

Edited Oct. 31, 1993

CHAPTER 10

From Village School to Academia (1949 -66)

1. Teaching in South Sea Mountain

I was in the prime of life and walking was more appealing than being jolted along on the creaking cart, even though the sun blazed down on the vast, flat plain. One day I walked 38 miles in my old RAF boots, feeling rather heroic. Much of the road, ran beside the main line railway - or what was left of it after the guerillas had wrecked it during the anti-Japanese war; every bridge was a tangle of twisted steel. But as we approached Shijiazhuang a short section of the line was intact and there I saw a startling sight - full-size steam locomotives, not Toonerville trolleys, shunting back and forth, belching steam and blazing fire. I had played with toy trains and watched real ones since childhood, but the last eight months had turned me into what my Cockney father would have called a yokel and I gazed in excitement at the engines. And as we proceeded into the city I looked with a mixture of pleasure and distaste at the blazing electric lights. They seemed wasteful after our dim oil lamps in the village.

A day or two after our arrival we were given an extravagant welcoming banquet at the best restaurant in the city. The building consisted of a series of connected courtyards in the innemost of which our feast was set out. At the end of it our host, CLARA, the Chinese Liberated Areas Relief Association, paid the bill. Shijiazhuang had been liberated only seven months before (in November, 1947) and the host felt it necessary to explain that communists did not give tips. The pre-Liberation tradition was that the restaurant staff would shout the amount of the tip as the customers departed, the volume of sound of the announcement being in direct ratio to the size of the tip. Now to give face to these non-tipping customers, who could be expected to bring good business under the new regime, the staff shouted from one courtyard to the next as we made our exit. But only the words of thanks and the name of the host could be understood. The reference to the "tip" was extremely loud

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but entirely incomprehensible. Private enterprise knew how to adapt itself to the ways of the Communist Party.

Shortly after the banquet we were visited by Wang Bin-nan, a veteran Communist who after the setting up of the People's Republic held many important diplomatic posts. Wang Bin-nan now asked us to become teachers at the "Foreign Affairs Training Class" being set up in a village near Shijiazhuang. This request was a blow. We had spent eight months gathering material for a book, now we were being asked to become teachers and set aside our writing, or at the very best divide our time and energy between the two. But we felt we must accept. Before leaving England we had been urged to subordinate our personal interests. We should do our writing on land reform so long as conditions allowed, but if ever our Chinese comrades asked us to do anything else, we should do it. Now came the crunch. Wang Bin-nan understood our feelings and suggested that we be both teachers and writers at the same time. It was easier said than done, but we took on the dual task, albeit somewhat reluctantly.

But already we had been inspired by the masterly conduct of the land reform campaign and had grasped something of its significance for China and in the long run the rest of the world. Pondering this I thought of Stone, our passenger in the jeep I had driven from Tianjin to Handan. Stone was an American "sanitation engineer". He was a down-to-earth type with a message for China and he came all the way to Ten Mile Inn to deliver it to Yang Xiu-feng, chairman of the Border Region. "There are three things you simply must do," he insisted. "And fast. Dig the latrines deep and put lids on them to keep flies out. Stock the ponds with fish which eat harmful insects. Put covers on the wells to keep dirt out. The gains will be stupendous." Chairman Yang listened attentively through his hearing aid. (He had done research in chemistry in France and later used his knowledge to help the guerillas make mines. Somewhere along the line a premature explosion had deafened him.) When Stone had finished his pitch Chairman Yang nodded in approval of his practicality. "These things must be done," he said, "but not just now. We have something else to do at the moment." Stone exploded. "What have you to do that's more urgent than this?" he asked. The Chairman smiled. "The land reform", he replied. Meanwhile he arranged for Stone to teach his methods to students at North China University. Now I thought to myself, if Stone can put aside his project for something more important, I suppose we can do the same.

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There was not much of a Foreign Office atmosphere about the school in the village of Nanhaishan (South Sea Mountain) ten miles west of Shijiazhuang. The half-dozen teachers and students - erstwhile underground workers in KMT-controlled areas - slept and ate, taught and studied in spare rooms of better-off peasants or absentee landlords. Forging close relations with the newly liberated peasants was part of our curriculum, so classes were halted to enable us to help gather the corn crop. I was working on the land at last, not merely admiring its beauty!

When Isabel and I started teaching in Nanhaishan we tried at the same time to work up our land reform material into a book. But privacy was never a part of Chinese village life. Students would unceremoniously enter our room at any hour of the day to ask us questions about the English language. I found it maddening to have my train of thought about land reform interrupted by questions on the use of "who" and "whom", or using a preposition to end a sentence with. So I put up a notice on our door stating that our mornings were devoted to school work and we welcomed questions at that time; but our afternoons were reserved for writing and visitors were not welcome then. This called forth criticism. A teacher in the communist-led Liberated Areas was expected to devote himself heart and soul to the students. We reluctantly took the notice down. Our first book was published ten years later, in 1959.

I instinctively rejected the traditional approach to teaching: forced feeding and mechanical memorising. To counter it I organised discussions and debates. But getting the students to talk rather than listen to the teacher was like drawing teeth. In desperation I proposed a provocative debate topic: "Capitalism is superior to socialism", explaining that it was not necessary to believe what you argued for. You would be marked for the skill with which you spoke. But before the debate took place word of this outrageous topic reached the ears of Chief-of-Staff Ye Jian-ying, head of the nearby Military Academy and with overall responsibility for our civilian school. He banned the debate. The organiser's name was not mentioned doubtless, to "save the foreign comrade's face".

On our staff was a young American, Betty, who had been a free-lance newspaperwoman. She had come to the Liberated Areas and volunteered her services - as a journalist. But at the time there was a more pressing

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need for teachers of English. Betty had never taught before and felt that her professional skill was being wasted. The school leaders, however, thought that she was primarily concerned with making a name for herself, and I was asked to convince her to put public before private interests. I was hardly the person for that job, for though I felt that a communist should put the cause before all else, I myself would have been happier writing than teaching. I also thought that while work assignments should be based on the people's needs they should be discussed with the person being assigned; the decision should not be peremptorily handed down from a higher level, which might misjudge the individual's character and capacities. This heretical idea was no doubt attributed to my "bourgeois ideology". The Party knew best and should be unquestioningly obeyed. Despite my continuing admiration for the Chinese Communist Party I never outgrew this heresy.

My "bourgeois ideology" expressed itself also in my impatience with bureaucratic delays in getting things done. Isabel and I were at first quartered in a charming little house with ochre-blossomed pomegranate trees in the courtyard. It had formerly belonged to a landlord. But in Nanhaishan even the landlords lacked such conveniences as flush toilets and we had to use a latrine which was located unhygienically close to the dining-room. Furthermore the latrine pit had no cover and the flies were free to buzz in and out, from the toilet to the table. I asked for a cover for the latrine. "Just something simple, made of woven sorghum stalks." This was agreed - in principle. In practice nothing was done. Finally I blew my top. "Why are they so bloody slow about everything?" I complained to the American doctor George Hatem. George smiled. Then with seeming irrelevance he started reminiscing, tying in his personal experiences with a sketch of the history of the Chinese revolution from the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921, through the Long March of 1934-35, to resistance against Japan and Jiang Jieshi's counter-revolution, then on the verge of being crushed. "All that in 27 years," George said. "Are they slow - or fast?" I was chastened. Eventually we got our latrine cover, no doubt thanks to George's prodding.

His thumb-nail sketch of Chinese revolutionary history helped me to put problems in perspective and to curb my arrogance and impatience. But I continued to have difficulty in drawing the line between reasonable patience and slavish submission to bureaucratic procrastination.

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George diagnosed another ailment for me: appendicitis. The village of Nanhaishan was newly-liberated and its Peasant Union had only just been set up, but it soon provided stretcher-bearers to carry me ten miles across the fields in pouring rain to the Bethune Peace Hospital in another village. I was covered with a heavy tarpaulin from which I could peek at the roots of the millet and sorghum sticking up from the mud. "This must be what it feels like to be a corpse," I thought. Soon I felt more like a corpse than ever as I lay on a make-shift operating table. The "operating theatre" was the only hospital building specially constructed; the wards, pharmacy, staff quarters, offices etc. were all rooms in peasant homes. Like them the theatre was made of wattle and daub, but its walls were whitewashed and they had rounded corners so as not to collect the dust of the dry north China plain. I was operated on in the light of a hissing pressure lamp by a skilled surgeon - a Japanese who had been "liberated" in the fighting in the northeast. The operation, he told me later, should have taken seventeen minutes, but it took forty five, because on making a neat little incision he found complications. I felt no pain but I spent an uncomfortable three quarters of an hour under local anaesthetic. What a privilege that was, I thought. How many 8th Route Army and PLA wounded soldiers underwent amputations and other operations with no anaesthetic at all during the Guomindang blockade of the Liberated Areas. After a few days recovering on a kang in a peasant home I was able to stagger to the "lavatory". It was an outhouse at the end of the pig-sty. And as I squatted in the shack made of sorghum stalks the pig would come galumphing up, snorting in greedy anticipations.

Not long after my return to Nanhaishan came the air-raids. A number of Guomindang officer prisoners had been kept in the nearby village of Nanxincheng, site of the Military Academy headed by Chief-of-Staff Ye Jian-ying. These prisoners were granted parole, which they broke. Getting back to their own lines they revealed the location of the Academy which was soon subjected to air-raids. So was Nanhaishan, though it was no military objective. We dug slit-trenches and I recall an uncomfortable afternoon in one of them. After a few strafing runs, during which machine-gun bullets landed in our roof, the planes sheered off. With the recurring raids, as we had no anti-aircraft, orders came down that we should get up before dawn, scatter in the fields, conduct what classes we could in the open and return after dark. Isabel and I, with experience of the London blitz during World War II considered this cowardly. We ought to carry on as the cockneys did. Fortunately no one took our heroic advice.

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I differed also on a political matter: the expulsion of Tito from the Cominform. One day the headmaster drew Isabel and me aside to tell us of this event. It was being relayed to us on the instructions of the chief-of-staff. At first I could hardly believe the news. Hadn't Tito fought with the Red Army against imperialist intervention in 1920, I asked? Hadn't he led Yugo-Slav partisans against the nazis? Still, the Head insisted. Tito had been denounced by Stalin for opposing Moscow's line. I was confused and unhappy. I had submerged my misgivings about Stalin six years before and had found content in unquestioning identification with a cause of which Stalin was the world leader. I said no more. My doubts were not dispelled, but I thrust them to the back of my mind for a dozen years.

Meanwhile they were overshadowed by a more urgent matter: Guomindang General Fu Zuo-yi's planned commando raid on the nearby headquarters of the Communist Party's Central Committee. Chief-of-Staff Ye Jian-ying saw no need to endanger such a non-combatant unit as our foreign language training class; so we were ordered to move to the mountains, marching at night, resting and hiding in villages during the day to keep out of sight of enemy planes.

This time I was far from offering any heroic advice as I had during the air-raids. And I was still weak from my appendicitis operation and after stumbling along in the dark for the first few miles I gave in to repeated urgings to clamber onto a cart with the old folk, nursing mothers and babies. What a disgrace! All the more so with Isabel striding briskly along.

But I was in good shape for a much longer walk a few months later at the end of the year (1948). After the ineffectiveness of the air-raids, the commando raid, which proved abortive, and a series of catastrophic KMT defeats in Shanghai and the northeast. Fu Zuo-yi saw the writing on the wall and agreed to peace talks.

While the peace talks were dragging on, our school started to walk to Beiping, or as close as it could until the city was handed over. Isabel, however, was advised to stay in Shijiazhuang for a while. She had had a miscarriage in Ten Mile Inn and now, at last, was pregnant again. But the dangerous sixth week of pregnancy was approaching and Ma Hai-de advised her not to attempt the three hundred kilometre walk. I remained behind with her until word came that the school would be staying for some time in Liangxiang, a county town 35 kilometres

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southwest of Beiping. In other words, the talks with Fu Zuo-yi over the peaceful surrender of the city were stalled. So the school decided to conduct language classes and I was sent for to come and teach.

I was to go with a couple of elderly civilians. We were escorted by six or eight P.L.A. men and were offered seats on the two carts which carried baggage and supplies. I found it more comfortable to walk in the crisp, sunny January air. I got along better with the jolly young soldiers than with the elderly gents and when we reached the Hebei province capital, Baoding, about halfway to Beiping, the soldiers invited me to join them in a visit to the local bath-house. I had never been to such a place before. It struck me as halfway between a Roman and a Turkish bath. One entered a warm high hall lined with couches of semi-naked men reclining and drinking tea. After taking off one's clothes one put them into a basket which was hoisted to the ceiling, where one's valuables were safe from thieves. Then, after soaping oneself from a wash-basin and rinsing off the lather, one proceeded to the baths. There were three of these, like small swimming pools, the first hot, the second smaller and hotter, and the third smaller still and scalding, with boards across it on which one sat and sweltered; it was far too hot to sit in. After this ordeal by water one staggered off to recline on a couch. This attracted no attention to normal clients, whose bodies were smooth as ivory. A hairy chest such as mine would have attracted no attention in a men's locker room in the West; in Baoding it created a sensation. People glanced and grinned, nudged each other and nattered as if an ape had come for a bath. I was neither embarrassed nor gratified by being the focus of attention. It was something that foreigners in China have had to live with until recent years, when Western films, including videos with their outlandish commercials, have hardened the Chinese populace to even stranger sights than my chest.

It was several days walk to Liangxiang, which was a mustering point both for the administrative personnel who were to run Beiping once it was taken and for thousands of troops. The great plain, gleaming in the snow, was crossed by lines of marching men converging on the little town like spokes on the hub of a wheel. I had a happy reunion with students and teachers. They were billeted in local houses with paper-paned latticed windows through which the yellow light of oil lamps glimmered at night. In town there were mass "struggle meetings" against pre-liberation corrupt and oppressive town officials. A dozen of them, in their long gowns and

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traditional "half-melon" hats stood on the platform at the entrance to a temple, the courtyard of which was thronged with the angry populace. One after another people rose from the squatting crowd to point angrily at the accused, charging them with rape, extortion, beating, killing. I sided unquestioningly with the accusers and felt no pity for the accused. Everything seemed simple and clear-cut. I knew which side I was on and was untroubled by thoughts of legal procedure or human dignity. My chief concern was to take pictures.

Once my picture-taking nearly got me into trouble. A company of P.L.A. soldiers were sitting on the ground in a vacant lot. They were peasant lads playing some childish game, passing a bean bag from one to another behind their backs while their comrade in the middle of the circle had to guess who had it. Young Chinese deprived of play in childhood, even in their twenties play games that strike westerners as juvenile. They seem politically precocious but emotionally immature. I watched these young soldiers and started to photograph them. A young officer strode angrily up, asked who I was and how I dared take photos. Still insensitive to cultural differences and to China's strong sense of national dignity, especially in dealing with the West, which had pushed China around for a hundred years, I bridled. "If you want to know who I am," I replied haughtily, "go and ask Chief-of-Staff Ye Jian-ying" and stalked off, never questioning my claim to be a communist, a democrat, an internationalist and anti-imperialist.

While the peace talks dragged on we held informal English classes in our billets. Soon after they concluded, Isabel arrived. She had ridden in an army lorry by way of Beijing. Arriving there she ran into George, who was staying at the same hostel. "Come along" he said, "You're just in time for the Victory Parade" and he whipped her away in a jeep to the "Forward Gate" of the Imperial Forbidden city. There he escorted her up to the battlemented parapet, where she stood with top P.L.A. leaders, including Lin Biao and Nie Rong-zhen who commanded the forces which now occupied Beijing. Up the main north-south thoroughfare from the Temple of Heaven to the Gate of Heavenly Peace poured the troops of the victorious People's Army escorting American guns, tanks and other military equipment captured from the Guomindang. Behind them trotted Mongolian cavalry battalions of matched ponies: black, brown, dappled and white. The citizens clapped and cheered. Long lines of students snaked along dancing the conga-like yang ge dance. I saw none of this, but Isabel told me all about it. I

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was glad that for once in this patriarchal society she should be in on something special, not I. At last in the early spring the school moved into Beiping, riding in a ramshackle train, which struck us as a most modern conveyance.

2. Emerging From "the Idiocy of Rural Life"

After 15 months in the country we were back in a city. I had lived in London, Paris, New York and Shanghai and thought myself a sophisticated "city slicker"; but strolling in a Beiping park one day we saw a young western couple walking hand-in-hand and I was shocked. I had grown so accustomed to village ways that this struck me as obscene.

Another shock to my proletarian puritanism was provided by our new students, as enrollment leapt in the first few days from 35 to 75. Looking out of the window of our old Japanese barrack building I saw some new students advancing on the cook-house carrying their privately-owned thermos flasks. Half a dozen such flasks had been listed in Ten Mile Inn as "struggle fruits" - booty of class warfare seized from the landlords. No one else in the village had owned such luxuries. Now these supposedly revolutionary students...! What are things coming to, I mused, like Livy moralising over the decadence of the declining Roman Empire. My reflexes were wrong. These students had grown up in comfortable homes. Yet here they were in buildings stripped bare of all furniture by looters before the Communists entered Beiping, sleeping on the floor at night and squatting on camp-stools in class. I evidently saw myself as an "old revolutionary".

I must have looked the part for Isabel and I caused alarm to the non-Chinese locals. We were wearing the clothes issued to all our teachers, similar to P.L.A. uniforms but without military insignia. The British manager of the Beiping Branch of the Hong Kong & Shanghai bank threw a flustered fit when I went to cash a cheque wearing my school uniform; and a graduate of St. John's University whom I had taught in the '30s was reported to have said: "What on earth has happened to Mr Crook! In Shanghai he used to dress so smartly, in a white sharkskin suit." One day, craving coffee, which we had not tasted for months, we went into a cafe run by White

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Russians. The coffee was served in dainty cups with silver spoons on the saucers by a buxom blond waitress, who retreated hastily to the kitchen. Then, after some excited whispering behind the scenes, she returned, whipped away the silver spoons and substituted tin ones. The White Russian proprietors, had evidently lost property to the Russian reds and they weren't taking any chances with these "Chinese bandits."

Not all westerners were scared of us. One day, strolling in the old Legation Quarter, where our barracks were situated, we ran into Howard, an American friend from our days in Chengdu in 1940-41. I had a soft spot in my heart for him, for he had helped bring Isabel and me together. I had asked him soon after my arrival what he did on Sundays. "Well, last Sunday I went cycling with Isabel Brown." I went straight out and bought a secondhand bike and have been cycling with Isabel Brown ever since. That was in 1940. But in 1949 things were different. Howard, no longer a missionary relief worker was language officer at the U.S. embassy, which had not yet withdrawn but which the Chinese Communists did not recognize. The Americans, like representatives of other capitalist countries, were simply put in Coventry by the Military Administration which preceded the People's Government. Howard approached us eagerly as old friends, thinking we might provide an official contact. He had a quantity of relief grain, he said. Could we help him hand it over? This was just the time when Mao Ze-dong was writing scathing articles about the inefficacy of the U.S. blockade of China and praising noted Chinese figures who refused to be bought over. Under the circumstances we explained we could not help Howard and referred him to Song Qing-ling, Sun Yat-sen's widow, who dealt with matters of welfare. We accepted an invitation to dinner at Howard's house at the Embassy, however, for old times sake. This was thrown up at me 20 years later by my interrogators in prison: "Hobnobbing with the American imperialists."

Meanwhile an opportunity arose for me to take a stand against the British imperialists.

At the end of April 1949 a British gunboat, the Amethyst, became embroiled in the P.L.A.'s crossing of the Yangzi River to take Nanjing. The incident reportedly caused 252 Chinese casualties and on April 30 Mao Ze-dong issued a blistering statement condemning British imperialism for intruding into Chinese inland waterways and militarily intervening in China's civil war.

Shortly after this there was a knock on our door and in came Hetta Empson, a South African-born

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sculptress (she was herself a statuesque figure), then teaching English at a Beijing university. Being married to the English poet and literary critic William Empson, Hetta was a British subject and she and one or two other local left of centre Britishers, including her husband, were circulating a petition. It was to protest to the Attlee government, by way of the British Embassy, against Britain's intervention in the Chinese civil war. We were overwhelmed by the entry of this Junoesque personage with her male entourage, all the more so as we rather fancied ourselves as the sole representatives of British anti-imperialism in China. We happily signed the petition and were soon occasional visitors at the Empson's. There we argued about literature and knocked back Chinese white spirit which flowed freely in their home.

At the end of June I was invited to a mass meeting at the Temple of Agriculture, where once the Emperor ploughed the first furrow every spring. This time the occasion was different, but I was given to understand that it was to be important and that the invitation was a special privilege. (Isabel was unable to accept as she was eight months pregnant). It turned out to be the first time that I was to see and hear Mao Ze-dong. He had been my hero ever since I read Snow's Red Star Over China. I was moved when, as the military band across the vast arena struck up "The Sky is Red in the East". The last line is "China has brought forth a Mao Ze-dong" on which words he emerged on the distant platform. Then in his Hunanese accent he delivered the speech "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship". In it he dealt with China's revolutionary history, friendship with the Soviet Union, international trade and aid, democracy for the people, dictatorship for their internal enemies, and other momentous matters, in a vigorous, confident style, replete with references to Chinese history and literature. I found it all inspiring and convincing, except for a sentence or so: "These "twenty-eight years of our Party are a long period, in which we have accomplished only one thing - we have won basic victory in the revolutionary war ... our past work is only the first step in a long march of ten thousand li." I smiled and thought: "He's a poet. That's just a figure of speech, a bit of Chinese modesty and understatement. Really the seizure of power settled everything." I cherished that illusion many years. Time has shown that Mao was speaking the literal truth.

At the beginning of August our eldest son, Carl was born in a small maternity hospital in a charming old-style Beijing courtyard not far from our barrack building campus. On hearing the news of his birth I pedalled

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over furiously and found Isabel, in breach of Chinese medical tradition, quietly reading. Not that she was any less excited than I about the little frog-like creature, now a bearded father of three. Eight weeks later, on New China's first National Day (October 1) we had a feast for the entire school in the courtyard where the Japanese Embassy Guard had once drilled. I dipped a chopstick in a glass of sorghum spirit and put it in Carl's mouth. He did not complain. I attribute his present characteristically Chinese enjoyment of drink without drunkenness to this initiation. I also recall often waking with a start in the still of the night and listening intently to make sure he was still breathing. He was. Human beings, at least in infancy, are a viable lot.

There was no doubt in my mind that I wanted Carl to be British. So when he was a few weeks old I went to the Consulate to register his birth. But my close bonds with my Chinese comrades forged during our intense common experience in the Liberated Areas had made me more responsive than ever to their anti-imperialist propaganda. Crossing the street and entering the vast old embassy compound - for which expedition I shed my Chinese uniform and wore tweeds - was like entering the lion's den. The British Empire is only a paper lion, my Chinese colleagues said, and after browsing through out-of-date copies of Punch in the deserted waiting-room I was inclined to agree with them. In fact on returning home I said to Isabel that the place had the atmosphere of a funeral-parlour. Nevertheless I was treated courteously by a young man who entered Carl's name in a ledger and later sent us his birth-certificate testifying that our son was a British subject.

Carl's birth was a momentous event for Isabel and me personally but not for humanity as a whole. That of another infant was. When Carl was eight weeks old, a telegram was sent, reading: "Congratulations on birth of new baby". It was addressed to Mao Ze-dong and it came from Edgar Snow, barred by the U.S. State Department from entering China. The infant in question was the Chinese People's Republic. This time, as distinct from the occasion when Carl was born, I was present at the birth. Together with Isabel I saw Mao standing on the parapet of the Gate of Heavenly Peace - Tian An Men - and heard him proclaim: "The Chinese people have stood up." In my heart I stood up with them and joyfully proceeded to strengthen my faith in the newly-established regime of People's China and its leader Mao Ze-dong.

But my joy was unexpectedly dampened. Isabel and I were on one of the small temporary reviewing

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stands set up at the foot of the mighty palace gate. We were assigned seats on the west end of the stand. A few feet away, on the east end was a delegation of Soviet writers, including Simonov, author of a novel about the heroic Battle of Stalingrad, Days and Nights, and Fadayevev, author of The Young Guard about young communists working illegally against the nazis in occupied territory during World War II. I had avidly read both books and there, a few feet away, were their authors! I eagerly approached them and in all the languages of which I had a smattering, tried to engage them in conversation. They were unresponsive. Even there on the reviewing stand for carefully selected guests their sense of security prevailed over the Russian warmth which fills their books. I felt like a lover spurned. Nevertheless, during those early days in New China, my doubts of ten years before about the Stalin regime were further dispelled.

One day we attended a meeting of the school Communist Party Branch. Though members of neither the Chinese nor, now, of the British C.P., we were invited out of "proletarian internationalism". The meeting had been called to consider a student's application to join the Party. His two party member referees spoke for him, then the candidate explained why he wished to join the Party. This question was becoming more important than ever now that the Communists had won power. Before then, to join the Party meant to risk one's life; now it might be to gain privilege and power. So the applicant's ideology was discussed, in his presence. He came from a landlord family and somebody now said that he had once grumbled, "If it weren't for Chairman Mao my family would still have its land." That statement sent a shock round the room. The discussion warmed up and the branch voted to turn down the application for the time being, urging re-application after another year. I was astonished at such severe handling of what struck me as a mere thoughtless remark. But the more I thought about it and discussed it with Isabel, the less trivial it seemed. Isabel had studied psychology at Toronto University and in the Liberated Areas she had asked how the subject was taught. It wasn't. Psychology was considered a "bourgeois pseudo-science" - to China's detriment. But though the theory was brushed aside, psychology was applied in practice.

Another discovery at this time was "The Mass Line". We learnt the phrase from our American journalist colleague Betty. Discussing our writing on land reform with her we described the work method of the Land

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Reform Work Team. "That," said Betty, "is the mass line. Never heard of it? It's in Liu Shao-qi's Political Report to the 7th C.P. Congress in 1945. I'll translate it for you." Reading it we realised that this mass line was what we had described in writing about the land reform campaign.

During these first few months in Beijing, the school was enrolling new students and teachers. Some of the latter were "Democratic Personages", well-known people who did not belong to the Communist Party but supported it against the Guomindang. Among these was an eminent scholar, well-qualified academically to fill the post of Dean. At Cambridge he had translated Chinese classical philosophy into English. The Party Secretary sounded me out confidentially as to whether I would agree to be Deputy Dean. "Chu Lao" (the Venerable Chu) "is able, loyal and honest," he said, "but..." "But what?" I asked. "Well, you see, he's not a Communist and you are. We know that we can count on you to uphold the Party line." I considered the proposed promotion an honour and accepted almost without reflection. I could not foresee what problems the new post would present. Years later Chu Lao said at a meeting, "Comrade Crook does not understand Chinese society." I thought that because I was a Communist and he a mere "Democratic Personage," he must be wrong; that a foreigner with Marxism could understand China better than a Chinese without it. Indeed I confidently believed that being a communist I could understand any social or political problem better than anyone who was not. This complacency was born of a smattering of Marxism. I felt I had no need to learn from the uninitiated. Its obverse was a mix of modesty and mental laziness. If the great leaders of communism did or said something that seemed wrong I thought to myself, 'Who am I to doubt them? They must be right, I wrong.' This stunted my powers of political analysis.

One rash act which my excess of self-confidence led me to was over the buying of books for our library. The well-known "French Bookshop", which sold mostly books in English, was close to our school, in the old Legation Quarter. One of our new teachers, Lao Zhou, was a returned graduate student from a well-known American university, where he had done research in modern British and American literature. He was far more of an academic than I, with my mere Columbia University B.A. But I considered that being an educated native speaker of English I knew the language and how to teach it, better than any of the Chinese staff. And I was deputy Dean to boot. When Lao Zhou told me he had seen a seven volume set of Jespersen's English Grammar in

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the French Bookshop, I poohpooed the idea of buying it. "Chinese teachers and students make too much fuss about grammar," I said. "I haven't studied any for thirty years and ..." I didn't put it into words but implied that I was none the worse for it. The fact was I had never heard of the world-famed Danish scholar Jespersen. "Besides, that's a preposterous price. We can't afford all that." Here I was on safer ground, morally if not scientifically. In the Liberated Areas when students sharpened their pencils, if a piece of lead an eighth of an inch long fell out they would stick it back in the hole. I admired such frugality. And for a year or two after Liberation I lived happily on an allowance in kind plus pocket-money measured in terms of a few pounds of millet a day. So to buy seven volumes of Jespersen struck me as a waste of money. But such head-on collisions as my disagreement with Lao Zhou were contrary to Chinese cultural tradition. Avoiding confrontation was necessary for maintaining good relations with the scholars whose talents were needed for building a new China. In the end I agreed to the purchase of the seven volumes Jespersen's grammar.

3. Movements: Topographical and Ideological

Early in 1950, after a year in the centre of Beijing, we moved to the north-western suburb of Xi Yuan. The location near the Summer Palace Park was ideal but the quarters, old barracks of a war-lord army, were not. We did at least have some basic furniture, but with the steady increase in the number of students and teachers we were all on top of each other. I should perhaps have welcomed this, but in fact I found the lack of privacy trying. Privacy becomes possible with prosperity and with the growth of individualism. In poverty-stricken China, emerging from feudalism and moving towards socialism, individualism was a dirty word. A person who went for a walk by himself in the surrounding fields was suspected of having "individualist tendencies" and was likely to be criticised. In this social climate students, as they had done in the village, would drop in at any time, day and night, to consult us on their studies. By now we no longer felt that this interfered with our book writing - we had become reconciled to putting that aside for a while. But it made the preparation of classes and correcting of papers difficult.

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Yet we had no right to demand the luxury of privacy. We were still living "on the allowance system", receiving a little pocket money every month and being issued the necessities of life in kind, from towels and tooth-paste to food, clothing and bedding. Isabel and I were proud of this, for we were included in the system, while the new Chinese teachers, returned students from Oxford and Cambridge and Harvard and Chicago were paid in cash. So I felt superior and self-righteous while secretly craving a little bourgeois privacy. Not long after moving to the suburbs, however, we old timers from the Liberated Areas were switched from payment in kind to payment in cash, like the new staff. This was a logical step. In the villages there had been next to nothing to buy, so we hardly had use for money. Now there were shops, stalls, restaurants all around us. Furthermore the astronomical inflation of the old regime had been brought under control. One did not need, as under the Guomindang, to take a suitcase full of paper money when shopping for daily necessities. Doing away with different types of pay, one in cash, one in kind, decreased the distinctions between old and new personnel and was good for unity between them. But some of the old-timers felt that the new salary system smacked of capitalism and one party cadre grumbled when called on, now that he had money, to smarten up and start wearing socks in his cloth shoes. He grudgingly conformed. But it was easier to change his clothes than his ideas. When called on to speak at a "mass" wedding ceremony of six couples he sternly warned the young brides and grooms not to indulge in the decadent bourgeois practice of birth control. In this, his thinking was in line with that of Mao Zedong and other top Party leaders, who, following the lead of the Soviet Union denounced birth-control as "Neo-Malthusianism". I had my doubts about this, thinking that a smaller population would make for a higher standard of living. But I dared not openly disagree with Mao and Stalin!

Along with our pay came improved housing. Isabel and I were given a couple of small rooms in a terrace for senior personnel - the school president, department heads and others. The new quarters were not luxurious. The terrace was built by making use of an existing wall surrounding the barracks parade ground. A parallel wall was built ten feet inside it and a roof slapped over the top of the two walls. Then the long corridor was partitioned into cubicles. We lived in two adjoining low-roofed rooms, (I could touch the ceiling if I jumped), until after our third son Paul was born in 1953. Our home was cramped but cosy and we had more privacy than

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when living cheek-by-jowl with the students in the rat-infested barrack buildings. An Australian trade unionist visitor, driven out to see us in a Soviet limousine, was shocked by our living conditions. But I doubt if we have ever been happier in our lives.

As the school expanded, so did my job. I had been appointed Deputy Dean to provide some communist stiffening for our "Democratic Personage" dean. But soon it became clear that I needed some stiffening myself and I was provided with two young Chinese colleagues whom the three of us regarded as my "Political Commissars". (One of them a quarter of a century later became a Deputy Foreign Minister of the People's Government. The other was wrongly branded a rightist in 1958.) The commissars were necessary. Chu Lao's remark that "Comrade Crook does not understand Chinese society" was true. It did not occur to me, for instance, that some of the work methods we had witnessed during the land reform movement in Ten Mile Inn, were common practice in the Chinese Communist Party and might well be applied in colleges. Once we arranged to hold a meeting of the English Department leaders and teachers. A day or so beforehand my commissars came to sound out my views on the subject to be discussed - the adoption of a Soviet text-book for teaching English. "I'm busy," I said. "Anyway, we're going to discuss that at the meeting. I'll say what I think about it then. Why waste time on it now?" Yet what they had hoped for was an exchange of views so that we could clarify and unify our ideas before the meeting. This was what the land reform work team and the village Party members had called "fermentation". Now I felt it to be duplication of effort. On another occasion I presented a report to the teachers. After finishing it I said: "Any discussion, comments, suggestions?" Silence. "O.K. then. The next item of business is ... " This struck me as efficient. No waste of time. But afterwards my commissars criticised me, for not giving people a chance to talk. "Afterwards some of the older teachers complained," they said. I protested that I had given them a chance and they had said nothing. "That wasn't enough," replied the commissar. "Too simple, too mechanical. You should have chatted with them before the meeting, sounded them out, encouraged them to speak at the meeting. Then you could have called on one or two of them by name. You didn't draw them out. And remember the meeting was conducted in English." "Well, this is the English Department, after all." "Yes but some of them are afraid of making mistakes and losing face." My crude concept of Western efficiency apparently needed

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polishing and adapting to the subtleties of Chinese society.

As to the matter of conducting English Department meetings in English: this was convenient for me and I justified it by saying that it was good practice for the teachers. But not all of them could express themselves adequately in the language and all but the very best had a face problem. I gave too little thought to their problems and too much to my own convenience.

Not that all my ideas on such subjects were wrong. I protested that we were running a school not a government ministry and that the proportion of our buildings used for offices was far too high. It should be reduced and more space allocated to class-rooms and dormitories. The whole administrative structure was top-heavy, I said, and dominated teaching instead of serving it. That problem dragged on for decades.

In spite of my poor Chinese I struggled on as Deputy Dean of the growing English Department for three years, with the aid of long-suffering secretaries and interpreters, who despite their sufferings remain my friends to this day. Eventually our joint torment came to an end, not just because it was impracticable for an illiterate to try and cope with the mass of paperwork in Chinese. By now it was considered no longer necessary or appropriate for a foreigner to hold an administrative position. I gave up the job of Deputy Dean with mixed feelings of relief and resentment. I was relieved at being able to set down a burden I could not comfortably carry but resentful of the fact that my setting it down passed unmarked by public recognition of my efforts to do the job well. (I had often worked in the office until eleven at night.) The Chinese Communist Party at that time expected its cadres to "be able to go up and go down", to accept promotion or demotion as the work demanded. I was hardly up to the level of that expectation and would have relished a little public praise.

My work was appraised with a backhanded compliment in the San Fan, the Triple Anti Movement, against waste, corruption and bureaucracy, launched in 1952.

For teachers and teacher-administrators like myself the San Fan did not focus on waste, still less on corruption. These were the problems of people handling money, running messes, supervising building. Those found guilty of large-scale corruption were called "tigers". For people like me the focal point was bureaucratic style of work.

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The procedure was: "leaders take the plunge first", the metaphor suggesting a cleansing process. Participation was not required of "Democratic Personages" such as the Dean of the English Department, but I was honoured by being regarded as a communist. So, in I plunged. I had to make three self-criticisms before being passed as having come to an understanding of my shortcomings and how to overcome them. The first session was with my two "Commissars" and other Communist colleagues. I forget now who they were, so evidently I bore them no grudges. The second session was with the same group expanded to include non-Communist fellow teachers and student representatives. The third was to the classes of students I taught.

After 35 years I recall few details of my self-criticism and criticism by others. One teacher denounced me for having my leather shoes cleaned for me by our children's nurse, whom I appeared to confuse with my R.A.F. batman! But the Party Branch Secretary told me privately that such matters of "personal life style" were not the main issue. More significant in my own opinion then and now was the resurgence of my old identity problem.

As Deputy Dean it was my responsibility to strengthen unity among the teachers and to be on good terms with them myself. At the very least I should do nothing to cause disunity. Yet, as I admitted during my self-criticism, I had harboured feelings of resentment towards some of them, which might harm our work. I suspected some of the teachers who had studied at prestigious universities in the West looked down on my mere Columbia B.A. degree. To make matters worse I tended to set myself up as an authority on the English language because I was a native speaker. In fact I was rather proud of my ignorance of linguistic theory, which they were steeped in. Yet they made mistakes in practice, in their use of everyday English. Furthermore I felt that some of them, while abroad, had been infected with the virus of anti-Semitism. In a word they looked down on me and I had less than comradely feelings towards them. Having revealed these and other things I said that as Deputy Dean, to say nothing of professing to be a communist, I should have been broad-minded enough to rise above such feelings of resentment. In the discussion which followed my self-criticism I was especially touched when one Chinese teacher said: "You should be proud of your Jewish heritage and show self-confidence." Having previously tried to conceal my Jewishness this remark made a lasting impression on me. From then on I neither hid nor flaunted my Jewish origin. If the fact was relevant I referred to it. If not, I stayed silent.

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This was only a minor incident in my ideological baptism. I was unquestioningly committed to Mao Ze-dong's "remoulding by self-criticism before the masses" and thought it would do me good. So I went through the San Fan movement with hope as well as pain, revealing my "evil bourgeois thoughts", including even sexual phantasies, which was not called for. In the end, since there were no really evil deeds to reveal and condemn, it was recognized that my main problem was ignorance and inexperience. So I was considered to have done the best I could, and was passed after my third self-criticism as a "hard-working bureaucrat." I was tough enough to accept this and to take the whole process in my stride, unlike some colleagues, both Chinese and foreign, who broke down and cried. I was aided by my acceptance of Stalin's advice: "In criticism and self-criticism, never mind if 95% of the criticisms of you are unjustified. Just pay attention to the 5% that are correct." The history of the socialist world and the communist movement would have been happier if Stalin had followed his own advice. Criticism is indeed a hard weapon to handle. Mao Ze-dong maintained that it was meant to "cure the illness and save the patient." In fact, when clumsily handled it could kill. Five or six years later in another movement, an exceptionally talented teacher, urged me to denounce the Communist Party for subjecting me to such "mental torture" during the San Fan - all the more inexcusable, he said because I was a "foreign comrade". I insisted that the criticism had been justified and had done me good, which I sincerely believed, then as now. But he was a sensitive soul as well as a talented one and after being harshly criticised during the cultural revolution, he committed suicide.

Some other movements of the early '50s I missed and I was not sorry to do so, for as they followed each other I became "movement weary" and longed for respite from improving myself. One respite came in 1952 when Beijing was the venue of the Peace Conference of Asia and the Pacific Regions. The Pacific Regions included all Latin America. But the only people in China who could speak Spanish were some Roman Catholic priests and a few Basque *hai alai* (pelota) players. These were not considered suitable for employment as interpreters. So through Party channels former members of the British Battalion of the International Brigade were invited. I was co-opted to the interpreters' team, though my Spanish, which was fluent in 1938 now, 14 years later, was rusty.

Waiting for the British team to arrive and for the conference to begin I tried to recover my language skill -

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by poring over copies of the Spanish edition of the Cominform publication For Lasting Peace and People's Democracy, which was hardly in the style of Cervantes. Finally my compatriots arrived. It was a joy to be with them and to hear their racy language ranging from cockney to Lancashire ringing in my ear. And to leave our spartan school accommodation and move into their luxurious quarters in an elegant courtyard house, which must have belonged to a war lord or a high KMT official. After the ideological re-moulding of the San Fan and other movements I felt that this new way of life was decadent but delightful. It was good to be among one's "ain folk" again and to help them understand Chinese practices which they found strange. But I tended to see things from such a Chinese perspective that one of them said: "David, you've lost your identity". Losing one's identity is not always a bad thing, for it allows one to see one's country and one's people objectively. But finding a new identity is hard. So I have found during the last four decades.

I sweated through my work as an interpreter which was not too hard once my ear was re-attuned to Spanish, for we translated the prepared speeches ahead of time. I was assigned Spanish to English, which was the most I could manage, and all I had to do was sit in the interpreter's box and synchronise my prepared English script with the speaker's rapid Spanish. It was worthwhile work for a great cause and I threw myself into it. Once at least I went without sleep for 48 hours. The highlight of the conference for me and many others was the speech of a woman who was to become a close friend of Isabel and mine. She was Joan Hinton, a young American. A brilliant student of physics at university she had been given a job at Los Alamos, New Mexico. When she discovered that she had been working on the atom bomb she threw up her career as a physicist and went to China in 1948 to join her fiancé, an upstate New York dairy farmer then in Yan An tending a herd of Holsteins. The two of them have worked on Chinese dairy farms ever since, designing farm machinery. But in 1952, in the advanced stages of pregnancy with her first child (who was eventually named "Peace" in Chinese), Joan made a powerful, self-critical speech condemning her work on the bomb. It rocked the conference hall and called forth furious denunciation of her in the American right-wing press.

Once the work of the conference was over all the delegates and the staff, including me, were sent on tour. I had been in New China five years but had seen little but Beijing except for the villages of Ten Mile Inn and

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Nanhaishan. So this festive trip with my compatriots and delegates from many countries was a delight - all the more so since we travelled in a luxurious special train, like royalty. I was thrilled to return to Shanghai, the scene of my crimes of a dozen years before and happy to be there with a clear conscience engaged in no harmful activities. Later we visited nearby Wuxi, a city of over half a million, where the whole population, it seemed, crowded into the square outside the station to see foreigners for the first time in many years. We had to push our way to our busses through crowds dense as those on the London tube or New York subway at rush hour. Why are foreigners such a strange sight in China I wondered. Years later, on Oxford Street in London, I realised why. There it was the natives, the British who were the rarity; so nobody bothered to stare at the foreigners. But in China a foreigner is as interesting to look at as an excavator at work in London.

From Wuxi we went by train and bus across miles of wasteland and over mountains where guerrillas had fought. Our destination was the newly built dam of Fuciling. Tens of thousands of peasants had done the job with their picks and shovels, moving thousands of tons of earth in the baskets swinging from their shoulder poles. We heard the story of the lives of some of the old labourers: how they had been forced off their land before liberation and had sold their children in times of famine. How the landlords had abducted their daughters and raped their wives. We had two young women interpreters to translate these horror stories. One had perfect pronunciation and grammar - she had graduated from St. John's mission university where I had taught - and spoke her excellent English in calm and measured tones. The other, slightly younger woman, had atrocious grammar and pronunciation. But her words gushed forth together with her tears as she told the old peasants' tales. She was our British group's favourite interpreter. Back in Beijing I told my students that in such a situation they should strive to combine accuracy with feeling, and should never regard language as just "words, words, words". Of Fuciling I described both the beauty of the newly formed reservoir nestling in the hills and the poverty of the local people, who could not even afford the luxury of toilet paper. They used strips of bamboo bark instead.

We and the delegates on the other hand, wherever we went were wined and dined with an extravagance that the new People's Republic could ill afford. The one Muslim delegate among us was provided with a special cook for the whole trip. He sat at a separate table uncontaminated by our pork and wine. But we had such a

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convivial time that he applied to join us, making clear that he had no need to observe the dietary laws all that strictly explaining, "I am only a leetle Muslim." But under the People's Democratic Dictatorship he was politely persuaded to obey the Koran and continue eating in solitary sanctity. Once back in Beijing the visitors were given the customary farewell feast - as the saying goes "You have to eat your way out of China". On top of this the interpreters were given lavish gifts, with a fur coat for each of the women. Nowadays tourists sometimes complain of China's tendency to "soak the foreigners". That may be a belated corrective to earlier excessive generosity.

With the departure of the delegates and the conference personnel I was preparing to go back to school. But I was told that I was still needed as there was some "follow-up work" to do. I was put up in a comfortable hostel in the centre of Beijing between the Peking Hotel and Tian An Men, with a private room and all mod. con. No work was immediately forthcoming but when I demanded some I was given a stack of postcards of scenic spots in Beijing and asked to translate the English captions into Spanish. This did not strike me as important enough to keep me away from my teaching and I said so. But I was fobbed off with answers that there would be more important jobs to follow. I suspected that this was just a personnel-grabbing ploy and that with the shortage of Spanish speakers somebody was trying to have me transferred from the school to the Peace Committee. I refused to go along with this and phoned the school to liberate me.

Back at school with Isabel and the boys (Carl was now three and Michael one) in our tenement terrace I felt happy to have resisted the temptations of luxurious city life and to get back to teaching. There had been another ideological remoulding movement in my absence and I was glad to have missed it. In principle I approved of the movements but I was tired of the mental and emotional pressure, even though I thought it did me good. Time to give my bourgeois ideology a bit of a rest, I said to myself.

Excuses for this came quite soon. The first was the birth of our third son, Paul, in 1953. He was tall for his age even by Canadian standards and the Chinese barber thought him rather stupid for being unable to conduct an intelligent conversation at the age of eleven months. Then in 1955 my parents-in-law came on a visit, to meet their grandchildren and to see once more the land where they had striven to spread the gospel for thirty years.

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They arrived on a Friday and on Saturday night Dad asked with studied casualness whether it would be possible for him to go to church next morning. (Mother, who had broken her back climbing a mountain in West China in 1940 and spent the rest of her life in a wheelchair was satisfied to stay at home.) Dad was not going to have the communists pull the wool over his eyes with some put up job of a programmed church service. Isabel and I scurried around late at night and got the address of some of the twenty-six churches then functioning in Beijing. I had not been to church since 1940, when I used to go in Chengdu so as to sit by Isabel. Now 15 years later, I sallied forth with her father, unquestioningly confident in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China which guaranteed freedom of worship. The first church we came to, in the middle of the city, was Catholic. It was not our destination as Dad, brought up a strict Methodist, considered Rome the anti-Christ. But still, as we were passing, he thought he'd look in. The gate was locked. This was a bad start to my self-appointed task of demonstrating the freedom of religion in China. I routed out the gate-keeper. "No, the church is not closed. We've already had early mass. The next one will be at eleven." (It was now about ten.) I sighed with relief and we went on to the Protestant church round the corner, where Dad was warmly welcomed and fully satisfied by the service and the sound of the old hymns.

What has all this to do with me and my life. Partly that I loved my parents-in-law. But I had an added reason. Having Christian relatives, of whom I could tell little anecdotes served as a camouflage for my Jewish origins, about which I was still not comfortable even in China, free as it was from anti-Semitism. In this sense I exploited my in-laws as well as my wife. They were part of my cover. Such was my state of mind on the matter of ethnicity.

4. New School, New Methods

In 1953, soon after the birth of our third son, Paul, the school had moved. It was still in the Western Suburbs but closer to the city. Today the site is the same but the scene is different, so many buildings have sprung up both around and within the campus. The small plots of farmland have given way to big fields and the crops have changed from grain to vegetables for the city market. On the campus itself the long battle for housing has been waged with some success, but it is still not over. Films and plays are shown no longer in the open air or in canteen buildings but in a well-equipped 1200 seat theatre. The library is being computerized, the language lab which once boasted a couple of wire-recorders now makes its own video films. Such has been the changing setting of the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute, which has been renamed The Beijing Foreign Studies University and is now striving to justify its new name.

The dozen years following the school's move ended in the cultural revolution. Until then my time was filled with teaching, extra-curricular activities and, at first, education administration. I remained Deputy Dean of the English Department for a while and at the same time Head of the English Research Room, this term being a translation of the Russian Kathedra. The work involved compiling and checking teaching material, scientific research and so on. I may not have been a good Research Room Head because of my weak "mass line", but at least I worked hard at it. The week-end, too, was short. It started about five thirty p.m. on Saturday at the end of a political meeting; and work started again about seven p.m. on Sunday. My British upbringing rebelled and I pointed out that in wartime Britain a shorter working week was often more productive, than a long one. To no avail.

Though I had never been trained as a teacher I took it on myself to visit the classes of other teachers and then have a chat with them, pointing out what I considered to be right and wrong with their method of teaching and their use of the language. I don't know whether this was resented but I tried to be tactful and constructive, mixing commendation with criticism, and was publicly praised by the school Party Secretary in his annual report. I eagerly fell in with the proposals of the Soviet experts when they arrived, strengthening lesson planning and

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term calendars and organizing "open classes" at which teachers attended their colleagues' classes and then gave criticism for their improvement. At one time this practice got out of hand. The open class was held on the stage of the auditorium and the audience outnumbered the students, for whom it must have been a traumatic experience.

But looking back as objectively as I can I would say that my efforts were not unproductive, despite the San Fan verdict on me as a "hardworking bureaucrat".

Two main streams ran through Chinese education. The traditional Chinese approach was for teachers to talk and students to listen, to stress theory rather than practice, grammar rather than fluency; to teach about the language rather than to teach it. All this was put under the heading of forced feeding or "duck stuffing", a metaphor derived from the famous Peking ducks, which I had seen fed - with a bicycle pump forcing food into their gullets. As the nasty name implies, duck stuffing was not officially approved of after Liberation; but it was still widely practised. Before Liberation the other, non-traditional stream, had prevailed in foreign mission schools, where as many courses as possible were taught in the language of the missionaries, usually English. The Chinese victims of this "cultural aggression" did gain mastery of foreign languages, but at the expense of their knowledge of their own language and culture. We teachers at a "revolutionary school of New China" were instructed by the higher educational authorities to draw on the best aspects of the old tradition, which had certain virtues; to apply useful experience gained in education in the Liberated Areas and to learn from the Soviet Union. My natural inclination was to veer in the missionary direction, (influenced no doubt by my teaching at St. John's in Shanghai and at Nanjing University in Chengdu) as well as by my ignorance of grammar and linguistic theory. For all these personal inadequacies I did some good by stressing the importance of speaking and of learning how to listen, which I had been taught by that great phonetician J.B. Firth at the School of Oriental and African Studies (S.O.A.S.) in London. Through the efforts of us anti duck-stuffers our English department made English a living language. And our students gained a reputation for being able to speak and understand not merely to read and write. Some teachers thought I over-emphasized ordinary, everyday English at the expense of literature and "fine language". One text book I wrote, of imaginary dialogues between foreign visitors and Chinese hosts was branded "naturalistic". I took the criticism as a compliment. I had conflicting feelings about the teaching of

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literature. I loved Shakespeare and Jane Austen - for myself - but thought they were not what our students needed. Still less did they need Beowulf and Chaucer.

In 1963 when many western countries were preparing to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth (in 1964) some of our senior Chinese professors together with some British members of the staff enthusiastically worked on a production of Othello. I was lukewarm about the operation, to the concern of some Chinese colleagues. But I did not oppose it and finally the play was performed - brilliantly. In other years we put on Oscar Wilde's Importance of Being Earnest, excerpts from Congreve's Way of the World and an adaptation of Pride and Prejudice. The performances were excellent and I watched them with pleasure, but I felt they were irrelevant. What we should have been doing, I thought, was to train interpreters and translators, who after graduation would be able to escort foreign visitors, tourists, business people, politicians. I considered the literateurs impractical at best, intellectual snobs at worst.

Another of my endeavours to rescue the language from the text-books and make it a living thing was arranging "background talks." They were given by English-speaking visitors to Beijing or by local native speakers. In the late '50s the renowned Black American scholar, W.E. Du Bois, editor of the African Encyclopedia, was in Beijing for his 90th birthday, with his wife Shirley Graham, also a well-known writer. I was chairman of the gathering of several hundred students and teachers at which Du Bois was to speak. At the last moment his wife informed me that it would be too much of a strain for him, so she would speak and he would introduce her. All I had to do was to introduce him! Somehow I managed the unexpected task and Shirley read a scholarly paper on Black American Literature. During question time someone asked her what she thought of Stephen Foster's songs about the South. Shirley answered: "What we Blacks say about 'carry me back to ole Virginny' is - that's the only way you'll ever get me there, carrying me." She was not the only one of our western friends who denounced "Ole Black Joe" as a patronising and nostalgic lament for the days of slavery; but somehow the song took root in China, despite our efforts to dig it out.

Another memorable speaker was the Scottish Communist M.P. William Gallacher, criticised by Lenin for "infantile Leftism" in opposing parliament. He also won Lenin's praise for his "noble proletarian spirit".

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(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

Willie took Lenin to heart and stuck it out at Westminster for 15 years. When he came to speak to our students and teachers he was greeted with the singing, in English of Burns' "Flow Gently Sweet Afton". It brought tears to his eyes (and to mine). But then, though already nearly 80, he gave a rousing speech, trilling his r's and thumping the lectern till the microphone almost toppled over as he quoted Shelley's "Rise like lions from your slumber".

The speakers at such background talks, which I helped to arrange over the years, did something to bring the English language and the English speaking world alive for our students and teachers.

So did another of my pet projects: Field Trips to factories, farms, scenic spots, places of historical interest, museums. For these I would round up foreign friends working in Beijing to play the part of visitors, while the students acted as their interpreters. As we went round the places visited I would take notes on the students' language, general knowledge, nervousness and comportment. Then, back at school, we would sum-up the whole operation in the spirit of criticism and self-criticism - for students and teacher alike. All this is no doubt old hat to western educators. For language teachers in China it was not, and for me in particular it was a method of breaking away from what I considered sterile theory and to combining language study with knowledge of society, of politics, economics and history. I recall visiting a co-operative farm in the suburbs which ran a beancurd (tofu) factory. We went round it with one student after another trying to translate the manager's explanation of what was going on before our eyes. Some of the student interpreters could cope, some could not. Why the difference? I told the students later it was because some of them were merely groping for words, others were grasping ideas and understanding the process. When we visited the Summer Palace Park, some of the student interpreters swotted up in advance the high-sounding names of places and exhibits, without knowing what they meant: the Hall of Benevolence and Longevity, the Pavilion of Virtuous Harmony etc; but they did not know or did not tell the stories of human interest associated with the Park: about the courtyard where the Empress Dowager kept the Emperor Guang Xu prisoner for ten years for trying to institute reforms; or the Marble Boat she built with funds intended for the imperial navy.

Some of my academic colleagues down-played the field trips as a vulgarization of language teaching,

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preferring to emphasize classical literature and linguistic theory. I strove to keep things down to earth.

I felt somewhat confused and resentful about our differences. At the same time I comforted myself with the thought that my approach was more practical and productive than theirs. Throughout those years I secretly saw myself as defender of a Communist approach to education against a backlog of Confucianism and an upsurge of bourgeois academic snobbery and pedantry.