

CHAPTER FOUR

Spain to China - Agent to Educator (1938-41)

I reached Barcelona a week before street fighting broke out within the Republican ranks. The city was in a state of tension.

I arrived on the night of April 27. I can picture a dimly-lit room in a hotel on the fashionable Paseo de Gracia, with half a dozen shadowy figures discussing in three languages (Russian, Spanish and English) what I was to do. My ultimate KGB orders were to spy on one of the opposing sides in the impending conflict: the POUM (an anti-Stalinist left wing political party) and their allies. These included the Spanish anarchists and, of special interest to me, the British Independent Labour Party (ILP), with whom George Orwell was aligned, My contact was to be one "Sean O'Brien", a pleasant enough character, though less genial than his name suggests.

The fighting broke out on May 3, when the Republican Government tried to seize the main telephone exchange. Until that day the Telefonica had been controlled by the anarchists, who were in a position to listen to and interrupt phone calls by top government and Communist Party officials

I was instructed to write a brief political autobiographical sketch. I had provided one orally in Madrid. Now more details were to be told. I complied conscientiously, including the fact that I was of Jewish family background, naively believing that this would attest to my anti-fascism, never dreaming that anti-Semitism might exist in Soviet society still less in a Communist intelligence organization. (As a matter of fact, until the disastrous purge of Soviet intelligence organs soon after this, a high proportion of their agents were Jews¹.)

Next my new identity had to be decided. I was to be a stringer for a British weekly for which credentials would be forged on a sheet of its printed notepaper, secured from a comrade in London. Another necessary document was my discharge from the International Brigades, for the police were swooping down on the cafes and stopping young men in the street, on the lookout for spies and deserters. My discharge was to be on "health grounds." In reality I was perfectly fit except for a slight cough, which I carefully cultivated to account for "lung

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

trouble." Then there were civvies to be bought and residence to be arranged. I was to stay at the Continental Hotel on the east side of the Ramblas, Barcelona's main boulevard.

The Continental Hotel was the hangout of those Britons in Spain who were associated with the Independent Labour Party. They included the ILP's official representative, John McNair, George Orwell, his wife Eileen Blair, and their friend, the Belgian engineer, Major Georges Kopp, portly and middle-aged. Associated with them were writers and journalists including non-Communist left-wing correspondents, some from Britain, some from other European countries.

I was to become friendly with these people - especially the "Trotskyists" - get to know their views, activities and contacts, and write reports on them, which were to be handed to Sean. The hand-over method was to place the report in a folded newspaper and pass it inconspicuously to Sean in a café or sometimes in the hotel lavatory. Sean would give me instructions as to new targets of observation and our next time and place of meeting.

All this was no doubt elementary espionage procedure, but it struck me as extremely exciting. My job was, in reality, not so simple. First I had to assume false political sympathies: anti-CP, anti-Stalin, critical of the Republican Government, sympathetic to the POUM and the anarchists. I had in fact found Spanish anarchists quite simpatico in occasional encounters in Madrid. My diary for March 3, for instance, reads: "On the tram a day or two ago I got talking to a group of Spanish anarchist wounded. They produced a bottle of Malaga and a glass and we had drinks all round....A cheery bunch." Here in Barcelona the anarchists were toting more lethal weapons than Malaga and were inclined to be trigger-happy. But in bars in the Barrio Chino² on the opposite side of the Ramblas to the Continental, they'd still insist on standing a drink to any congenial character - such as myself.

My situation was complicated by the fact that the Continental was frequented not only by those I was to spy on but also by my true comrades, such as Bill Rust, correspondent (later editor) of the British Daily Worker, Wally Tapsell, who succeeded Springhall as commissar of the British battalion and other communists, with whom it would not do to appear friendly. So I was always at odds with myself, suppressing my natural inclinations for a natter, expressing views I did not believe in and striving to appear a disgruntled element.

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

Looking back, my disguise now strikes me as so absurdly thin as to deceive no one seriously asking himself who I was and what I was up to. No journalist could have taken me for a genuine member of the profession though I filed a few amateurish stories to the magazine for which I had forged credentials. Yet other questionable characters were even more naive than myself. They not only accepted me as a journalist but trusted me with letters to smuggle out of Spain, which I offered to do through the British Consul (whom I never set eyes on). The letters were handed to Sean, read and if necessary photographed, and forwarded, not by the British but the Soviet Consul. If the truth had been discovered I might have ended up with a knife in the back. But somehow I survived and got away with operations more dangerous than letter smuggling. Some of these it frightens me to think of, some give me qualms of conscience. But whatever I did was done with the same sincerity and conviction as when fighting at the front.

A couple of hundred yards down the Ramblas, on the same side as the Continental, was a building occupied by the POUM. And on one of the upper floors was the office of the ILP. After making friends with its members, which didn't take long, I was in and out of the building, assumed by the not too vigilant Catalan guards at the entrance to be one of the "English comrades." The British took easily to the long lunch hour of the Spaniards and perhaps even to the siesta habit, for Barcelona livened up only after 5 p.m. or so. This opened up possibilities for me. More than once I sauntered up to the ILP office when no one was around, quickly opened likely looking drawers, extracted folders and address books, hid them under my jacket, strolled out past the guards, rushed uptown, had them photographed and replaced before the office came to life again.

Up on the Calle Muntaner (number 411, if I remember correctly) in a quiet and fairly fashionable part of town was a safe house, presumably rented by the Soviet Consulate. On an upper floor were two flats, their entrances facing each other, but their back rooms joined by sliding doors. There lived a middle-aged German couple, Gertrude and Anatol. Gertrude was chic and romantic, but a good cook; Anatol gentle and scholarly (he gave me German lessons) and an excellent photographer. He had fixed up a neat workroom where he could quickly photograph documents. Gertrude and Anatol were permanent residents of the flat, but from time to time there were others. One I knew well was an attractive New Zealand woman, Amy, a few years older than I, and at

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

times a tall strapping German, going by the name of Alfonso, with whom she was having an affair. We all got along well together, bound by our common cause and common danger. There were other visitors whom I was not allowed to see, who haunted the other flat and were referred to as "ghosts."

The Barcelona fighting lasted five or six days and was over by May 8. Whatever its cause, its effect was to strengthen the central government, in both Catalonia and the whole Republican area as against the leftist elements in the Popular Front. But the principal gainers were the communists, who at once set about crushing the POUM. My present view is:

- a. The Republican Government felt that the war must come first, the revolution later. The POUM and the anarchists either felt that the two should go together or that the revolution should come first.
- b. The Government accordingly felt it urgently necessary to strengthen discipline and to centralize the conduct of administration and war and the possession of military equipment. This meant limiting the autonomy of the Catalans, who formed the overwhelming majority of the POUM and the anarchists.
- c. The Comintern and the Soviet Communist Party (meaning, presumably, in the final analysis, Stalin), while aiding the Republic with food, arms and technicians, (not ordinary ground troops) did so on a far smaller scale than the German nazis and Italian fascists aided Franco. The Comintern sought the defeat of fascism in Spain but opposed socialist revolution, because it harboured the illusion that the British and French governments might eventually be persuaded to give up sham non-intervention and join an international united front against fascism.
- d. The Communist International branded the POUM as Trotskyist, which it had been until about 1934 but was no longer. The POUM was, however, against Stalin. This, in the eyes of Stalin's followers (including myself) meant that the poumists were Trotskyites; and that by opposing "war first, revolution later" and the Popular Front, the POUM was aiding fascism. Such an organization, it was taken for granted, might be penetrated by fascists, and some Stalinists went to the length of calling POUMists fascists.

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

I recall no significant personal experiences during the fighting itself but I was assigned to play a small part, of which I am not proud, in the crushing of the POUM. I was to go to jail, to be with Georges Kopp and other POUMists, partly to try to glean information from them, partly, no doubt, to confirm my identity as an anti-Stalinist.

About the middle of May the police raided the Continental Hotel in search of incriminating documents in the rooms of such people as Kopp, Eileen Blair and a number of West European (mostly French and Belgian) correspondents of non-communist left publications or representatives of splinter parties. I was on good terms with these people and when they got wind of the raid (probably when it started on the lower floors of the hotel) helped them hide papers. I remember balcony scenes in which we flung bundles back and forth so that the rooms would be "clean" when the searchers entered. A day or so later I was quietly approached by plainclothesmen in the lavatory and hauled off to a makeshift prison.

I can picture a semi-basement room about the size of a tennis court, with a couple of dozen prisoners milling around. There was little if any furniture. People slept on straw mattresses on the stone floor. Kopp was there and he gave me a cordial welcome and found me a place to sleep. This made me uncomfortable. I not only regarded him as an enemy, but disliked him personally. Yet here he was helping me. I have no vivid memories of my ten days inside and recall gathering no intelligence. I had never been in prison before except for a few hours in New York for picketing a reactionary film as a student. That was quite a jolly affair, with singing of revolutionary songs by fellow picketers and quick dismissal by the magistrate who did not take our offence too seriously. The Barcelona experience was longer but not traumatic. There was no brutality; the guards may well have been anarchist sympathizers; the food was simple but sufficient. I still love stewed lentils and chick-peas (lentejas and garbanzos). Most important of all I thought that I was involved in an exciting experience for the good of the cause. Perhaps I did begin to worry after 8 or 9 days, but on the tenth I was escorted upstairs, interrogated by a young Englishman with a nasty wound in the arm, who warned me to behave myself in future and keep better company. I presume he did this on instructions and had no idea as to why I had been hauled in. Again I was in a false position. I felt I was really his comrade but had to pose as something different.

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

After my release I reported to Gertude. She congratulated me and fed me one of her delicious paellas. Then I went back on the job.

Not all of my "targets" were POUMists, like Kopp. Some were foreign anarchists. My imprisonment strengthened their confidence in me. One of my targets was an American called Bluestein, another an Austrian called Landau. Landau had gone underground after the street fighting and my bosses wanted to track him down. On some pretext or other I extracted his phone number from Bluestein and passed it on, as requested to Sean. Since the end of the fighting the Telefónica had passed out of anarchist control and it was now possible for my bosses, knowing Landau's phone number to find out his address. It was in a quiet suburb not far from the Soviet Consulate, to which I was inconspicuously driven from the Muntaner safe-house and given my instructions.

The unsuspecting Landau had the habit of reading in the front garden of the villa in which he was hiding. At least some man had the habit of reading there. The task was to identify him beyond doubt. I was capable of doing that, provided I could get close enough. So it was arranged for me to walk arm-in-arm with Dolores, a tall, attractive blonde, past the villa garden and get a good look at the reader, without being noticed by him. We strolled along like a courting couple, with Dolores shielding me from the reader's view. I managed to see him, however and was able to identify him beyond doubt as Landau. What happened to him, poor devil? Sean told me later he had been kidnapped, put in a wooden crate and loaded on to one of the Soviet ships bringing food or arms to the Republic. I was in those days in a state of blissful ignorance of Stalinism. How else could I have done the things I did in my twenties? As for Landau, he was evidently an enemy of the Soviet union, so he was an enemy of mine. I had gone to Spain to fight in a life and death struggle. I was willing to risk my life and had no compunction about being responsible for that of an enemy. My conscience, then, was clear.

These are some of the highlights (or lowlights) of my espionage work in Barcelona. Work, of course, was not everything, especially when one is in one's twenties. And the work itself involved social life, some of it pleasant enough - so long as I was careful to remember both who I was and who I was supposed to be. Life in Barcelona at that stage of the war (from May 1937 to the summer of 1938) could be pleasant as well as painful for a person in my position. Running into IB comrades, such as Sam Wild, was both a pleasure and an

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

embarrassment. (I dared not openly sympathize with their political position, though I did so secretly.) During my brief stays at the Calle Muntaner I could play tennis with Sean - and, less enjoyably watch from the safe distance of the balcony of our flat, the fascist air-raids on the docks and the working class areas. One night, though, I was caught in a raid in the centre of the city. When the planes had passed, a nearby apartment house teetered on the verge of a mass of rubble, walls blasted off exposing furnished rooms as in a stage set. Quickly a human chain formed, with people frantically passing lumps of masonry from the bomb crater to the street in the hope of unearthing bodies, living or dead. I joined the chain and felt that for once I was honestly being myself.

Then there was routine. I would go to the press office, as a journalist should, to file my phoney stories. But once there I could not resist making a beeline for the Daily Worker, which I had so long read and sold and believed in. Sometimes I foolishly went to the club of the International Brigade. Once I went to a concert of revolutionary songs sung by Ernst Busch³. I loved to wander through the dingy streets of the Barrio Chino to eat lentils and chick peas and drink rough wine from a porron. Once and only once I ate cat meat, described on the menu as rabbit. And all the time I studied that lovely language, Spanish, taking lessons at the Berlitz School and acquiring some fluency with the aid of a Spanish girl-friend.

Towards the middle of July, 1937, I had been on the job nearly three months and my bosses, perhaps considering me as a potential long-term employee, enquired about my passport. It was soon to expire and they said I must go to Paris and renew it, mentioning that I might seize the opportunity to spend a few days at home. As British passports, in line with the policy of "non-intervention," were then being stamped "Not valid for Spain," I would have to cross the French-Spanish border illegally to avoid having any incriminating exit and re-entry stamps. Here was an adventure I relished. I travelled by car with Amy and Alfonso to Puigcerda, about a hundred kilometers north of Barcelona, on the border of France and Spain. Just over the border, in France, is a pocket of Spanish territory, Livia, evidently overlooked in some untidy treaty long ago. Anyway, there it was, a bit of Spain in France, joined to its motherland by a strip of international road. On that road you were in no-man's-land; off it, you were in France. Towards sundown, Alfonso drove me halfway along the road and slowed down at a hedge crossing a field dotted with stooks of golden grain. I hopped out, sprinted a hundred yards along

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

the hedge, my haversack flapping behind me, my right hand clutching a parcel wrapped in newspaper. A French farmer was waiting to lead me in a stooping, zigzag, uphill run across the fields to his farmhouse. There, as instructed I handed him the parcel, which he took without a word, as if expecting it. It was full of neatly-bundled banknotes, of what national currency and for what purpose I have no idea. Looking back I would guess that this was one of several tests of my honesty and reliability. After a hearty French peasant meal I went to bed early, rose at dawn and was soon on the bus to Perpignan, enchanted by the sight of the mountains in the summer sunlight. The only time I had been in these parts before had been during the journey from Perpignan to Figueras in January and at night. Now looking out of the back of the bus one could see the Pyrenees in their splendour.

I arrived in Paris just in time for the traditional march of trade unions and left-wing political parties on Bastille Day, July 14. To maintain my cover, even abroad, I contacted a French Trotskyist whom I had met in the course of my work in Barcelona and accepted his invitation to take part in the demonstration with his comrades. Thus I found myself marching at the very back of the procession under the banner of the 4th International and, somewhat halfheartedly, shouting its slogans. This public association with people I had for years regarded as enemies made me intensely uncomfortable. Later, to set my emotions at rest, I sneaked off to a mass meeting of the Popular Front organized by the French Communist Party. There I gave myself up to the stirring oratory of Maurice Thorez, with which I could comfortably identify. These two contradictory political acts of associating with both Trotskyists and Stalinists in one day, crystallized the split personality forced on me.

After this schizophrenic experience I spruced up, joined the crowd at the British consulate and handed in my passport, now just expired. After a day or two a new one was issued without question and I was soon with my family in Yorkshire. I had been told to make my home leave brief, and I did. Within a couple of weeks from the time I left I was back in Barcelona. Sean passed on praise for my promptitude from our bosses. I had not dallied on the primrose path in peaceful Paris nor been diverted from my political task by filial feeling. I had, without realising it, passed a test which changed the course of my life. Within a year I would be on my way to China

Back in Barcelona my work went on as before, but gradually the tide of war was turning in favour of the

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

fascists. They completed their capture of the north of Spain and formed their own government, after the Republican Government had been forced to move to Barcelona. In the middle of March the Italian planes bombed that city night and day and a couple of weeks later Franco's land forces reached the border of Catalonia. The food situation grew worse and I recall an anarchist slogan on the wall: "More bread, fewer committees."

One day I was summoned to the quiet of the Muntaner safe-house. That night I was taken downstairs and escorted across the street into a waiting limousine. Inside were two heavy-set Russians who interviewed me as we drove around in the dark. I had done good work, they said. How would I like to continue doing the same sort of thing in Shanghai? I would be well looked after. If my family in England was in financial need I would receive a special allowance of fifteen pounds a month to send them.

I agreed to go without hesitation. Not because of the money⁴. That never entered my mind. I had read Edgar Snow's Red Star over China. Few books had gripped me more. The Long March, the Chinese Communists' cave capital in Yan'an, Mao Zedong, Zhu De, the 23 heroes who crossed the iron-link bridge, hanging on with their hands in the face of machine-gun fire. I could see it all in my mind's eye. Of course I would go to that marvellous land.

Some time in May, 1938, just over a year since my arrival there, I left Barcelona for Paris. I did not see Spain, this land which meant so much to me, for forty years. In 1938 I had my brand new passport, but of course I didn't use it, leaving by the old Puigcerda-Livia route.

On my previous visit to Paris I had been on my own. This time conspiratorial contacts had to be made. I was to travel by Metro to a certain station south of the Seine, buy a copy of the London Times, carry my raincoat on my left arm (What if it was raining? No matter, I was a mad Englishman), walk along the boulevard for 25 metres and look for a dark-haired man of about my own age. The contact was made without trouble, I was given money and told where to stay (I think it was the Hotel Georges V) somewhere in Montparnasse. I remember finding the young man congenial and being thrilled when he told me I would be travelling by way of Moscow, presumably to receive detailed briefing. Moscow was my Mecca. Travel arrangements would take some little time and meanwhile I was to take Russian lessons with a teacher from the Berlitz school. I still remember the

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

lively little old lady teacher, who I took for granted was at least a duchess. She was certainly an excellent pedagogue, who had me stand up, sit down, go to the door, come back - all in Russian. It was all in vain, however, not because I was a poor pupil but because the travel plans were changed. I was not to go to the Soviet Union after all, but to sail from Marsailles. It was a terrible let-down, compensated for by another brief home leave, lasting only a couple of days. That was the last time I saw my mother, who was to die prematurely at 56. Still, Paris after all, was Paris, especially when one was 27. I remember saying goodbye to my congenial contact and looking forward to seeing him again some time. He smiled. "Yes, if I'm still alive." Marshal Tukashevsky had been shot less than a year before, to be followed soon by Bukharin. The Moscow trials were still on. Who knew how long they would continue and how widely the net would be cast? That probably accounted for the change in my travel plans, though I didn't realize it at the time.

This was the first of my three voyages by ship to the Far East. It was uneventful but educational, reminiscent of A Passage to India. There was a pretty Eurasian girl on board and the young men, including myself, sought her out in the way of men with a maid. But for the others the attraction seemed to decrease East of Suez. A young English civil servant enlightened me. He was returning to his post in Malaya. Others were going to India. "You have to think of your job, old chap. Promotion and all that. It's best not to be seen associating with Eurasians socially. Of course on the upper deck at night if the moon's not too bright. See what I mean?" I thought, well, that's not going to affect my job. Yet later my Russian boss in Shanghai held it against a Trotskyist there that he had a yellow-skinned girl-friend.

I reached Shanghai in the sweltering summer with ten shillings to my name. My employers had left it to me to tell them how much money I would need for the voyage. After purchasing my ticket, not wanting to waste the money of the workers' fatherland I had drawn up a modest budget. A bit too modest, it turned out. But luckily some of the Old China Hands on board had told me about the connection between credit and complexion in Shanghai. White men didn't pay cash, they signed "chits" in the better restaurants, at hotels, even for taxis. Then at the end of the month a stack of chits arrived and you paid up - if you were a gentleman, which every white man was presumed to be. And if you didn't pay, your employer would get after you. It was an elegant

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

arrangement, which suited my bankrupt state. I moved into the fashionable Park Hotel overlooking the race-course.

Despite the convenient credit system I had to get some money in a hurry and more important I had to carry out the pre-arranged plan for making local contact. I was to ring a certain phone number and make a rendezvous, introducing myself by a pseudonym. In case the phone should be tapped we were to set a fictitious time for the meeting, which was actually to take place two days earlier and two hours later than specified. I got through and made an appointment. "O.K.," I said, "We'll meet at the Chocolate Shop" (a well-known café) "the day after to-morrow." "Oh," said the bird-brained lady agent at the other end of the wire, "but that means to-day!" Judging by the way things went, however, this phone-call was not overheard.

"Miss King" (a well-chosen name, which might have been taken for Chinese or English) was a fair, fat and forty Russian. She discreetly handed me a wad of notes, told me to move out of the Park Hotel, into the "Foreign YMCA" next door and to see her at her flat on the upper end of the Avenue Joffe next evening. There I met Boris, a short, plumpish, jovial middle-aged man whom I later identified from a newspaper picture as a Soviet vice-consul. He gave me my assignment.

The main object of my attention was to be Frank Glass, a Trotskyist journalist, assistant editor of a local English-language magazine. But it would hardly be possible to approach him directly. That was one reason why I had been told to move out of the Park into the Y, which was frequented by a friend of a friend of his. (Another reason was that the Y, though a very decent place to live, was far cheaper, and it would not do for people to be wondering where my money came from.) This friend of a friend (who became a genuine friend of mine) was a young Eurasian engineer, Jason, and he in turn was pally with Philip, a Canadian, who was a loyal follower of Frank Glass. Jason and Phil were keen photographers and I had also become one (under the tutelage of Anatol in Barcelona), which gave me a good excuse for getting to know them.

Meanwhile there was the question of my cover. I might have become a free-lance journalist, as I had been in Barcelona. But in Shanghai I had a stroke of luck. The fall term was about to begin and Shanghai's most prestigious mission university, St. John's, needed a teacher of literature. I was genuinely interested in this subject

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

and fairly well qualified, thanks to perusal of "The World's Best Books" at Columbia. So I went along to St. John's, situated beside Jessfield Park. I was employed on the spot by the head of the English Faculty, Miss Lamberton - at the "locally hired" rate. Wages and salaries in Shanghai reflected the socio-racial hierarchy, the rate not being for the job but decided by nationality, skin colour, ethnic origin etc. The highest rate of pay went to the British, American and other "herrenvolk" hired by contract in their own countries. (This was in the International Settlement of Shanghai; in the French Concession, of course, the French were at the top.) The construction of the pyramid was, roughly: British, West Europeans (especially Nordics) and North Americans were the apex; South Europeans came lower down. (The Portuguese were a doubtful entity, as most if not all of them were Eurasians). Then came the White Russians, whose tens of thousands formed the main non-Chinese component of the French Concession. Next were the Eurasians and finally, at the bottom of the pile, the Chinese. Locally hired Westerners, such as myself, were shop-soiled stock purchased at bargain-basement rates. That did not worry me, as my salary as a teacher was a bonus, on top of my pay for my non-academic work, though my pay for espionage was so low it could be classified at best as Moscow silver, not gold. I cannot recall how much - or how little - it was; nor what the mission paid me for my teaching.

I found my cover congenial. Teaching literature and doing the necessary reading was a pleasure. The students, too, were pleasant in their way. But they were poles apart from the young POUMists I had known in Barcelona, coming from wealthy comprador, official or professional families. They were evidently accustomed to being waited on at home and seemed constitutionally incapable of using their hands, even for opening a classroom window. The highest estimate one could put upon their politics was that they were more or less patriotic. Some of the men took their studies lightly. One, an athlete, had lingered over the pleasures of college life for years without graduating until somebody, presumably his father, must have suggested that it was time for him so do so. Towards the end of my first year of teaching he paid me a social visit and on leaving graciously presented me with a smart silk tie. An Old China Hand would have realized that this was a hint to give him a passing mark. But I was new to the scene, so I thanked him courteously, corrected his exam paper carefully - and flunked him. The girls were charming in a ladylike way. (I remember having to explain that the human race was composed not

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

of ladies and gentlemen but of men and women.) Most of them were elegantly dressed in silk sheaths with slit skirts and high collars, and I must confess that I was captivated by their beauty.

One of them, an excellent student of literature, wrote romantic poetry in English, which she brought to me for criticism. Whether, to begin with, that was all she wanted is hard to tell. The visits became frequent and the tutorials began to touch on matters other than literary criticism. Her father, she said, was a high-ranking military officer of the Guomindang who had gone over to the Japanese; but she herself was a patriot. She was also, incidentally, a rather fundamentalist Christian, convinced that god took a personal interest in her and would see that no harm would come to her. She was groping for a cause, so I suggested that she might serve her country best by going to Yan'an and gave her some money for the journey. She set off but failed to break through the Guomindang blockade of the Communist areas and was forced to turn back from Xi'an to Chongqing. There she met and married an underground Communist who has since become internationally known. Not all St. John's students were social butterflies or playboys. Some were serious students. One seemed to be a communist.

Living at the Y was not only convenient for my cover, it was interesting and pleasant, with its swimming pool and gym, its coffee shop and reading-room and library. On the recommendation of Jason I was elected to the Library Committee. This gave me a say in the purchase of books, which soon showed a left-wing bias. I was also on the Debating Club Committee, where I once incautiously proposed as a topic: "The Sun is Setting on the British Empire." This was vetoed by the British Consul; but I managed to stay on speaking, or at least reading terms with him, for we both belonged to the Shakespeare Reading Club, at which the members in their time played many parts.

This cultural cover, however, was peripheral. It established me as a teacher, which I remained - genuinely - on and off for the next 40 or 50 years. But Frank Glass was a journalist and I gradually had to descend to the depth of the Fourth Estate in order to get close to him. This too was a pleasant process.

Frank Glass lived in a block of bachelor service flats near the Bund, the Shanghai waterfront, opposite the French Consulate. I moved from the Y into the same block as soon as a flat fell vacant. The apartments were modest by middle-class western standards, but spacious, with private bathrooms, simple but comfortable furniture

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

and a splendid view of the river. I was aware that they were luxurious compared with the crowded, unsanitary hovels of Shanghai's teeming working class millions. The building was on Avenue Joffe, the main shopping and business street of the French Concession. Business in those parts prominently featured massage parlours, gambling joints, sing-song houses and restaurants with bar-girls with whom unaccompanied men could chat and flirt by buying them "cocktails" made of cold tea. These cost the customer the price of a genuine Martini and the girl took a cut on each one she could inveigle the client to buy her. Avenue Joffe ran parallel to Avenue Edward VII, a more sedate street, which formed the boundary between the French Concession and the International Settlement. Linking the two avenues was a short street nicknamed "Blood Alley," frequented by sailors from the ships of many lands, anchored in the nearby Huangpu River. The street was lined with cheap taxi-dancehalls, where the girls (a ticket a dance) included a fair proportion of White Russians of a not too girlish age. The street's nickname was derived from the blood which flowed in the fights over the dancing girls. At the corner of Blood Alley and Avenue Edward VII was a pub run by a couple of paunchy American ex-Marines. They cooked excellent water-buffalo steaks and served the usual run of drinks, featuring on cold days hot Tom-and jerry, and for hangovers "Bombay Oyster." This was a witches' brew of tomato juice, Worcester Sauce, a raw egg, lemon juice, pepper, etc. I found it an excellent breakfast dish before heading for St. John's to lecture to the young ladies and gentlemen on Beowulf or the Early Church Fathers.

The pub on Blood Alley was the hangout of American sailors and of English-speaking journalists. These included a young American named Pomeroy, so Anglophile that he volunteered for the British forces before U.S. entered World War II, was captured by the Japanese in Burma and died working on their "Death Railway" there. Another American was Berrigan who, I believe, was later killed in Viet Nam. My special friend was Jack Belden, who wrote eye-witness reports of the Communist New Fourth Army guerillas and later that justly renowned book, China Shakes the World. Talking and drinking with these people was informative and entertaining; but my main interest was in their fellow journalist Frank Glass, also a well-informed and pleasant person - but with a difference. He subjected his information to a Trotskyist analysis, which I found irresistible. There were others in the journalist crowd who were not necessarily journalists. One was a German with a Russian name, Jovishoff,

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

who eventually died of typhus. One of the journalists told me years later that when his friends gathered together his belongings they found papers showing that he was a GPU agent. I recall him as a gentle chap with a satirical sense of humour, who described himself as a follower of the "Three-and-a-half International" (that is, halfway between Stalin's 3rd and Trotsky's 4th International. Another non-journalist in the journalist crowd was Frank Glass's follower, Phil, whom I had met at the Y and who had introduced me to the pub - and to Glass.

The Blood Alley pub and its clientele were the setting for my operations, with Glass and Phil as the focus of my attention. My task was much the same as in Barcelona: to keep my eyes and ears open, to glean what information I could about the movements, activities, contacts and interests of the Trotskyists. Here I was handicapped by my ignorance of Chinese politics, history and society, for almost the only books I had read on the subject, apart from Snow's Red Star over China were Pearl Buck's The Good Earth and Malraux's Man's Fate. In fact I had to admit to Boris, during my initial briefing, that I had never heard of Chen Duxiu⁵. Chen was well-known to the informed as China's leading Trotskyist, and Boris told me to pay special attention to any possible links between him and Glass. Actually Chen was at this time in the process of drifting away from Trotskyism, with several of whose Chinese leaders and factions he had for some time disagreed; and I never learned of his having any links with Glass. Another name I was to listen for was that of Jason (sic) and that did eventually crop up.

Being a teacher in a mission university and not a journalist I had to establish a personality to account for my interest in the Chinese left. Here my earlier membership in the International Brigade, of which I made no secret, proved useful. I professed to have gone to Spain as a member of the British Labour Party (which I was) and to have become disillusioned there by the Stalinist suppression of the POUM and the anarchists as well as by the steadily worsening position of the Republican Government. This I now blamed on the Spanish Communist Party whose policies, I said, served not the Spanish people but the Soviet Union. These ideas appealed to Frank Glass (as they were meant to) and he began to look upon me as promising material. To further my political education he gave me a book: The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution by Harold Isaacs, then an avowed Trotskyist. Looking back I think it must have played a part in influencing my thinking. Glass, sensing this,

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

asked me if I would be willing to write an article comparing the war in Spain with that in China, both of which countries were suffering defeats at the hands of fascist aggressors. I agreed and wrote a piece under a pseudonym, headed "Two Republics, One Fate?" By now I was on the road to Trotskyism, at least in Glass's opinion and possibly, to some slight extent in reality.

For this, my political isolation was largely responsible. For my situation in Shanghai was different from that in Barcelona. There I had frequent contact with Sean, Gertude, Anatol, Alfonso and other English-speaking comrades; even occasionally with a genial Russian whom I knew as Leo. In Republican Spain, too, Communist reading material was easily available. In the International Settlement of Shanghai, it was not. Contacts with my Russian mentors had to be secret, short and few. And the only reading material they provided me with was an occasional copy of Inprecorr - International Press Correspondence, which was more of a news review than a theoretical journal. This meager ideological diet could not compete against the stuff that Glass now fed me: Out of the Night by Jan Valtin, a renegade Soviet agent; a book by Louis Fischer, once an admirer of the Soviet Union but now disillusioned; some of the earlier anti-Stalinist writing of Arthur Koestler and, of course, Glass's own analyses of the international situation which appeared regularly in the magazine of which he was foreign editor, The China Weekly Review.

But I could not quickly cast off convictions acquired over almost a decade. I continued to make my reports to Boris, first at the flat of Miss King, later at a house in a more fashionable part of the French Concession. And I still drew my pay from him. Once I was horrified, on opening the pay packet at home to find a slip of paper with words on it typed in Russian, apparently an accounts memo. What criminal carelessness! Another bit of Miss King's brainlessness? I recall little of the content of my reports that could have had much significance. Once when I reported on one of the Blood Alley pub crowd, a White Russian named Leonov, Boris said: "Oh, don't bother about him. He's just a playboy." Was he? How did Boris know? Was he, too, a Soviet agent? But one item of information Boris was keenly interested in. It was of a remark I had overheard Glass make to his follower Phil about one "Blackie Jacson" and had something to do with a sailor. Was Blackie himself a sailor? Or had a sailor brought a letter from him to Shanghai from Spain? I have racked my brains but

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

cannot recall the details. All I know is this: Jacson was one of the names of the man who later murdered Trotsky.

One night early in 1940 I went, on schedule, to the house in the French Concession. I rang and knocked and peered again and again, but there was no one there! I went again on other nights, with the same result. So they had ditched me! Why? Was my material unsatisfactory? Had they sensed that I was falling under the influence of Trotskyism? Did they think I had succumbed to the seduction of Shanghai and become a playboy? Was some mission accomplished and they wanted to sever all now obsolete links? I do not know for sure to this day, but I came closer to knowing in the summer of 1940 after leaving Shanghai and heading as a free agent for the interior of China.

Meanwhile I was in a financial fix. My spy pay had been low but together with my salary from St. John's, it was enough to live on in reasonable comfort and to have a good time in the "City which never went to sleep." I went to the Dean of St. John's and asked for an increase in pay in view of the rising cost of living and the inflation which was just taking off. The venerable gentleman in the dog-collar peered at me over his specs. He understood and sympathized with my predicament, he said, but "the only way we could give you an increase in pay would be if you joined the mission." "I'm afraid I could hardly do that," I blurted out. "You see, I'm an atheist." To his credit he did not fire me on the spot. He simply refused my request for a rise. So I did what Chinese teachers did in similar circumstances. I got another job and taught at two universities at once.

The second post was at Suzhou University, which had taken refuge from the Japanese-occupied Suzhou City and operated in an office building on Nanjing Road in the International Settlement of Shanghai. This lacked the rural charm of St. John's, set in its parklike grounds, with green lawns and mighty cypress and eucalyptus trees. Nanjing Road, especially this lower end of it, towards the Bund, was a bustling shopping centre by day and at night the street was lined with poor peasant girls turned prostitute. Down the side streets one caught the sickly scent of opium and from the upper stories of the buildings there floated down the click of the mahjong chips. Before dawn came the cavalcade of "honey carts" loaded with human manure and poisoning the air. These were followed, in the cold winter months, by the lorries of the Municipal Street-cleaning Department, picking up the corpses of the beggars and refugees who had frozen to death in their sleep on the city streets. Such was the

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

Paradise of Adventurers. And such was the setting of Suzhou University where I taught till I left Shanghai.

There was nothing to keep me there now that I had been cut loose, and I had no urge to return to wartime England. For between my Trotsky-tinged notion that the war was between rival imperialist powers and the British Communist Party line of "phony war," I felt this was not my fight. But I was confused and troubled, to the extent that one night, strolling down Nanjing Road with a Quaker friend, Herbert Hodgkin, whose probity I trusted, I hinted at the nature of the work I had been doing. Not in detail, but just that I had been "working for the Russians". I was confident that he would keep his promise never to tell a soul. And it gave me some needed solace to talk honestly to at least one fellow human. I never told another until I met the woman I was to marry a year or so later.

Meanwhile I decided to see something of the real China, outside this "isolated island," the International Settlement of Shanghai.

Looking back on my two years in the International Settlement of Shanghai nearly half a century ago what comes to mind most quickly and easily is not my anti-Trotskyite work but the people I knew and what little I learnt about the city. I met not only those I had to meet in order to move in Glass's journalist circle, but others out of personal interest and inclination, and because I was a political animal with a social conscience, because this was my first time in the east, because I was young and eager for new experience.

Teaching as I did in a mission university and being an active member of the YMCA, I moved more in Christian circles than I had ever done before. Inevitably the Christians I got to know best were neither fundamentalists nor missionaries. They were YM and YW secretaries and others on the left, with communist sympathies or even secret Party members.

Through mixing with the journalists I had come to know Edgar Snow's then wife, Helen Foster Snow (Nym Wales) and when I told her I was interested in meeting socially concerned Chinese she introduced me to two YWCA secretaries who conducted literacy classes for women textile workers. They in turn, sensing my leftist inclination introduced me to their counterparts in the Chinese YMCA, with whom I had discussions on whether Christianity was compatible with Marxism. They said yes, I no. Whether any or all of them were underground

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

Party members at the time I do not know, but both the YM and YW secretaries held official positions after the People's Republic was set up.

Other friends were of a different type. Lee Schoen, the New York businessman who had urged and helped me to go to Columbia, had at some stage introduced me to a relative of his, Emily Hahn, known to her friends as Mickey. At that time she, like me, was teaching in Shanghai, though no one could have taken Mickey for a school marm. She was a beautiful and charming eccentric, now known for her books and her writings in the New Yorker magazine. In those days she smoked opium and kept a pet gibbon, a sociable creature who dipped his fingers in the guests' cocktails and after a few dips retired to the top of the tallboy where he fell into a drunken stupor. I at first expected Mickey herself to fall asleep after a few puffs of opium but it seemed only to make her conversation more entertaining. Her Chinese lover, who referred to Mickey as "my foreign concubine," translated T.S.Eliot into Chinese. In such a ménage one met an interesting range of people, from diplomats to demi-mondaines. Mickey introduced me to some of each and tried to fix me up with a pretty White Russian girl named Galya. This for me was a lighthearted relationship. But it showed signs of seriousness on her side, especially after I accompanied her on a midnight Easter procession from the Russian Orthodox Church. But I managed to break off our relationship after arguing about a movie of the life and death of Marie Antoinette. Galya wept and I quoted Tom Paine's: "They pity the plumage and forget the dying bird." That finished it. Mickey was more enlightened and apparently not entirely unpolitical in her social contacts. She befriended and gave refuge to an underground Chinese woman Communist, Yang Gang, who translated Mao Zedong's "On Protracted War" into English, and Mickey published it in a short-lived magazine she was running. She also published a piece of mine, on racial and social snobbery in Shanghai.

Such social contacts helped me to pass myself off as what I was not.

What was I in reality? Certainly I was in a complicated state of mind. Not merely on account of being a Stalinist masquerading as a Trotskyite sympathizer and an atheist teaching in a mission university. I was at once horrified by the poverty of the people, the misery of the beggars, the oppression of women, the corruption, racism and snobbery. Jason, at my request, took me to silk filatures where child labourers worked inhumanly long hours

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

with their hands in and out of unbearably hot water. And to electric light-bulb factories down back alleys where children worked in dimly lit, foul smelling sweatshops. But I was beguiled by the pleasures of the city of sin. I also fell in with his suggestion to take riding lessons from White Russian teachers, professedly former officers in the Czar's cavalry. Then we took dancing lessons with a Chinese (male) instructor as a prelude to visiting Ciro's, the Paramount and other taxi-dance-halls or cabarets. There I was charmed by the slim and seductive Chinese hostesses in their slit-skirted silk sheaths, who glided along the parquet floor, while secret agents of opposing Chinese political factions bumped each other off in the hallways. Even these fun and games brought one in touch with the reality of feudal-colonial society, for there was a hierarchy of dancehalls, as Jason showed me on a conducted tour. At Ciro's and the Paramount one got, three dances for a dollar, unless one overpaid out of ulterior motives. In less high class halls the rate might be 15 or 20 to the dollar. There the hostesses were awkward peasant girls in blue cotton gowns, brought to the city by contractors who paid their starving parents a paltry sum. Those who were pretty and clever enough gradually gained poise and polish and learned to dance in step without stumbling over the patrons' toes. Thus they worked their way up to the more expensive halls. There they might catch the eye of a man with money and become his mistress or concubine., And after that, when they lost their youth and looks? Jason had no clear answer, but he took me to see the film of Cao Yu's tragedy, Sunrise, which deals with the tragic life of and death of such a peasant girl, sold by her parents to save her from starvation, then forced into prostitution and suicide.

The dancing girls' fate was no better than that of their male counterparts, the rickshaw-pullers, whose occupational life lasted some seven years. During that time they lived on the brink of starvation and physical exhaustion, coughing their lungs out, hassled by the police who fined them for minor breaches of traffic regulations. They engaged in cutthroat competition with their fellows, dashing suicidally across the road through the motor traffic, to reach a prospective passenger first and then, in the competitive bargaining which followed, accepting the lowest offer. I recall one incident involving a puller. I was changing my "Moscow silver" (which was paid in US dollars) at an "Exchange shop," to which I had rolled up in a rickshaw. The bank clerk had tried to swindle me out of a few Chinese dollars, worth perhaps fifty US cents. I hated being swindled and argued until

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

the clerk acknowledged he was wrong and came across with the extra money. I took it and gave it to the rickshaw puller.

Such are my memories of two years in old Shanghai, which I left in the summer of 1940.

With the help of Chinese friends connected with the YMCA I landed a job in "the interior," at Nanjing University, then in exile in Chengdu over a thousand miles to the west.

My salary was not high - US\$25 a month if I remember right, plus lodging; but after all I was only a locally hired non missionary. So to earn a little money in advance, I accepted a request by St John's to teach a summer session course before departing, tempted not merely by the pay, but by being given a free hand to teach anything I liked. I decided on a course in satire, from Aristophanes to Bernard Shaw, including Rabelais' Gargantua and Pantagruel, Cervantes' Don Quixote and other works I had read at Columbia. The Rabelais caused a bit of trouble and at one point a demure young lady student plaintively asked me: "Do we really need to read this stuff? It's so vulgar!" I thought a bit of Rabelais' earthy anti-clericalism and his anti-dogmatic approach to education would do the young ladies and gentlemen a world of good and insisted on their going through with it, though I fear that some of Rabelais' wittier obscenities must have been lost on them. I did not spell them out.

When the summer session satire came to an end I set off on my pilgrimage to the west.

The journey was physically tiring but mentally refreshing, taking my mind off my personal political troubles. First by ship down the coast to Hong Kong, then not the "economic mirade" of to-day, just a sweat-shop city with the same corrupt pleasures as Shanghai, for those who could afford them. But the beauty of the hilly islands rising in the sun from the sparkling sea was a glorious sight. Then to Haiphong and Hanoi in "French Indo-China," where I enjoyed speaking the language and drinking the wine. After that riding the narrow-gauge railway, which ran through thick jungle to the Chinese border and then zigzagged and hairpinned up the mountains from which turbaned minority nationality people, clad in dramatic cloaks, came down to the stations to sell roasted maize. On the train itself pedlars set up little stoves on the platform between the carriages and cooked noodles, rice porridge and eggs. Once, where a bridge had been bombed, we had to leave the train and cross the water in rowboats to board a train on the other side. Such things were taken as routine by travellers

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

accustomed to conditions in war-torn China

I described the train journey in an article published a year later in New York⁶.

"During one of the frequent stops, after emerging covered with coal dust, from a long mountain tunnel, I dashed up to the engine with my soap and towel to wash in the water trickling from the boiler, the nearest thing to a washroom the train afforded. Coming up for breath from inside my steaming hot towel - I had adopted the Chinese technique of washing - I was surprised to hear myself greeted with the words: "How do you do, sir? Where are you going?" - all in the unmistakable and precise English of a Chinese student of an American mission school. My questioner and I exchanged courtesies, and when it was discovered that I was going to the interior to teach, I was invited to join my new acquaintance and his student companions - in the fourth class.

We squeezed along crowded corridors, stumbled over squealing, tied pigs grunting on the car platforms, past baskets of cackling chickens and howling babies, into the fourth-class carriage. It was like a subway rush-hour crowd crammed into an already loaded freight car. In the center was a six-foot-high pile of miscellaneous baggage, the top of which a few of the passengers, doubtless of mountain stock, were using as sleeping berths. The rest were in less precarious, if less comfortable positions, sitting on wooden boxes, wicker suitcases, window ledges or the floor. In the midst of all this I was ceremoniously presented to the academic party.

These were no old-fashioned, long-gowned, bespectacled aesthetes, The men, athletic in appearance, wore slacks and open-necked khaki shirts. The girls favoured the blue, one-piece overall famous as a militia uniform in the Spanish Civil War. (Later I was to see some of the girls on the university campus, so demurely dressed as to be scarcely recognizable.)

There was a Miss Li, just back from doing graduate work in Chicago University and speaking fluent English with a pronounced midwestern intonation. She was on her way to teach sociology in the same university as myself. There was young Wei, just graduated from a Shanghai university, heading for Guiyang, where he was to do Y.M.C.A. student work. There was a delightful couple of high-school youngsters, the girl with typical maidenly Chinese bangs fringing a face at once impish and angelic. She and a boy of about her own age had just returned from the South Sea Islands, which they had been touring with the celebrated Wuhan Choir, raising money for the war by singing patriotic songs to overseas Chinese communities. They sang enchantingly to us, too, as our ramshackle train chugged through the deep gorges and over the towering highlands of wild Yunnan Province....

At last we reached Kunming, the city of Eternal Spring, capital of Yunnan Province. I headed for the bus station and asked at the office for a ticket to Chengdu. The clerk looked at me with a smile, surprised at my naivete and said: "Sorry, no tickets for three weeks." But I was not quite so naive, after all. I had come prepared with a note from a girl in the St. Johns' University office, addressed to her "uncle." "Come in, come in," called the manager from his office after seeing it. "When do you want to leave? Tomorrow? Certainly." And so I embarked on the strangest bus ride of my life. In the course of it, astonishingly, the mystery of my release from

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

espionage was explained.

The bus journey was long and circuitous, winding through the cities of Guiyang and Chongqing before it reached Chengdu, my place of employment. It was marked out in stages by the China Travel Service and at the end of each day was supposed to reach a presentable Travel Service Hostel for the overnight stop. But each day, late in the afternoon, before reaching the scheduled stop, the driver would start swearing. The engine had "broken down." He got out, tinkered with it awhile and then announced that we would have to spend the night in this little town. I had palled up with a boisterous young American fellow-traveller who knew the procedure. "Why these regular breakdowns," I asked? "Oh, either the driver has a deal with the local innkeepers or he has a girl-friend in town." Whatever the cause, there were no exceptions to the rule, except at the big cities, where we changed buses. At each "breakdown" my friend and I were out of the bus and rushing down the village street in search of a halfway presentable inn. They were all infested with fleas, bedbugs, mosquitoes and mice. One night I awoke to the sound of snorting and found two pigs in the room. The best place to sleep was not on the verminous bed but on a couple of square tea tables.

And then in Guiyang, where we stopped overnight, I dropped in on some local American missionaries. We were having tea and listening to the radio. The news came on. Trotsky had been assassinated in Mexico City. So that was it! I had served my purpose, as one expendable underling in a worldwide web woven in Moscow, stretching from Spain to Mexico with strands in Shanghai.

At the time I had mixed feelings. I was shocked but I felt no deep remorse. My contact with Frank Glass had changed my attitude to Trotsky and planted seeds of doubt in my previous belief that he was the epitome of evil. But they were still only seeds. And my conviction that Stalin was the epitome of virtue had not been seriously affected by slight misgivings about the Moscow trials. They were hard to understand but not necessarily wrong. I had held these twin beliefs about Trotsky and Stalin too long immediately to discard them. So I took it that Trotsky had been found guilty of treason to the Soviet State and been condemned to death. But the sentence could not be carried out in the Soviet Union because he was not there. So it was carried out abroad. That I thought was not wrong and I had no qualms of conscience - at that time. I could only act according to my

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

beliefs and my knowledge. Today these are different. To-day the question in my mind is, how would history have been affected if Trotsky had been allowed to live his normal span? But "Ifs in history" is at best an entertaining intellectual exercise. It is a game I shall not play here. I learnt of Trotsky's assassination in the middle of a long, exciting journey. I had to continue it.

We chugged up the mountains and coasted down, with the motor thrown out of gear, the driver believing this would save petrol to flog on the black market in Chongqing. One mountain road had seventy-two hairpin bends, some of them so sharp and narrow that the bus could not make them in one turn. It had to inch forward and then back - towards the precipice. Down below one could see the trucks which had gone over the edge and somersaulted to destruction. But somehow, in the end, we made it.

Arriving in Chengdu at the end of these dangers and discomforts I was installed in a comfortable flat on the second floor of a wooden frame house in the Methodist compound, with a "boy" - that is to say a young man servant - to attend to my needs. The friendly middle-aged couple downstairs also looked after me in a parental but understanding fashion. In fact the husband, Charlie, was so understanding that he had me join him in gathering mulberries from the tree in the garden to flavour the local spirit, daqu, which otherwise tasted like fire. This made me modify my views on Methodist missionaries. But we disagreed on major matters such as the outcome of the war. Charlie said the Germans would be in Moscow in a month; I bet him five American dollars they'd never get there. The sum was a fifth of a month's salary, but for all my doubts, confusion and wavering about Stalin my faith in the Soviet people was unshaken. I'd have staked more than \$5 on them.

Soon after my arrival I received an invitation from three unmarried ladies occupying another house in the Methodist compound. I was expected to wear a dinner-jacket. I was able to fulfil this sartorial requirement, for I had had a new one made in Shanghai and had brought it all the way to the "interior." This attitude to clothes was a throwback to my pre-communist youth.

Formal Western dinners, however, were not typical of my social life in Chengdu, for I did my best to integrate with the Chinese staff. I managed to find a young accountant to share the flat with me and he invited me to join his mess of a few young office workers. There we ate the spicy Sichuan food, which I consider China's

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

best.

Again from the 1942 magazine article:

Air raids became almost a routine matter during the fine summer months. Thanks to the excellent three-alarm system, which gave about an hour-and-a-half's warning, the academic schedule was but slightly upset. The sound of the preliminary warning whistle caused far less excitement in the classroom than a really good boner. Classes were continued without interruption until the second alarm, and when the siren sounded the class dispersed as nonchalantly as if the ordinary dismissal bell had rung.

The unflinching and unimaginative punctuality of the Japanese was admittedly a great help. They could be counted upon to appear regularly about 11.30 a.m., so it was simple enough to adjust the schedules of Chinese university and Japanese air force. In the summer, morning classes were moved ahead, beginning at seven o'clock and finishing at eleven. The next two periods were set aside for air raids. Afternoon classes began an hour later than usual, by which time the air raid would generally be finished. If it wasn't, classes were scheduled to begin automatically half an hour after the all-clear had sounded. The revised summer timetable consequently read: morning classes, air raid, lunch, afternoon classes.

However, I won't deny that the mandarin malady lingers on. The feeling is still sometimes encountered that this is a "coolies' war," and some intellectuals justify their consistent absence from the front with the argument that the lives of such highly trained persons as themselves are too valuable to be thrown away. Although there is a great deal of truth to this statement, it is also the stock excuse of shirkers. On graduation from medical school, for example, not all young doctors rush into the Army or Red Cross or Government service. Not a few of them, instead, set up lucrative private practices in what were till recently the sheltered preserves of Hong Kong and Shanghai. There is still too much of such careerism undermining the effects of self-sacrifice. Loyalty still tends to be directed toward the family rather than toward the nation.

One factor which somewhat checks this trend, however, is the acute economic crisis. Prices have skyrocketed in China for a variety of reasons, some justifiable or unavoidable, some not. The student, like others, feels the pinch, particularly the refugee student whose home is in the occupied areas and whose family income, especially if it was derived from the land, has fallen off drastically. The Government helps somewhat with rice, living expenses and, in Government institutions, with free instruction. But rice often costs thirty times as much as it did before the war and, with the loss of Shanghai and Hong Kong manufactured articles have become even more prohibitive. Consequently the Government's help is bound to be inadequate. So it is that the Chinese student, with his aristocratic mandarin tradition, is being forced to copy his democratic American colleague and work his way through college.

It is a tremendously difficult and gradual process of adaptation in a society where "face" counts for so much. Yet, last summer, throwing dignity to the winds, college students were working knee-deep in the mud of the West China paddy fields, raising rice and vegetables. Maybe they were not especially efficient workers and could not have competed with regular peasant labor unless they had been subsidized and assured of a protected market in the university community. But the newly impoverished academic farm hands, disregarding the scorn of their more snobbish classmates and, flying in the face of their whole genteel upbringing, have started something which may prove to be of the utmost importance to their country.

Outside of the classroom the student is learning the important art of getting his hands dirty. Inside it, inflexible and outdated educational methods often check his efforts to adjust himself to rapidly changing conditions. To the old Chinese scholar one may apply, with slight modifications, the epigram about the Bourbons: they forget nothing and they learn nothing.

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

The Chinese student has an amazing memory which permits him to learn by heart whole passages from books and lectures. Unfortunately, however, this sort of feat is apt to be enough to fulfil existing academic requirements, with the result that the student receives insufficient encouragement to learn something which is far more difficult and far more useful - to think for himself.

My teaching also brought me into touch with student life, especially the course in English composition, for which I assigned autobiographies or family histories, to be written in serial form, week by week and corrected in individual tutorials. But with the prevailing political climate, the writers tended to be cautious. A serious bespectacled young woman student, however, who gave me Chinese lessons, said one day: "In the minds of us Chinese, Christianity, imperialism and opium all go together." For all my Marxism this came as a shock. I asked her to explain. She did so with a passionate patriotic account of the Opium Wars of the mid-19th century. She taught me more about China than its language.

Others who taught me some of the facts of Chinese history and politics were Christian Socialist missionaries, some of whom became lifelong friends: the Endicotts, the Willmotts, the Kennards and others. They invited me to join their underground study group, whose subject matter was disguised under the harmless title of "History of the Relations between the Chinese Communist and Guomindang Parties." Even this was stretching the limits of safety in the political climate of Jiang Jieshi's China, especially since there were some Chinese members of the group, which met at night in the Willmott's home. There were occasional visitors, too, including Han Suyin⁷ (then studying midwifery in Chengdu) and Jack Belden. The group members were courageous, serious and knowledgeable about Chinese life. I learnt a lot from them and they felt that with my experience in Spain I had something to offer. But I myself was confused and uncertain as to my political position and to those few in whom I confided I said I was a Communist but had differences with the Party. Years later I discovered that two of the group members were, or became, members of the Communist Party of their respective countries. One of them secretly introduced me to an underground member of the Chinese C.P. but because of my uncertain political position I never followed up the contact. If I had, I might have become better integrated into campus life, for the students here were far more politically conscious than those of St. John's. The study group had revived my interest in going to Yan'an and I discussed this with a missionary who had been there. But by

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

this time (1940) it had become harder than ever to break through the Guomindang blockade of the Communist Border Regions. And other political and also personal reasons made me give up the idea of going there.

The political reason was Germany's attack on the Soviet Union in June, 1941. This, for me and other Communists, changed the nature of World War II from an imperialist to an anti-fascist war. In this, I felt I had a stake, as I had had in the anti-fascist war in Spain. And I decided to return to England and join the armed forces.

The personal reason was meeting Isabel, to whom I became engaged before leaving Chengdu for home.

Before leaving Shanghai I had told an American acquaintance that I was heading for the interior. He said: "Well, you'll end up marrying either a missionary's daughter or a Chinese." I replied without hesitation: "Then it'll be a Chinese." I was wrong. I married a missionary's daughter. I had never thought seriously of marrying anyone. I was attracted by women but I was committed to revolution and could not see myself as a husband, still less as a family man, with children. For more than a decade mine had been an unstable life in an unstable world, now rapidly becoming more unstable than ever. I liked Aristotle's saying, learnt at Columbia, that "man is a political animal," and I had political promises to keep. Women yes, but marriage no. One woman changed all that.

Friends, Chinese friends in particular, and our sons and relatives often ask how we met and fell in love. Isabel likes to avoid answering the question. I am less reluctant, though I doubt if there has ever been anything new to say on the subject of love since the Song of Solomon. But a few incidents in our courtship may be worth mentioning.

Isabel's sister, Julia was teaching in the English Department of Nanjing University on the West China Union University campus, as I was. One day she was unwell and Isabel came to take her classes. I was correcting papers in the department office. I looked up briefly as "Julia" came in, and said: "Oh, you've changed your hairdo," and got on with the job. These were the first words I spoke to her. Isabel's attitude, a few days earlier, had been even more casual. The two sisters were passing the campus tennis court where I was playing, and Julia said: "Oh look, there's the new Englishman." Isabel cast a hasty glance over the hedge and said: "Not tall enough for me" and walked on. Meanwhile the local young men, as young men will, had been discussing the local young women, the consensus being that Isabel was the pick of the bunch. A little later I asked one of the men what he

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

did over the weekend. "Well, last Sunday I went cycling with Isabel Brown." I went out and bought a secondhand byke and next Sunday I went cycling with Isabel Brown. We've been cycling together ever since, for nearly half a century now. I also pursued Isabel to the village near Chongqing where she was doing sociological research. So, at a different time did Jack Belden. We compared notes. "Yes," said Jack. "She's nice. But frankly, so much character scares the hell out of me." He had a point, but perhaps I was less modest or more reckless. In the summer of 1941, six of us, including one of my men students, went on a trek to Dajianlu (Kangding) in the then province of Xikang⁸. We hiked for six days through wooded mountains with rushing rivers in the gorges below and snowcapped peaks above, partly along the route of the Red Army's Long March five years earlier. Then ten days on horseback in the grasslands, thinly populated by nomad herdsmen and carpeted with wild flowers. We climbed to 17,000 feet above sea-level. At that height we humans could breathe more easily than the horses and Isabel and I more easily than the rest of the party, despite our ongoing romance. The trip lasted six weeks, during which time I grew a beard. Back in Chengdu I had a shave, proposed - and was accepted. I attribute this to Isabel's sudden shock at seeing me no longer bearded like the pard. Her parents, too, though far more enlightened than the majority of missionaries must have suffered from shock at finding their daughter engaged to an atheist communist who was, furthermore a Jew and not a teetotaler. This last might well have been a major objection for Methodists from Canada where hard liquor was a social problem. Trying to win their favour I had presented them with a beautiful silver vessel bought from a Tibetan hawkker, which I imagined to be a teapot. It turned out to be a wine pot. This gift sparked lengthy debates on the evils of alcohol, my defense being the frequent positive references to wine in the Bible. In the end we agreed amicably to disagree. As to my politics, my future in-laws were people with a social conscience and they considered commitment to a social cause, even one they disagreed with, was better than commitment to self-interest. As to my Jewishness, it was not conspicuous and was easily overlooked as time went by.

Before this, during the many days that Isabel and I walked and rode side by side we talked of many things, especially of religious belief and disbelief. I had long since rejected Judaism and Isabel, though she accompanied her parents to church in Chengdu (as did I, in order to be with her), was already questioning the

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

Christianity in which she had been brought up. She was sharply critical, too, of the life-style of most of the missionaries, with their large houses, many servants and imported comforts which contrasted with the far lower standard of living of their Chinese fellow Christians. While I encouraged her in her heresy she enlightened me about Chinese society. Our party had hired a couple of porters to carry tents, warm clothing for the heights and iron rations for those stretches of our journey where no food was obtainable. The porters were opium addicts and the stages of our march were dictated by their need to stop at those places where they could get their smoke. I learned that such men were generally poor peasants who had fallen into debt and lost their land. They smoked opium to make their bitter lives bearable. Carrying our not too heavy loads on a litter was not the worst of their jobs. They often carried tea all the way to Tibet, over passes more than 10,000 feet above sea level. Each man had a strong T-shaped stick so that after walking a hundred yards or so uphill he would stop, flex his knees and rest his load on the horizontal of the T. When we once took shelter in a hut 10,000 feet up, we found a porter resting. I picked up his load to try it for weight. I was 30 at the time, well fed and in good health. It was as much as I could do to stagger across the 10 foot hut. This helped me understand why the porters smoked opium, even though it could be the death of them. For with their unhygienic diet they often went down with dysentery. The local remedy for this was opium. But as they smoked it every day, the remedy was ineffective and they died. Opium production was controlled by the big landlords, who forced their tenants to grow poppies. The trade was in the hands of the local warlords who had fought the Red Army five years before among these mountains that we now trod. The Red Army's anti-warlord slogans, painted on great rocks and on the face of precipices could still be read. Passing Luding Bridge, I recalled Edgar Snow's account of the 23 Red Army heroes on the Long March, who had crossed that bridge five years before⁹. They swung along hand over hand on the iron links, their legs dangling down to the rushing river far below, for the flooring had been removed by the enemy, whose machine-guns blazed at them from the opposite end. Some of the 23 fell to their death but those who got across wiped out the enemy machine-gun nest, paving the way for the rest of the Red Army to cross.

On our journey we too crossed that bridge - on the restored floor of planks. Meanwhile we climbed beside the glacial river up to Dajianlu. There we hired horses and with their Tibetan owners rode across the

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

wildflower-strewn grasslands and up the mountains to our objective. This was to glimpse (not scale) Minya Gongka, a 25,000 foot peak topped by a pyramid of ice. From a respectful distance and at a height of 17,000 feet, we saw the ice pyramid emerge from the clouds. Minya Gongka had been climbed by an American expedition eight years before. The climbers made their base camp at a Daoist temple and the monks told them that at the top there was a crock of gold. After reaching the summit and returning to their base the monks asked if they had found the gold. "No," they replied, "there was no gold there." "Then," the monks answered, "you didn't get to the top."

I must recount one more episode - a shameful one, for me - of this journey which ended in my engagement. We were jogging along a stony mountain path and I, on my flat feet, had fallen behind, with one of the Tibetans whose horse was ahead with the others. At one point a swift stream crossed the path and I stooped to take off my shoes to cross it. But the Tibetan signed that he could carry me across - and I consented! I still recall the scene with shame.

On the way back to Chengdu, as I mulled over proposing to Isabel, I kept saying to myself: "No matter what, I'm going back to U.K. to join up. I'm not going to be held back from that by anything or any woman." But Isabel was not just "any woman"; and having for some strange reason agreed to marry me, she raised no objection to going to wartime England to do it. We got married in London, but only after a year of unforeseen adventures and mishaps.

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

Notes

1. The fact emerges most strikingly in that remarkable book The Great Game by Leopold Trepper (McGraw Hill, New York, 1977) Trepper, himself a Jew, was the founder and leader of the Soviet intelligence network, nicknamed by the Gestapo: "The Red Orchestra," which functioned in Europe before and during World War II.
2. Literally "Chinatown." Actually a poor working class, shopping and entertainment area. I saw no Chinese there
3. German Communist singer of revolutionary, anti-fascist and internationalist songs in Germany and Spain, where he was closely associated with the International Brigade.
4. This was never forthcoming until I asked for it for family reasons. In Shanghai and during the year and a half that I worked there I received a total family allowance of seventy-five pounds, which I sent to Yorkshire. I was not in the business for money.
5. Chen Duxiu (1879-1942). First a leader of the New Culture Movement in and after 1919 and a founder member of the Chinese Communist Party (1921). He was General Secretary of the Party until 1927. (n.b. Chinese names and words are rendered in the official romanization of the People's Republic - hanyu pinyin.)
6. Mademoiselle, New York, August, 1942.
7. Han Suyin describes the study group in her book Birdless Summer.
8. Historically the "Eastern Province of Kam" - part of Tibet. Later, under the Guomindang, a separate Chinese province. After Liberation it became an autonomous Tibetan region in Sichuan Province.
9. Red Star over China Penguin and other publishers.