember that even Hangchow was not all lotus and peonies. Su Tungpo could not always laugh and sing and stage one-man comic operas and go boating on the lake in the moonlight, for there were seventeen thousand prisoners in jail to be tried for debt and for salt smuggling, locust pests to be fought, the salt canal to be dredged, a famine to be investigated. In the hundreds of poems written by the poet at this time of his life, it is hard to find any dominant mood. He wrote comic and satiric verse, inspiring descriptions of landscape, sentimental poems of love, songs gay with laughter, and other songs bitter with tears. But underlying all his superficial frivolities and gaieties and cracking of jokes at the wine feasts, there was a spirit of restlessness, of despondency, of sorrow and even of fear. No one man reflected the feelings of his people more fully than Su Tungpo, and it was given to him to put into songs and words of beauty more richly and more fully what the other writers were trying to express. Yet, it is well to remember that Su Tungpo had come away from the capital to his post with a wound in his heart. There was a feeling of insecurity and of hidden grief over the trend of political events, a grief which touched his soul more deeply than others. As he beautifully expressed it:

"The wounded mallard folds its wings e'en though the wind is quiet,
The frightened rook sleeps lightly when the moon is clear."

One poem he wrote at Michow, addressed to Chiao Shü, sums up his general attitude in this time of prolific writing, between the years 1071 and 1076, at Hangchow and then Michow.

"Thirty-six thousand days comprise a human life.
Of this, old age and sickness occupy half.
And in this life, joy is attended by sorrow,
Laughter and song keep company with tears.
Without a why or wherefore, madly we plunge
Headlong like puppets or playthings of the gods.
Then in a while we laugh about the past,
All things blow over like a thunderstorm.
—Since I perceived this truth some time ago,
I have forsaken my merrymaking friends."

In another poem, addressed to Kung Wenchung, he revealed his inner contempt for the pomp of office.

"By nature I am like a forest deer,
With hardly the temper of the harnessed breed.
Look at these gilded accoutrements,
The jadeite buckles and the silken reins!
Compelling admiration from onlookers,
But meriting well my inner contempt. . . .
Every man has his goal and aim in life,
And I have always held to my belief.
Others will laugh at what I am saying,
But I expect the highest of you and me."

And so along with his songs of laughter we hear a voice of outcry and a sigh. We hear beyond the boom of the bittern the moaning of those in jail, and beyond the gurgle of water on the water-wheel the sad plaint of an old farmer's wife. Mixed with the noise of celebrations overlooking the lake, we hear a resigned voice complaining of his thin and greying hair.

Su Tungpo was unpredictable. He had the habit of beginning his poems in the most natural, simple and effortless manner, he would put in an allusion or two recalling ancient history, and from then on nobody knew what was going to happen, least of all the poet himself. Sometimes he gives us an amazing piece of contented inconsequentialities, a song without purpose, recording the curious impression of a moment, and then he may burst into bitterness, satire, or profound irony. There is no question that he was a master of both prose and poetry, written in the style of "sailing clouds and winding waters, going whither it wants to go and stopping whenever it is right to stop". It also may be said to be the style of an author who cannot help himself. At a time when free criticism was most resented at the court, it was a style definitely calculated to land the poet in trouble.

But Su Tungpo did not know what lines he was going to write next, and he did not care. With the prodigality of his genius, he would often write three or four or five poems in succession on the same theme and using the same rhyme words. There was a poem which started by describing the atmosphere of a day when it felt as if it were going to snow. And so he began:

"It is going to snow,
Clouds cover the loch,
Towers and hills seem to be there, and seem not."

The friend to whom he sent it wrote back, and he replied with a second poem which begins like this:

"Beasts are in the lair,
Fish are in the loch,
Once in the traps and snares, they return not."

The friend replied and he sent a third, which begins:

"Eastwards lies the sea,
Westwards lies the loch.
Distant hills appear so dim, they appear not."

And in the fourth poem he began:

"'Don't you see
The Chientang loch?
Today King Chien's palaces exist not."

In the second poem, he got into trouble, for then he was carried away by the thought of the fish and the beasts losing their freedom. From then on it was only a step in thought to go on and speak about the prisoners who were being flogged in prison and whose wives and children were sent to jail. These were long poems, and he had to start with the end rhyme words and build his thoughts around them. Two of the rhyme words were "fugitive" and "describe". While in one poem he said: "I write this poem in a hurry, like a fugitive," it was natural for him to say in the other poem: "In a famine year there is no way of sending the fugitives home." In using the rhyme word "describe", he said in one poem: "The setting sun and cottage smoke are difficult to describe"; but in the other poem about the prisoners, he also said: "It is easy to paint a stork, difficult to describe a tiger"—a clear reference to a rapacious government.

Su Tungpo was hardly the kind of man to deny that he was happy when he was, or to pretend that he was happy when he was not. Many of his friends kept up correspondence with him and they wrote poems to each other. Liu Shu was now at Kiukiang and so was Li Chang. Sun Chueh was at Huchow, only a short distance north of Hangchow. These were friends who had fought together against Wang Anshih's administration and were now serving in various capacities in the southeast. All of them felt disgust with the state of things, for at this time Wang Anshih was still in power, but being less headstrong, they kept their opinions to themselves. Han Chi and Ouyang Shiu were dead. Fu Pi and Fan Chen were living in retirement. Szema Kuang devoted

himself to authorship, Chang Fangping gave himself to drink, while Tungpo's own brother was wise enough to keep his mouth shut. Tungpo was less tactful. It was just a question whether, when one actually saw the people suffering, one should express his feelings regardless of consequences for himself. Perhaps he never considered the question. And so along with poems of delight and wonder at pastoral beauty, he kept on writing about what was not so beautiful in the countryside. The poet was either mad or terribly in earnest. He knew that his lines travelled fast to the capital, and he did not care.

It would be interesting to take a close look at some of these lines which, as time went along, accumulated in sufficient volume to convict him of disrespect for the ruling regime. Taken separately, they were merely occasional comments, but together they were impressive as a collection of poetry of protest. A few examples will suffice. He wrote in the simplest language of the horrible scenes of people conscripted to dredge a canal for salt boats. As an official supervising the work, he saw the workmen gather together at the sounding of the horn at dawn, and he said in so many words that "the men were like ducks and pigs, splashing about in the mud".

On his trip to Fuyang, south-west of Hangchow, he wrote a fresh and delightful poem on the clearing up of the sky, beginning as follows:

> "The east wind knows that I am going home,
> It stopped the sound of raindrops from the eaves.
> The cloud-lined blue peaks lift their cotton caps,
> And the morning sun hangs like a gong atop the trees."

But he could not help seeing things, and while he sang about how "the spring brought flowers into every village", he also wrote about the food of the farmers. They were eating bamboo shoots, and the bamboo shoots were good, he said, but they were not salted, for "they have not tasted salt for three months", because the government monopoly had killed the salt trade. Once he let himself go, he could not help telling how the young sons of the farmers took advantage of the farmers' loans, borrowed the money, stayed in the city and spent it all, and came home bringing no more than a city accent, for the government was clever enough to open wine-shops and amusement places right next to the loan bureaus.

On his trip north, near the Taihu Lake district, he saw his good friend, the tall, bearded Sun Chueh. As a connoisseur of painting and calligraphy, he wrote a piece on his friend's collection of famous handwritings; but in his poem he also said: "Alas, you and I stand alone in this world, stuffing our ears and steeling our hearts against all current affairs." While he wrote a beautiful poem on the gushing current of

water coming up the water-wheels, he also wrote a poem called "The Sigh of a Peasant Woman".

"This year the rice crop ripens late,
Waiting for the sharp, dry winter wind to come.
But the rains came when the frost was due,
The sickle rusted and the rake was covered with mould.
I cried my tears out, but the rains continued.
How could I bear to see the ears lying in the mud?
After waiting for a month living in a shack,
The skies having cleared, I carted the crop home.
With sweat on my red shoulders I carried it to town,
The price was low and I begged to sell it like chaff.
Careless of next year's hunger, I sold the cow
To pay the tax and chopped the doors for fuel.
The government wants tax in cash and not in kind;
For wars in the north-west across a thousand miles,
My sons are drafted."

Again, he was writing joyous songs for the surf-riders during the period of the Hangchow bore. It was the custom at mid-autumn every year at Hangchow for people to come from great distances and line up on the bank of the Chientang River and watch the coming of the bore, which steadily rose in height as it came in from the sea and entered the narrowing bay. Before the bore came, there was usually a marine display. It is not clear how they rode on the surf. While they were called by the name of "riders on the surf", *ta-lang-erh*, the impression was that good swimmers rode out in small boats with red and green flags on them to meet the oncoming bore. Su Tungpo wrote rousing popular songs for these surf-riders to sing, and spoke of the white foam swallowing up the red flags of the riders and the height of the surfs covering half the view of the Yueh hills. But he also wrote of his inner feelings after waking up from a drink in the early hours of the morning.

"The affairs of men are in a turmoil.
The lonely scholar's spirit is vexed.
Why should the melody of the lute
Be drowned in the noise of the kettle-drum?
Three cups can drown ten thousand worries,
And after waking up my spirit is cleansed. . . .
Sleepless with the burden of my thoughts,
I rise to see the lambent Milky Way.
Over the railings the Dipper has turned low,
And the bright Venus shimmers in the east."

One of the poems that got him into trouble was a subtle crack he made at the ruling authorities, by implication comparing them to owls. He was visiting the district of Linan in the company of Chou Pin. According to the story told later at Su's trial, a magistrate of Linan had drafted a proposal for simplifying the collection of the draft exemption tax. This magistrate had come up to Hangchow with his proposal, and now, returned home, told Su Tungpo his story.

"I was driven out by the owl," the magistrate said.

"What do you mean?" asked Su Tungpo, and the magistrate told him how he had gone to the city with the plan and submitted it to a deputy tax commissioner, and how the latter had him escorted out of the city under armed guards. So Tungpo asked to see his proposal and found that he had suggested a good simple system of collection.

"What do you mean by the owl?" asked Su Tungpo, and the magistrate replied:

"Well, this is a popular fable. One day a swallow and a bat were having a dispute. The swallow held that the sunrise was the beginning of the day, while the bat argued that sundown was the beginning. As they could not decide the matter, they went to ask the opinion of the wise phœnix. On the way, however, they met a bird who said to them: 'We haven't seen the phœnix lately. Some say he is on leave and some say he is taking a long nap. At present the owl is taking over the position in his stead. So there is no use your going to consult that bird.'"

In his poem written on this occasion, addressed to his companion Chou Pin, he said in a tone of resignation and great despondency:

"For years I have been going through a struggle,
And now I gradually feel the Master prevails.
I want to find a farm of five acres,
And clear all vexations from my breast. . . .
I have not yet been able to go my way,
But who will listen when I try to persuade?
I have always admired the upright ancients,
And I shall leave the rest to heaven's will. . . .
Why follow the example of the swallow and the bat,
And argue about the beginning of the day?"

In time, lines like these were carefully collected and scrutinized by those in power. There was no preaching of rebellion, no overt criticism, no declamation against those in authority. But such lines have the power of mosquito bites. They sting, they irritate, and they annoy; and if there are too many bites, they can thoroughly ruin one's sleep for the night. It was particularly annoying to have these poems published by

one of Su's close friends, Prince Wang Shien, who was married to the Emperor's sister. At a time when verse was the popular form of communication of ideas, two clever lines of verse made better "quotes" than a windy memorandum. And Su Tungpo was enormously popular; his verse was repeated at scholars' parties. The day was coming when it was no longer possible to ignore Su Tungpo's voice.

In September 1074 his term of office at Hangchow was up. His brother was now serving only as a secretary at Tsichow, modern Tsinan, in Shantung province, and Tungpo had begged to be transferred to that province. His wish was granted, and this time he was appointed chief magistrate of Michow, which is near Tsingtao. He served at Michow only for two years, then was again appointed a chief magistrate, of Suchow, where he served from April 1077 to March 1079.

After saying good-bye to his friends in the monasteries on the northern and southern hills of Hangchow, Su started with his family on the way north. His wife had bought a very intelligent maid of twelve, by the name of Chaoyun, who was to become most important in the life of Su Tungpo.

Michow was a very poor district, growing principally hemp, dates, and mulberries, and the life here offered a striking contrast to that of Hangchow. The officials' salaries had been cut at this time, and in his preface to a descriptive poem, "Medlar and Chrysanthemum", Su Tungpo said: "After being in the service for nineteen years, I am becoming poorer every day and can no longer live as I used to. When I came over to be magistrate of Kiaochow, I thought at least that I would not have to starve, but the pantry is bare, and we have to live frugally. I often go out with a fellow magistrate, Liu Tingshih, along the ancient city walls, and pick the medlar and the chrysanthemum in the abandoned gardens and eat them. Then we feel our bellies and laugh."

With Wang Anshih out of office, Huiching was now in power and a new income tax was instituted. The allocation of the draft exemption tax was far beyond the ability of the people of the district to pay. Children were dying on the roadsides. One line in a poem Su wrote at this period spoke of his "going along the city wall with tears in my eyes" to bury the exposed corpses. In a letter he wrote years later, he mentioned the fact that he was able to save thirty or forty starving orphans and put them in homes.

It was a period when Su Tungpo was feeling sad and despondent, and, strange to say, it was when the poet was saddest that he wrote his best poems. That is, judged by Chinese standards, it was in this period that he reached complete maturity as a poet. The anger and the bitter-

ness were gone, and there was only peace and resignation. Even his joys in the beauties of nature and the pleasures of the day were more mellow, indicating a clear difference from the youthful gusto and effervescence of his Hangchow days. He had steadily grown in his admiration for Tao Chien, the one great harmonious poetic spirit of China, and in the poem "On the Western Garden" his work cannot be distinguished from that of Tao. In this poem we see not only true peace and contentment but also a complete union with nature and a quiet delight in the sounds and colours of nature itself.

"In the deep western room, I recline on a bed,
Quite awake from a nap, yet the day seems so long.
I feel tired for no reason and dazed though not drunk,
But the wind from the grove sets right all that was wrong.
Then I stroll in the garden, catch the sweet smell of grass,
A pomegranate has burgeoned, the dates are so strong!
The dove rests in the shade, idly folding its wings,
And the oriole's gay golden throat trills a new song.
On a cane, I observe the world's course and myself.
All things prosper in turn; why should I hustle along?"

It was when the poet had reached this state of complete harmony with nature that he could write a poem like the following: "The Recluse Pavilion."

" 'How can you pass such days of quiet and calm,
While human life is sore beset with ills?'
Last night I slept by the breezy northern window;
This morn the crisp air fills the western hills."

From such a mystic view, he obtained a sense of spiritual freedom, a freedom which equalled that of the clouds travelling without aim and purpose over the mountain peaks. The poem "Cloud-Gazing Tower" reads as follows:

"Through rain and shine, alternate night and day,
Drifting at will and stopping as it may,
The cloud has made the universe its home,
And like the cloud's so is the gazer's way."

It is striking that Tseyu always made the occasion for Su Tungpo to write some of his best poetry. On his journey from Hangchow to Michow, thinking of his brother, Tungpo wrote a beautiful song in the metre of a *tse,* in this case set to the tune of *Shinyuanchun:*